

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion on the methodology adopted for this study. More specifically, it outlines, explains as well as justifies the research philosophy, approach, design applied in this study. Additionally, the sampling techniques, data generation procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study and the ethical and legal considerations form the discussion of this chapter.

Fleetwood (2005) describes the way the world is perceived to be (ontology), it influences what one thinks can be known about an issue (epistemology). How one thinks can be investigated using a methodology, research techniques and the kind of theories that one thinks can be constructed. The ontological and epistemological foundations underpinning this study were based on what the social world entails and how it could be studied (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013). The use of a particular ontological position will lead to a particular epistemological position. In this context, ontology is about the nature of reality as well as what constitutes reality and what there is to know about reality (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). It questions whether there is a social reality that exists independently from human views and interpretations, the reality can therefore be reduced to subjective understanding. Onwuegbuzie & Frels (2013) contend that if the social world constitutes things that exist independently of human conceptions and constructions then a positivist approach is adopted. However, this study was focused on the epistemological and ontological foundations of the interpretivism philosophy to try and understand the ontological/reality of rural women's economic empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy in Zimbabwe.

The reason for selecting the interpretivist research paradigm was based on its philosophy rooted in the fact that seeking to understand knowledge related to human and social sciences cannot be the same as its usage in

physical sciences because humans interpret their world and then act based on the interpretation (Hammersley, 2013). Adopting the interpretive approach was not merely to interpret what the research participants told the researcher or what she observed and had reviewed in literature, but rather the researcher made her own analysis based on the findings of the study, describing the situations as she had witnessed as well as what had been told by the participants, interpreting the data in line with the concept (growth point) and theories (SLA and WET) on rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy. Data were therefore broadly and extensively interpreted on what the participants opined on what constitutes rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy. This is why interpretivism adapts a relativist ontology in which a single phenomenon may have multiple interpretations rather than a truth that can be determined by a process of measurement. Relativist ontology is the belief that reality is a finite subjective experience (Denzin *et al.*, 2005). The truth depends on the individuals and groups' holding it. In this context, it was the women under investigation who held the knowledge on what qualifies as rural women's economic empowerment through the growth point policy which is perceived as their truth. Based on their experiences, views and opinions, knowledge was sought from them since they are the people in the growth point. There are many truths embedded in such a study and not one as in the positivist who believe that there is only one reality and is objective while the interpretivist believes that there are multiple realities that are subjective and are socially constructed. It tends to focus on how people have different opinions about an issue. In this context, the researcher considered the various and differing views and opinions that were expressed by the participants based on their personal experiences to come up with what constituted as the truth. This is what Hancock *et al.* (2009) call understanding the way the social world is and the way things happen the way they do. It was therefore important for me as the researcher to understand the way the participants understood their own situation and coming up with their own understanding of the phenomenon that the researcher was able to interpret from.

Creswell *et al.* (2007) contend that, with interpretation, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its complexity in its unique context instead of trying to generalise the base of understanding for the whole population because the results are within a context. To this end, the researcher's approach to this study from an interpretivist standpoint, was based on its values that include epistemology and ontology. It involved the researcher interpreting elements of the study by bringing the human interest into it (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The study aimed to establish, through women's lived experiences, views and opinions how the growth point policy has been applied for rural women's empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point. Consequently, the interpretivist's view that knowledge and science of investigation cannot be separated from people's views and opinions, aligned well with this study as already explained.

The research approach adopted for this study was selected to acquire in-depth information and reach a conclusion on how the growth point policy has been applied for rural women's empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point, Matabeleland North Province. Naturally, the qualitative method underpinned on the interpretivist paradigm was adopted for this study. As described by Creswell & Garrett (2008), qualitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad questions, generates data consisting of words/texts from participants, describes and analyses these words for themes while conducting the investigation in a subjective manner. A qualitative method was suited to this research as it aimed at understanding the lived experiences of women within the growth point policy of Tsholotsho. This allowed the researcher to identify patterns and behaviours that may have been difficult to identify in a descriptive method. So the investigation was carried out in its natural setting where the researcher did not manipulate the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Additionally, the qualitative research method develops theories, uses small sample sizes and does not generalise results to the wider population, instead, generalises from one setting to another

(Leeming, 2018). The method therefore enabled the researcher to enter the settings of Tsholotsho Growth Point and conduct FGDs with women as well as carry out interviews with key informants to understand issues related to the situation under investigation.

