

Making internationalization of higher education a national strategic focus

National
strategic focus

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper contributes to knowledge on the internationalization of higher education (HE) through presenting a “lived” experience on how to optimize internationalization outcomes through national internationalization policy development.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper uses a case study of Zimbabwe to qualitatively chart a strategic focus to internationalization through incorporating the theory of change (ToC) approach to national (government) policy development.

Findings – The paper details the context, challenges, rationales, approaches, priorities and processes that guided IHE policy development in Zimbabwe. It underscores the importance of baseline research and benchmarking in propelling an evidence-based and participatory approach to IHE policy development.

Research limitations/implications – The methodology and framework used here makes it possible to draw comparisons in similar settings in a way that enables a more holistic understanding of the complexities and practicalities of national internationalization policy development.

Practical implications – The study can assist nations to take a strategic approach to guide institutional internationalization responses. In doing so, researchers and HE stakeholders in similar national contexts can learn valuable lessons from the study.

Social implications – Internationalization is increasingly becoming a policy imperative for HE in pursuit of quality as well as fostering sustainable national development (Craciun, 2018). Higher education institutions (HEIs) are recognized as key drivers of sustainable national and international development through the production of quality graduates with “global competencies.”

Originality/value – The study contributes to the growing research interest on strategic approaches to internationalization targeting specific national experiences.

Keywords Internationalization policy framework, Higher education, Zimbabwe, Theory of change

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Internationalization of higher education (henceforth referred to as internationalization) denotes the intentional integration of international/global or intercultural aspects into the mission of higher education institutions (HEIs), to enhance quality of teaching, knowledge production and service (De Wit, 2013). In the advent of knowledge-based economies and globalization, internationalization has gained heft as a vital mechanism in transforming higher education (HE) systems for national and global development (Bisaso and Nakamanya, 2018; Jibeen and Khan, 2015; Soliman et al., 2018; Thompson and do Amaral, 2019). Countries the world over are making significant, well-planned, well-executed and well-documented progress toward comprehensive internationalization. Craciun (2018) underscores the need to develop national (government) and institutional (university-specific) policies that enhance internationalization outcomes through refocusing it “from the periphery to centre stage” (p. 8). Torjman (2005) defined policy as a strategic process of decision making arrived at after reviewing the potential effects of various alternatives. To Harman (1984), policy is:



the implicit or explicit specification of courses of purposive action to be followed in dealing with a recognised problem or matter of concern, and directed towards the accomplishment of some intended set of goals (p. 13).

More specifically, [Rumbley and Helms \(2018\)](#) define a national internationalization policy as:

a guiding framework put forward by high-level national actors that provide an overarching outline, plan, roadmap, or strategy for internationalization of, or within, a given country's HE sector (p. 1).

[Jones and Kozma \(2003\)](#) indicate that a national policy typically provides:

- (1) legal, programmatic and institutional guidelines that direct collective and individual behavior;
- (2) rationales, overarching vision, mission and an implementation framework with goals and outcomes; and
- (3) cross-cutting enabling policies.

Whilst the importance of assuming a strategic (policy) approach to internationalization is well-acknowledged, several countries lack the knowhow, skills and guiding frameworks to develop such policies. [Craciun \(2018\)](#) called for research that digs deeper into the rationales, approaches and processes used for internationalization policy development. [Thondhlana et al. \(2020\)](#) found that, in countries where national internationalization policies exist, they rarely mention the policy development processes and imperatives. Furthermore, [Gornitzka et al. \(2003\)](#) noted that internationalization research is largely descriptive and thin on conceptualizations of policy frameworks. Regarding mostly the global South, additional challenges including lack of local research, socio-economic strife, political turmoil and colonial past compound the problem and strengthens the call for relevant scholarship. In post-colonial contexts, for example, internationalization must recognize the ways in which colonialism feeds into current practices. In this regard, [Thondhlana et al. \(2020\)](#) argue that internationalization has a transformational/decolonising potential.

