CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to investigate the role of the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) in developing and nurturing local cuisines. It provides a comprehensive description of the research design, philosophy, study area, target population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and analysis procedures. The chapter also addresses issues of reliability, validity, ethical considerations, and limitations of the methodology.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach, specifically employing a case study method. The qualitative approach is chosen for its ability to provide rich, in-depth insights into complex social phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It allows for the exploration of multiple perspectives and the nuanced understanding of the university’s role in local cuisine development.

The case study method is particularly suitable for this research as it enables an intensive investigation of a specific institution (UZ) within its real-world context (Yin, 2018). This method facilitates a holistic examination of UZ’s initiatives, programs, and impacts related to local cuisine development.

3.3 Research Philosophy

The study is guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes that reality is socially constructed and knowledge is subjective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). This approach aligns well with the research objective of understanding the intricate interactions between the University of Zimbabwe, local communities, and their culinary traditions. Through this lens, multiple interpretations of UZ's role in fostering local cuisine development can be explored.

3.4 Study Area

The primary focus of this research is the University of Zimbabwe campus in Harare. However, the study extends to nearby communities that interact with the university through various food-related initiatives. This broader perspective allows for a holistic understanding of UZ's influence beyond the academic environment (Chikwanha et al., 2023).

3.5 Target Population

The target population for this study includes diverse stakeholders, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the topic. These groups are:

1. Faculty members from UZ departments like Agriculture, Food Science, Hospitality, and Tourism.

2. Students enrolled in food-related academic programs.

3. Administrators involved in community engagement and curriculum design.

4. Local food producers and community members associated with UZ’s initiatives.

5. Representatives from local culinary organizations or associations.

This varied population ensures multiple perspectives on the university’s involvement in cuisine development

3.6 Sampling Techniques

This study employs two primary sampling techniques:

1. Purposive Sampling: This non-random sampling technique is used to intentionally select individuals who have direct knowledge or experience related to the research topic. It ensures that participants such as UZ faculty, students, and community stakeholders provide rich and relevant insights (Patton, 2020).

2. Snowball Sampling: To access hard-to-reach participants, this method allows the researcher to identify additional respondents through referrals from initial participants. This technique is particularly effective for engaging local food producers and community members who may not be directly linked to UZ's formal structures (Noy, 2022).

3.7 Sample Size

The study aims to include a total of 50–60 participants, categorized as follows:

-10–15UZ faculty members

- 15–20 UZ students

- 3-5UZ administrators

- 15–20 local food producers and community members

- 3–5 representatives from culinary organizations

This sample size is designed to achieve theoretical saturation, where additional data no longer yields new insights (Saunders et al., 2021).

3.8 Data Collection Methods

To thoroughly address the research objectives, multiple data collection methods are utilized:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews:These allow for in-depth exploration of perspectives from UZ faculty, administrators, and culinary organization representatives. The flexibility of this method facilitates probing into specific initiatives and challenges (Bryman, 2022).

2. Focus Group Discussions: Interactive discussions with students and community members generate collective insights into UZ’s role in promoting local cuisine. This method fosters diverse viewpoints and group dynamics (Kitzinger, 2021).

3. Document Analysis: Institutional documents such as syllabi, reports, and policies are analyzed to understand UZ’s structured efforts in cuisine development (Bowen, 2021).

4. Participant Observation: Direct observation of relevant activities—such as culinary classes and outreach events—provides first-hand insight into UZ's practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

3.9 Research Instruments

The following instruments will be utilized to collect data systematically:

1. Interview Guides: Semi-structured interview guides tailored to different participant groups (e.g., UZ faculty, administrators) will ensure coverage of key topics, while allowing for flexibility to probe deeper (Bryman, 2022).

2. Focus Group Discussion Guide: A structured guide designed to foster interaction and gather insights during group discussions with students and community members.

3. Observation Checklist: This checklist will standardize observations of relevant activities such as classes and outreach events, ensuring consistency in data recording (Kawulich, 2020).

4. Document Review Form:A systematic form will facilitate the extraction of key details from institutional documents, aiding a thorough review (Bowen, 2021).

3.10 Data Analysis

Two qualitative analysis techniques will be applied:

1. Thematic Analysis: This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) in the data. It includes stages such as familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

2. Content Analysis: Applied to the document review data, this systematic technique categorizes and interprets textual data, helping to derive meaningful insights (Hsieh & Shannon, 2022).

NVivo software will be employed to organize, analyze, and manage the data efficiently.

3.11 Reliability and Validity

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the following strategies will be employed:

1. Triangulation: Employing multiple data collection methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, observations) to cross-verify findings (Denzin, 2020).

2. Member Checking: Sharing preliminary findings with key participants to validate interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 2021).

3. Peer Debriefing: Engaging academic peers to review research processes and interpretations, improving reliability (Creswell & Miller, 2021).

4. Audit Trail: Maintaining detailed records of research processes, raw data, and reflective notes to ensure transparency and traceability (Lincoln & Guba, 2021)

3.12 Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to strict ethical principles to safeguard participants and uphold research integrity. These include:

1.Informed Consent: Participants will be fully briefed on the study’s purpose, methods, and their rights before providing informed consent (Resnik, 2021).

2. Confidentiality and Anonymity: To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms will be used, and all data will be securely stored (Bell & Bryman, 2020).

3. Data Protection: Digital files will be encrypted, and physical documents will be stored in locked cabinets. Only the researcher and designated assistants will have access to raw data (Saunders et al., 2021).

4. Voluntary Participation: Participants will be informed that their involvement is entirely voluntary and that they may withdraw at any point without repercussions (Miller et al., 2022).

5.Cultural Sensitivity: The study will respect local norms and practices, particularly when addressing traditional culinary knowledge and practices (Chikwanha et al., 2023).

3.13 Limitations of the Methodology

While the research design is robust, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

1. Single Institution Focus: Focusing exclusively on UZ may restrict the generalizability of findings to other institutions or contexts (Yin, 2021).

2. Time Constraints: The cross-sectional design captures insights at a single point in time, potentially overlooking long-term trends (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

3. Researcher Bias: Despite efforts to ensure objectivity, the researcher’s familiarity with the local context might influence interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021).

4. Limited Quantitative Data: The study’s qualitative nature may exclude measurable data on UZ’s impact, which could have complemented the findings (Bryman, 2022).

5. Language Barriers: While efforts will be made to conduct interviews in participants' preferred languages, subtle nuances might be lost during translation (Saunders et al., 2021).

3.14 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed outline of the research methodology employed to investigate the University of Zimbabwe's role in developing and nurturing local cuisines. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, the study ensures an in-depth exploration of the topic. The research design includes semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and participant observation, targeting various stakeholders such as UZ faculty, students, administrators, and community members.

Strategies for ensuring reliability and validity, including triangulation and member checking, have been incorporated to enhance the study’s trustworthiness. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and data protection were prioritized to protect participants and uphold research integrity.

While limitations such as the single-institution focus and qualitative orientation have been acknowledged, the methodology remains well-suited to achieving the research objectives. Overall, this chapter establishes a robust framework for exploring the dynamic interplay between higher education institutions and local culinary traditions