In addition, the qualitative method provided me as the researcher with the opportunity to develop insights into the feelings of women on the applicability of the growth point policy in relation to the socio-economic outcomes. The main aim was to get an in-depth understanding and insights into the views of the women under study, based on their experiences. The qualitative method, therefore, made provisions for such an interrogation as it allowed the researcher to observe and listen one to one to various discussions and conversations on the subject. Since the qualitative method required the researcher to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon (rural women empowerment through the growth point policy in Zimbabwe) the questions that kept arising and needed careful scrutiny were:

- How has the socio-economic status of women changed since the ushering in of the growth point policy?
- To what extent has the Growth Point Policy influenced rural women empowerment outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point?
- How are the constraints of the growth point policy impacting on rural women economic outcomes?
- How can rural women's economic outcomes be improved through the growth point policy?

These questions needed the views and opinions of women themselves and other stakeholders to answer, hence the qualitative method allowed for such questions to be explored and the opinions coming out of these questions noted down. It was therefore important for the researcher to ensure that every detail was captured and noted by taking down, noting/recording all that the participants said to ensure the trustworthiness of the study which, according to Connelly (2016), is crucial to the usefulness and integrity of the findings of a study. It refers to the

degree of confidence in data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of a study demonstrates that a true picture of the phenomenon is being presented. To achieve this, the study made use of triangulation, member checking and peer debriefing.

Moreover, the use of audio recordings and field notes captured each verbal sound and the feelings being inter-twined particularly during focus group discussions. Body language, according to White & Gardener (2013) is the use of non-verbal signals that one uses to communicate one's feelings and intentions. These include posture, facial expression, it helped to pick up on unspoken issues and negative feelings that the participants were trying to suppress but that naturally enriched the study. It was therefore very important for me as the researcher to pay great attention to detail so as not to miss out on these important moments. So, in combination, verbal and non-verbal communication helped me to understand the true feelings of the participants throughout the research period. Thus, the interpretivist design/qualitative approach, helped to uncover much more information over and above of what the researcher had envisaged getting. This information was then analysed thematically. In this study, it is assumed that the growth point policy is applicable to women's empowerment and that the ineffectiveness of the growth point policy has contributed to rural poverty (unsustainable livelihoods) which was affecting women more than men because of gender dynamics within the rural sector. This assumption was used throughout as data was generated and analysed. General conclusions were drawn from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

However, there are several weaknesses and limitations of using this method. Because interaction is at the heart of the qualitative data generation effort, there is much reliance on the participants to agree to give their time and interaction. In this case several communications were made prior to the actual interviews. Additionally, the process is time consuming because of face-to-face interactions. This is alluded to by Driessnack (2005) that with qualitative method, more time is consumed

and needed to generate data as compared to quantitative method. Another drawback of this method is the issue of bias. The research may be influenced by the researcher's personal bias and idiosyncrasies. However, in this study, the use of multiple data collection methods (in-depth interviews and FGDs) were used to manage bias.

For this study, the researcher selected the exploratory research design. According to Creswell *et al.* (2007) a research design is the plan for executing a research study. An exploratory research design is used when there is not enough known about a phenomenon (Saunders, 2007). It does not aim to provide a conclusive answer but mainly explores the phenomenon to gain a better understanding. In this study the exploratory research design was selected because the subject of rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy has not been carried out before. It allowed me as the researcher to explore the phenomenon and interpret the emerging issues as they unfolded. The study did not aim to provide the final and conclusive answers to the research questions but merely explored the research topic with varying levels of depth answering the how and why questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

Moreover, the issues were not simply described and narrated as given by the participants but were also based on what had been reviewed in journals and books. The aim was to gain richness, depth and the uniqueness of the reality of the experience (Munhall, 2001). Since it was conducted to discover new ideas, new insights and increase knowledge on women empowerment through the growth point policy, the study therefore explored the experiences of women at Tsholotsho Growth Point, taking into context, what they experienced and observed since the implementation of the growth point policy. This was more to do with the outcomes anchored on the growth point policy that were applicable to women. Additionally, this was important noting that the subject of women empowerment through the growth point policy was a new phenomenon that had not been done before.