As advised by [Trondal \(2010\)](#), a sustainable strategic approach to developing internationalization policy should employ appropriate empirical domains in order to avoid conceptual and contextual biases. The complexity, relevance and contextually contingent nature of internationalization requires thorough self-study of HE systems to help devise appropriate innovative interventions to enable universities to acquire the requisite tools, knowledge and skills to achieve and benefit from it. This study aimed to get a "lived" insight of internationalization perspectives, aspirations and research, teaching and learning experiences from the vantage point of university leadership, academics, students and stakeholders. It uses the case of Zimbabwe to interrogate the context, challenges, rationales, approaches, priorities and processes that informed the internationalization policy framework development. This will serve as a guide or point of reference to institutions and nations intending to develop their own policies. Zimbabwe is an example of a global South country whose internationalization had been until recently, ad hoc in nature and largely shaped by external (Western) discourses. The project undertook to develop a comprehensive, home-grown, locally relevant and internationally benchmarked internationalization policy to further improve the quality of its HE.

The literature identifies a valuable conceptual framework of four interconnected and sometimes overlapping categories of rationales/motivations for internationalization policy of any given country ([De Wit, 2019](#); [Helms et al., 2015](#); [Jiang, 2010](#); [Majee and Ress, 2020](#)) namely AQ : 5 academic, economic, political and socio-cultural. Whilst the importance and specific considerations for these rationales vary depending on context and history, it is widely agreed that: academic rationales relate to the objectives aligned to improving HE quality;

economic rationales address the relationship between HE and economic benefits and competitiveness at the individual, institutional and national levels it underlies efforts aimed at increasing the institutions' income by providing education abroad or attracting more foreign students.; socio-cultural rationales relate to intercultural exchanges and global competencies and political rationales are linked to national identities, ideologies, stability, peace, security and sovereignty.

Although internationalization is complex, contextual and dynamic, its transformational value-creation capabilities make it a critical tool for empowering HEIs to contribute toward the attainment of national development goals through highly skilled manpower development, knowledge production and innovation. The knowledgeable and skilled graduates so produced possess "global competencies" (Hunter et al., 2006, p. 270) and a broader worldview that makes them attractive to local and global employers (Altbach, 2013; Kireeva et al., 2018; Mansilla and Jackson, 2013; Teferra, 2016; Robson and Wihlborg, 2019). Further, they have open minds that challenge inequity, injustice and contribute to sustainable socio-economic and ecological development. Internationalization enriches the students' learning experience in order to improve their employability through strategies such as mobility, curriculum modification, networks, collaboration and partnerships (Watkins and Smith, 2018). According to Maringe et al. (2013), the value-creation aspects of internationalization are at the strategic, knowledge creation; cultural integration and global market levels thereby supporting "a broad vision of the university and its potentials and responsibilities" (Boni and Gasper, 2012, p. 467). Consequently, in the globalization era, a key metric to evaluate the success of a university's local relevance and global competitiveness is its ability to internationalize in all aspects of its *raison d'être* (Green and Schoenberg, 2006).

Internationalization is complex as evidenced by the plurality of understandings/, rationales, strategies and activities across universities resulting from the different opportunities and pressures faced by different nations and institutions (Caruana, 2010; Mertkan et al., 2016). Thus effective policy development relies heavily on the ideas and possible solutions proffered by the diverse HE actors. These ideas stem from a shared understanding of the problem and context. As our study will reveal, the various stakeholders had divergent interests and perspectives and their participation in the policy development process was key. For academics, the presence of international students and the privilege of taking sabbatical leave in foreign institutions ought to be at the core of internationalization policies. HEI leadership prioritized the potential of generating income, developing staff, improving research, enriching institutional cultures, student satisfaction and employability. Students, parents/guardians and employers valued quality student experiences and outcomes. Similarly, the external HE quality assurance agency was keen on enhancing the quality of education through varied exposure of staff and students. The Ministry of HE's low hanging fruit was the increase in foreign students as this was consistent with government's international reengagement agenda.