The benefits of using the exploratory research design were that; there was the provision of insight into real-life situations of the study participants. There is also a belief that people are experts of their own experiences, hence in this study women were held to have the experience and knowledge regarding rural women's empowerment through the growth point policy. This was relevant to women's responses in comparison to what the researcher had observed. However, the major drawback of this design was that the findings of the research were not conclusive as only a better understanding of the phenomenon was reached. Moreover, it is more based on relevance rather than rigour, something that the positivists regard as a weakness of the method as rigour adds to the trustworthiness of a study (Cardano, 2020).

In social sciences, research cannot include all community members when undertaking an investigation. It was therefore important for this study to draw a sample from the population of Tsholotsho Growth Point. Neuman (2014) posits that a study population is a subset of the target population. Khotari (2004) also describes the population of interest as the study's target population that it intends to investigate. It is made up of groups or individuals with one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher. In this study, the target population included key informants comprising the local community leaders, government officials from various Government Ministries at the Growth Point, Community Leadership, local NGOs, Growth Point Policy specialist and participants made up of women in and around Tsholotsho Growth Point.

As argued by Ritchie *et al.* (2013), after establishing the population for the study, the researcher goes on to identify an appropriate sample frame from which the sample can be selected. This study adopted purposive sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling technique. It focuses on when the sample is selected based on non-random criteria and without every member of the population having a chance of being included. Patton (2002) describes it as a technique widely used in qualitative research for

the identification and selection of key informants and participants for the most effective use of limited resources. It involves identifying and selecting individuals that are known to the researcher and are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2011). In this study, the importance of availability, willingness to participate and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive and reflective manner was considered. The advantage of purposive sampling is that it is cost and time-effective while the drawback is that it is highly prone to bias. The researcher targeted only those people who she thought would be in a position to supply reliable information on the growth point policy and women empowerment. Owing to the qualitative nature of the study, a small sample size was adopted. According to Ritchie *et al.* (2003), samples for qualitative studies are generally smaller because they attract a lot of data and more data does not mean more information. Moreover, qualitative research is more concerned with meaning than making generalised assumptions. Crouch & Mackenzie (2006) also argue that qualitative research is very labour intensive and analysing can be time consuming hence the concept of saturation is used when additional data does not give new information.

In this study, the sample comprised of a total of 30 participants made up of 20 women (participants) and 10 key informants chosen through non-probability purposive sampling technique as shown in the table below.

Department	Number of Participants
NGO	1
Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises	1
Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, Climate and Rural Development -ARDAS (former Agritex)	1
Growth Point Expert	1
District Administrator	1
Councillor	1

Chief	1
Environmental Management Agency	1
Rural District Council	2
FGD – Centre	10
FGD –Village	10
Total	30

Figure 3.1 – *The study participants (Researcher)*

Women participants were selected on the basis of having resided in and around Tsholotsho growth point for 10 years or more. The number of years spent at the Growth Point was assumed to be the minimum period to have experienced the economic growth of the Growth Point as well as the effects of the intended interventions of the policy. The selection was based on the longevity of their stay at the growth point and was done with the assistance of the community leaders as they were better positioned to match the prospective sample. The selection criteria was also based on the economic activities that women engage in, that is small-scale farming for women participants in the villages and informal trading for those at the central growth point.

In addition, 10 key informants were selected for the study and these comprised of officials from the Ministry of Local Government, Women's Affairs and Community Development, Rural District Administrator, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (ARDAS), Environmental Management Agency of Zimbabwe, Non-Governmental Organisations, Growth Point Expert and traditional community leaders all with knowledge of growth points participated in the study. Moreover, the key informants were chosen based on their ability to provide both the theoretical and practical side of the growth point policy performance and women's issues. Additionally, the selection criteria was in view of the need to ensure dependability of the research study. The key informants were a group of people assumed to have the potential of providing rich explanations and descriptions on rural women's empowerment outcomes through the

growth point policy at Tsholotsho Growth Point. It was also assumed that they possessed the experience of working with women in improving their livelihoods based on the provisions of the growth point policy.

The study made use of hierarchical influence in the different departments selected. Help of senior personnel in the various departments was sought to assist in identifying key people they thought would be knowledgeable in the study. Generally, the targeted key informants were those that would supply/avail rich information sincerely and reliably on rural women's empowerment through the growth point policy. However, there were challenges met and these had to do with the technique itself. Since purposive sampling is based on the judgement of the researcher in selecting participants, the use of this sampling method can be subjective resulting in the researcher leaving out participants critical to this study unintentionally or unknowingly being biased in their selection (Gibbs, 2018).

A total of 30 participants were engaged in the study, 20 of these were female participants in two FGDs and the other 10 were key informants (key informant interviewee - KII) conducted with 8 males and 2 females. While the selection of the FGD participants was more deliberate in attracting the female participants, selection of the KII was mostly based on the position held by the participant rather than the sex of the informants. Spontaneously, it was observed that most of the positions of influence in the district are occupied by men than women (8/10). This observation also raises concerns with regards to representation of women as well as their participation in various forums discussing their socio-economic concerns.

The two groups of participants, that is, key informants and Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) were all given pseudo names to protect their identities as indicated in the ethical consideration section. Therefore, the key informants were classified as K11 (Key Informant Interviewees) and FGD from the Centre (referring to the central growth point) while (C) as C1- C10 and those from the periphery/village as V1-V10.

The ages of the FGD participants range from 30 to 82 years. Those from the FGD-C were relatively younger with most of them aged below 40 while those from the FGD-V were relatively older, with most of them above 55 years. This central-village (rural-urban) age distribution can be inferred to resonate with the estimated economic activity variations between the younger and older women.

While all the FGD-V participants regarded themselves as farmers, those from the centre reported being engaged in various non-farming economic activities. This showed that there is a lot of variety for those in the FGD-C, (1) was engaged in cobra making, (1) in detergent making, (2) catering, (1) chicken rearing, (1) farming, (1) cleaner and (3) buying and selling. The difference in economic activities from the centre and the village is attributed to more diverse opportunities available at the centre, unlike at the villages where the main activities are mainly farming that is largely rain fed. Exploring the activities characterising both the centre and the village was done with a view of establishing the trickle-down effect which recognises the growth point strategy of growth that starts at the centre and diffuses to the outer laying areas, the hinterlands. Therefore, carrying out the two focus group discussions in the two different locations helped the study to establish how women's livelihoods have been transformed through the growth point policy.

While all the FGD participants from the centre had reached the secondary level of education, some of the participants from the village (especially the elderly) have never been to school. All participants from FGD-C were of secondary school level and from FGD-V, 2 had never been to school, 5 had done primary school while the rest had secondary education.

Only two of the KIIs were female informants, one, an environmentalist from the Environmental Management Agency of Zimbabwe (EMA) and the other, a district coordinator for an NGO (MANA). All the other positions were filled by male participants, from the village-based positions (Chief and Councillor) to the whole district-based positions (CEO, DA, Agriculture

Specialist, Development Officer and District Treasurer). The Professor, a major critique of the growth point policy in Zimbabwe was also a part of the KIIs.

The majority of key informants are located at the Tsholotsho Centre at the main growth point. It is imperative to observe that most of these departments are state offices providing essential services in the district. However, there are non-state actors (NGOs) who are partners of the government like MANA who provide services in the district. The departments work hand in hand for the development of Tsholotsho District and in the socio-economic empowerment of women in their individual capacities. On the other hand, the consultant/professor was engaged based on his expertise on the concept of the growth point strategy and how it has been applied in Zimbabwe.

Myers (2009) observes that qualitative research is designed to help researchers to understand the lives of people through the social, political and cultural contexts they live to capture and gather in-depth information. Naturally, the qualitative research approach recognises that the researcher is the main instrument for data generation and gets to experience the phenomenon firsthand (Lincoln & Guba, 2001). To this end, as the main research instrument for this study, I used in-depth interviews and conducted focus group discussions as data generation methods. The data generation methods used in this study were selected to deeply understand the phenomenon under investigation which is the rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy.