This paper begins with an overview of the conceptual framework that guided the policy development. This is followed by an explication of the methodology of the study and an expose of internationalization in context of Zimbabwe. The findings of the study are then presented and discussed before underscoring the lessons learned from the study and concluding.

Conceptual framework

We situate this study within discourses of internationalization and its capacity to strengthen glonocal (local, national and global) development (Zezeza, 2012). The literature reveals that policy development, implementation and impact generation matrix, is complex, non-linear (Bartels et al., 2012) and its success relies on the dynamic interactions amongst players,

knowledge/evidence (e.g. contextual, historical, cultural and political) experience and policy spaces (Siciliano et al., 2017). Although internationalization activities primarily occur in HEIs, the pivotal role of government in giving policy direction and the centrality of buy-in and participation of all key stakeholders in the HE ecosystem are key considerations in conceptualizing and developing effective policies. HE stakeholders are those primary/ secondary, overt/latent, commercial/non-commercial and/or internal/external actor(s) who have the potential to influence or to be influenced by a policy (Balane et al., 2020; Garvare and Johansson, 2010; Mainardes et al., 2012). This confirms the policy agency theory wherein policy necessitates linkages among the government, various actors, HEIs, discourses and technologies (Shore and Wright, 2011).

We draw upon Rasul and Karki's (2008) policy development framework (See Figure 1) to F1 map out a suitable framework to guide the identification of the requirements, actors, procedures and strategies for successful policy development.

The framework emphasizes the following:

- (1) Context setting - analysis of the existing situation
 - national internationalization context
 - identification of stakeholders and defining their role;
- (2) Research to obtain evidence - baseline information, the status quo and the intended direction, outcomes and priorities (Chigumira, 2005);
- (3) Developing solutions collectively - close interaction between researchers and stakeholders is a key to ensure inclusivity with respect to actors and their needs/ perspectives;