Charmaz (2006) postulates that in-depth interviews with key informants are designed to elicit a vivid picture of the perspectives of the key informants on the investigation including perspectives, views and opinions. In-depth interviews were used to interrogate and obtain a clear understanding of the women's economic outcomes at Tsholotsho Growth Point, Tsholotsho District from the perspectives of the participants. Charmaz (2006) also adds that an in-depth interview is the one that takes

place when the researcher interviews the study population, individually or in groups so that ideas are freely expressed on the subject under study. This study used face-to-face conversations with the participants. The use of in-depth interviews helped me as the researcher get much more information by probing further since the questions asked focused on the how, why, to what extent. Such questions allowed me as researcher not to dwell on the initial answer but probed further, soliciting for more information that was relevant for this study. In-depth interviews are less formal and least structured since the wording and questions are not predetermined. Semi-structured questions were used for this study which comprised of questions that were flexible in a way that participants were able to explain and express themselves in-depth, as suggested by (Ritchie *et al.*, 2005). The reason for using semi-structured interviews was that they are regarded as not restrictive rather, they allowed participants in this study to respond to questions asked and also add more information that was considered relevant (Gibbs, 2018). In addition, the questions forming the interview guide were simple to understand, clear, short and in single parts and the main language used was English. Where participants were not well versed with the English language, the questions were translated to Ndebele. The study allowed them to express themselves in the language of their choice, however their responses were translated into English. Moreover, interviews gave background information on the participants since it was verbal, face-to-face conducted, hence, the researcher managed to interact with the participants physically. Furthermore, she managed to get information that she would not naturally get through observations, that is, feelings and intentions (Nyawaranda, 1998). The researcher made use of audio recorders and field notes to complement each other and to also ensure that there was a general correspondence of what was recorded and the notes. The advantage of having both was that where the recordings were inaudible, then it was handy to refer to the notes. For instance, in the FGDs there were times when several people would want to express themselves all at once. In this case she captured what each participant said as much as possible in the field notes.

Like any research gathering method, in-depth interviews have their own limitations. These include the time aspect. They are time-consuming and not cost-effective. They produce a lot of data that needs to be transcribed, organised, and carefully scrutinised. It is for these reasons that the qualitative method does not allow for big samples (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

As indicated above, the study also made use of focus group discussions in addition to in-depth interviews. Focus group discussions are a form of data generation method that involves small groups of people who come together to discuss a topic of interest (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). They should identify the purpose of the discussion, identify the participants and develop questions. One focus group should comprise 6-12 participants, a facilitator and a note-taker. Charmaz (2006) observes that focus group discussions are frequently used as a qualitative approach to gain in-depth understanding of social issues. Focus group discussions aim to obtain data from a purposely selected population. The focus group discussions for this study comprised women participants who had been purposively selected based on the criteria already mentioned above. For instance, FGD-V was selected based on the grounds that they derived their livelihoods from farming and because of their proximity from the central growth point, it was assumed that they benefitted from the growth point's concept of trickle down. As for the FGD-C, participants were selected on the basis that they resided at the central growth point and derived their livelihoods from trading (buying and selling).

The purpose of focus group discussions in this study was to stimulate an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of women on the growth point policy. They were able to provide a rich set of data based on their views, opinions, thoughts and experiences where the researcher was not only able to observe their interactions in a social setting but also could ask for further clarification to gain more in-depth insights into the phenomenon. By conducting two sets of FGDs, the study was able to compare findings between the groups to detect overall patterns and group variations (Malhorta & Grover, 2012).

Again, the design of the focus groups was based on the study's research questions in trying to locate rural women's empowerment outcomes through the growth point policy at Tsholotsho Growth Point, Matabeleland North Province. The community leaders assisted in the identification of women who were better suited for the profile and who I anticipated would be able to efficiently participate in the focus group discussions to provide the information that I was looking for. The focus group discussions required me as the researcher to remain focused as different views in a group on the same subject are collected (Gibbs, 2018). Babbie & Mouton (2001) argue that FGDs provide an environment where participants discuss, debate on issues in-depth, argue and reach a consensus. This helped with generating multiple data at the same time as women shared their experiences based on the women empowerment and growth points with proceedings recorded on audio.

The major benefit of using focus group discussions in this context was that like-minded people were brought together to discuss a subject that affects them all. This kind of discussion brought out vital and rich information and also led to additional and valuable information which was critical for this study. However, the drawbacks of the FGDs are that they can lead to a lack of authenticity on part of the participants in that they might give information they think the researcher wants to hear. Likewise, some members tended to dominate the discussion resulting in loss of information from the passive participants. Being the facilitator meant that the researcher had to pose the questions, control the proceedings, take down notes, this on its own was a tedious process that required her to have an assistant. It is worth noting that the researcher engaged an assistant that she personally trained for facilitation. As such, the whole process required the researcher to remain focused.

Data was analysed guided by the SLA and the growth point concept frameworks. Data analysis is an iterative process and requires reflexive interpretation since reflection is an important element of analysis (Carcary, 2009). Since this study was qualitative/exploratory, it comprised

processes and procedures whereby there is a move from the generated data into trying to explain and interpret the situations and the people under investigation putting emphasis on the narrative approach. Sandewolski (2010) posits that the narrative approach involves and recognises the extent to which the stories told provide insights into people's lived experiences. In this study, narratives were used from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to establish the relevance of the growth point policy to women in Tsholotsho Growth point.

A thematic analysis was therefore adopted to analyse data. It involved identifying, analysing and reporting the themes (patterns) within the data (Patton, 2002). It was based on the views of the participants in addition to the researcher's understanding and how she interpreted the views. It is flexible as it is not tied to any theory. A theme is a major recurring idea and judgment is important in establishing the theme since there is no telling what proportion of data constitutes a theme. It involves searching across a data set to find repeated patterns for meaning (Patton, 2002). This was achieved through the NVivo programme. According to Bazeley (2019), the programme merely takes over the making and sorting of data to maximise efficiency as well as speed up the process of grouping data according to category. However, the researcher still needs to create the categories, code, collate and identify patterns to derive meaning from the data. At this point, NVivo was very useful as it aided the processing of data from the case classifications and commented transcripts to the nesting of the themes and sub themes. The nesting facilitated the viewing of the data sources and references of each theme and sub themes. NVivo was used to create diagrammatical representations of my thoughts about the data sets which the researcher presented to illustrate the various themes and sub-themes discussed in the results and findings chapters. Creswell (2012) concludes by describing NVivo as a programme that helps with rapid coding, thorough exploration and rigorous management and analysis.

As already indicated, the qualitative method attracts a lot of data, so to manage this, the researcher started analysing data during data collection as main themes were emerging from it. This was done to verify with the participants if the analysis was a true reflection of what they had said in the interviews and focus group discussions. To verify if the researcher had interpreted their views correctly in what (Bailey, 2008) refer to as member checking to verify the trustworthiness of the study.

Data were therefore analysed by describing what was generated and interpreted to derive meaning from it based on growth points and rural women empowerment. This was achieved through incorporating the theories (Sustainable Livelihood Approach and Women Empowerment Theory) and concept (Growth Pole) that guided the study. The data generated from various stakeholders were based on what they perceived to be the relationship between the growth point policy and the socio-economic empowerment of rural women articulating it their way, knowledge and experiences.

The first step in analysing data in this study was to read through data several times, noting down interesting ideas. As already indicated, the process of analysing data started during generation, this is when the researcher took down notes and recorded proceedings and attached meaning to them. In this phase, the researcher repeatedly read and re-read the data corpus which comprised of field notes, audio recordings from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Data were then transcribed putting everything into words (verbatim). This process is highly interactive and the researcher had to go back to the field to check against original data that is field notes to compare occurrences as to identify specific issues that were applicable to women's empowerment issues within the growth point policy context. Additionally, the researcher used general observation and reflection to complement notes and recordings as it was critical in developing themes (Akinyode & Khan, 2018). The second step was to generate codes.

The generation of codes as explained by Saldana (2015) is a simple operation of identifying segments of meaning in data and labelling them with a code. In other words, coding is regarded as the process of categorising excerpts to find themes and patterns in the data generated. It included visiting all aspects of the data generated including that which the researcher noticed during the actual data generation. This assisted the researcher to recollect and reflect on some of the data generation activities that in turn triggered ideas important for the study. In this study,

while coding, the researcher was able to make judgments about each individual element in the data to decide its relevance (Strauss, 1987). Coding is therefore an important phase of data analysis as it moves raw data to the findings by also ensuring that the research questions imposed during interviews and focus group discussions were answered (Charmaz, 2014). The benefits of coding are that they give voice to the participants since they are created as a means to understand the phenomenon and the participants' views and perspectives. Charmaz (2014) further posits that through the development of codes, the researcher comes to understand the views of the participants and actions from their own perspectives.

After coding was completed, related data were then collated into specific codes to come up with meaningful themes, which were further collated into possible themes. Relevant data were grouped, reviewed and themes refined. The process involved an examination of the coded data extracts to look for potential themes of broader significance (Clark & Braun, 2006) in themes that did not emerge from the data but were constructed by the researcher through analysing, combining and comparing how codes relate to each other. In this study, themes were derived from the coded data and were linked more to the original data as the research reflected on the entire data set which was based on the study's research questions. To this end, themes should be independent and meaningful but also work together to form a coherent story (Clark & Braun, 2006). At this stage of analysis, the researcher took note of the themes that were of potential significance to check if they were directly related to the questions guiding the study. Important themes, therefore, answered the research questions guiding this study which were reviewed in phase 4.

In this phase, the research established whether each theme was supported by adequate data. This was achieved by checking on the coded data within each theme. The researcher also checked whether the data were coherent in supporting the theme and also checked if some themes were too large or diverse as indicated by Braun & Clarke (2006). If the answer to these questions was a no, data was re-sorted and themes

modified to reflect and capture coded data better. Notably, at this stage, in the study, themes were coded, combined, divided with some being discarded. When the researcher was satisfied that the themes had been adequately covered all the coded areas were included in the final analysis, thus, the first level of analysis was completed. In level 2, the researcher checked to see if individual themes were in line with the meanings in the data set and whether the thematic map accurately represented the entire body of data. The thematic map should demonstrate how re-reading and revising codes and themes are critical parts of the analysis process (King & Kitchener, 2004).

In this stage of data analysis, the researcher transcribed all the responses from the interviews and the focus group discussions. The identified themes made it easy for me to transcribe what was on audio recordings into the identified themes. In addition, field notes were also incorporated, typed out to identify the recurring themes emerging from the study. The researcher had to check what the themes in the study represented. This is what is referred to by Patton (2002) as the process of creating a synthesis that involves putting the perspectives or opinions to generate insight into the researcher's thinking. To this end, each group of participants in the study came up with the main categories of themes and subthemes linked to each other.

The final phase involved the writing of a thematic analysis report based on the themes emerging from the study. It was supported by evidence from participants using quoted responses on participants' lived experiences. Additionally, the themes were integrated into the theoretical frameworks and arguments from a review of related literature (Huberman, 1994). Likewise, gaps were also identified, questions posed and recommendations suggested.

The term validity has been questioned by qualitative researchers, instead, they have opted to use trustworthiness to validate the study. Lincoln & Guba (2001) refer to the trustworthiness of research as the accuracy of the data and findings. They proposed four tenets as meeting the

trustworthiness of the study that is credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The argument of moving from validity to trustworthiness for interpretivism was that terminology should not be transferred across research paradigms but rather agreed to have those suited to the qualitative approach as indicated above. Whittemore *et al.* (2014) have discovered that developing validity standards in qualitative research is challenging because of the necessity to incorporate rigor, subjectivity and creativity in the process.

However, Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) contend that rigour in the qualitative research approach is based on the overall planning and implementation of the whole research process to ensure its authenticity and trustworthiness in the process. This resulted in scholars such as Lincoln & Guba (1985) translating validity to credibility, reliability to transferability and objectivity to confirmability. There was therefore the need to demonstrate the true value of multiple perspectives that is the dependability of findings to broader contexts and the freedom of bias in the research process addressed as validity issues. The separation of validity to trustworthiness, therefore, dwells on the type of different knowledge that the positivist and interpretivist approaches generate. The interpretivist seeks depth of breadth and attempts, learn nuances of life experiences as opposed to the positivist's aggregate evidence which is generalisable and objective (Whittemore *et al.*, 2014).

Confirmability refers to the truth of the data and the participants' views, interpretation and representation of them by the researcher (Shufutinsky, 2020). Is the data representative of the participants and their experiences? In this study, it was the level to which real life experiences of the participants matched with what people said about them. Shufutinsky (2020) further argues that a qualitative study is considered credible if the description of human experiences is immediately recognised by individuals that share the same experiences. To support credibility when reporting a qualitative study, the researcher should demonstrate engagement, methods of observation and audit trails. In this study, the researcher kept

a journal, recorded events to reflect on the research ideas and anything else that could impact the objectives of the study. To ensure that the study was credible, the researcher recorded data intensively to link it to the interpretation. This was achieved through note-taking and regular discussions with participants.

Dependability is the constant of the data over a similar condition. This can be achieved when another researcher concurs with the decision trails at each stage of the research process. Janis (2022) describes dependability as the extent to which the same results can be obtained from the same participants should a repeat of the study be conducted. Thus, this study achieved this through triangulating the results from the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation and those from relevant documents that were used in the study. Furthermore, a data audit was also used to verify such information.

Transferability refers to the findings that can be applied to other groups. Sandelowski (2010) points out that a qualitative study will have met this criterion if the results have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and readers can associate the results with their own experiences. This study achieved transferability through the use of focus groups and key informant interviews. The study included key informants with knowledge of the growth point policy and rural development as well as women who have lived within the Tsholotsho growth point longer than 10 years. Purposive sampling was used to select the aforementioned participants. However, the criterion of transferability is dependent on the aim of the qualitative study and may only be relevant if the research intends to make generalisations about the subject or phenomenon.

Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the data generated to represent the responses and views of the participants and not those of the researcher's point of view and biases. This was done by confirming how interpretations, conclusions were established and confirming that the findings came directly from the data achieved by show

of emerging themes from the participant's quotes (Sandelowski, 2010). In this study, an audit trail was conducted comprising of the actual data, field notes, recorded conversations to guard against bias.

During this study, the researcher ensured that the ethics guiding this study were upheld and sound principles underpinning academic integrity were observed and reported. Babbie & Mouton (2001) observe that in research, ethics are the general agreements shared by researchers on what is proper and what is not. It involves the protection and respect of participants under study and includes informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity among others. The effort was made to outline to the participants what the study was all about, why it was being conducted in addition to how it was going to be conducted. Firstly, participants were assured that pseudo names would be used instead of their real names. Secondly, they were made to freely participate in the audio recordings without any pressure. Those who were not comfortable with recordings were respected in that way. The researcher, created a platform where the participants were not coerced into doing anything they did not want to do or say. The researcher made assurances that they were safe and protected and were not obliged to give information they felt they did not want to give. So, there was a consensus on every aspect of the process. They were also assured that they would be shown the analysed data so that they could confirm that indeed that was the information they gave. Lastly, participants were assured that they were in a safe environment and that whenever they felt the need to withdraw from partaking in the study, were free to do so. The participants signed consent forms that the researcher had designed and they all consented to participate in the study.

Simelane-Mnisi (2018) asserts that ethics should be viewed as regulations as well as decision-making such as the 'do no harm' principle. In this regard, COVID 19 regulations were observed as per the country's guidelines. Furthermore, before the research process, the researcher assessed potential risks and outlined benefits for individuals and communities. Participants were made to understand on the process as well as on the research findings.

In the focus group discussions, there was a need to balance up the arguments by not showing that one response was better than the other. The researcher made sure that she respected every response and avoided being biased to one particular one. The researcher reiterated to the participants that the platform was for academic purposes and that she was learning from them. They were made to feel that they had more knowledge of the growth points and their impact on their socio-economic life since they experienced the phenomenon first hand. Ideally, the researcher avoided imposing and pushing for what she wanted to hear but took in responses as they were presented. To achieve this, the researcher incorporated every participant as to how they preferred the interviews and discussions to progress in a way that made them comfortable. Generally, several of them were worried about how the information was going to be used, however, they were assured that the information was for academic purposes only and that it will not directly be linked to them as individuals. Additionally, assurances were made that after data generation and analysis, it would be presented to those who were in doubt. After such assurances, all consented to how the process was going to be carried out.

This chapter presented the research methodology that was adopted for this study. It included the research paradigm, approach and design, sampling techniques, data generation and data analysis procedures, trustworthiness of the study and the ethical and legal consideration. Of significant to this study is the rationale for the choice of the methodology where the qualitative method was found to be relevant. It enabled the study to explore and interpret women's experiences to establish the applicability of the growth point policy to rural women empowerment. The next chapter focuses on data presentation and analysis achieved through the application of the method, design and techniques discussed in this chapter.