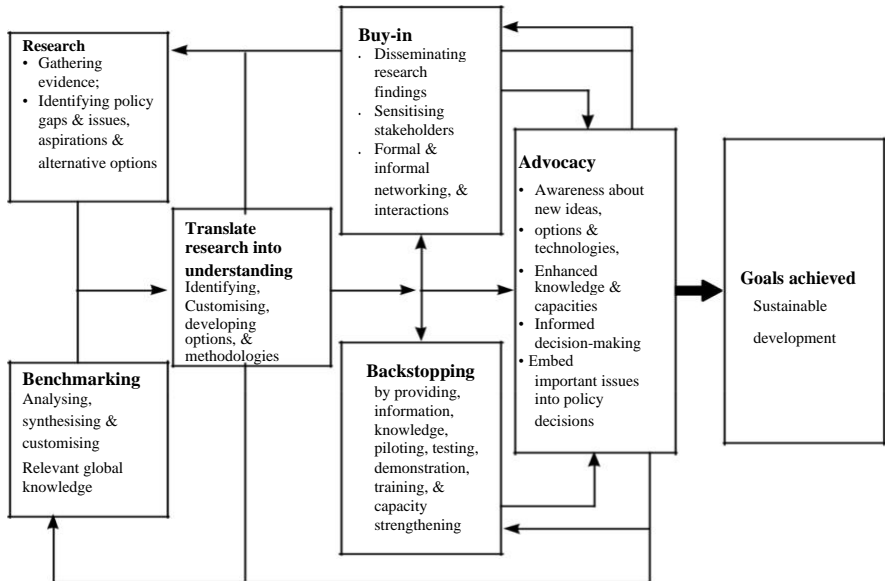


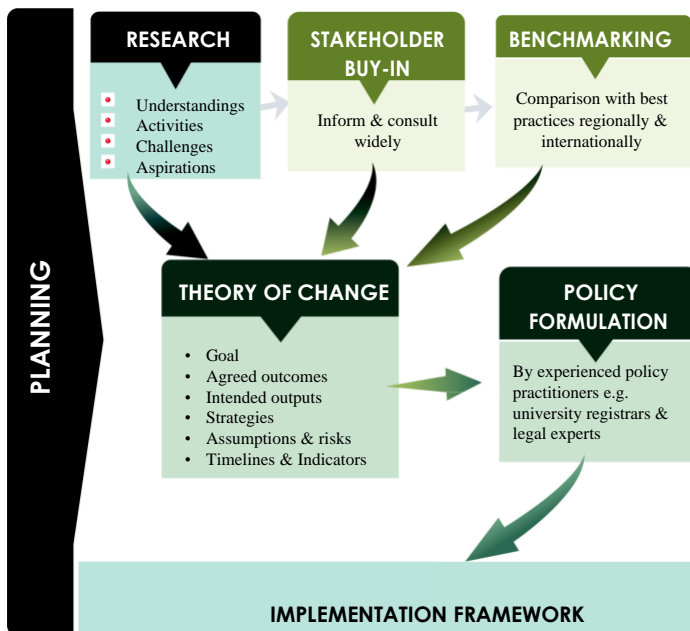
Figure 1. Policy development framework

Source(s): Rasul & Karki (2008, p.22)

- (4) Benchmarking with others who have documented and non-documented best practices makes it possible to avoid pitfalls. However, benchmarking should be done with caution, taking into consideration differences in history and context in order to effectively manage risks;
- (5) Goal-setting guided by national imperatives.

The combination of these issues and concepts provide a set of thinking tools for national F2 policy development. The resultant conceptual framework is shown in Figure 2. In adapting Rasul and Karki (2008)'s policy development framework, we use the theory of change (ToC) methodology to allow a wide range of stakeholders to interrogate the research findings and agree on the "pathway of change" and responsibility to achieving set goals. ToC focuses on how to achieve the intended long-term goal using backward mapping (Vogel, 2012). The ToC process identifies the challenges, strategic choices, interventions/activities, assumptions, timelines, indicators (means of verification) and contextual factors which influence the ToC (Taplin et al., 2013). In doing so ToC also enables us to interrogate the intended interventions/activities and strategies through a decolonial lens so as to avoid the danger of "... reinforcing past and present inequalities and knowledge hierarchies, and creating new ones" (Thondhlana et al., 2020, p. 6). ToC enables planning efficiency planning, because progress toward the achievement of longer-term goals can easily be measured beyond mere identification of outputs (De Silva et al., 2014).

By employing the adapted framework, the study investigated four major issues: (1) The internationalization context in Zimbabwe; (2) Stakeholder roles and motivation/rationales underpinning the internationalization policy; (3) Intended outcomes and priorities from the ToC; (4) Critical reflections on the policy development framework.



Source(s): Authors

Figure 2.
Adapted policy development framework

Methodology

The research was based on a case study of Zimbabwe using a qualitative methodology involving documentary analysis and primary data collection and analysis. Documentary analysis included a scanning of the national and international policy landscape to gain insights into national policy development and looking specifically at internationalization policy development. The ensuing content analysis helped us to identify the relevant stakeholders, protocols, processes as well as gaps in existing practices (Boaz et al., 2018). Primary data collection involved in-depth interviews, averaging forty (40) minutes, with purposively selected 94 participants including: senior government officials (10), captains of industry and commerce (9), external quality assurance officials (10), University Vice Chancellors (20), Registrars (20), Deans, (6) academics (6) , non-teaching staff (4), internationalization officers (6), alumni (4) and students (4). This rich mix of HE stakeholders reflecting the diverse hierarchies and responsibilities laid fertile ground for us to capture a wide rich data. The case study approach helped to extract in-depth contextual data based on “lived” internationalization experiences, knowledge, practices and challenges and innovative solutions. We also collected documentary information on the HE system and context from each institution in the sample to enable us to explore narratives on the understandings, perceptions activities, aspirations, approaches and strategies regarding internationalization.

Participants were interviewed on similar issues in order to capture understandings and perspectives of internationalization. Ethical approvals were obtained from the relevant partner institutions in Zimbabwe and UK and participants gave informed consent prior to their participation in the research. All participants’ names were pseudonymized.

The study commenced with a scoping study involving semi-structured interviews with participants at six universities (four public and two private). The sample was selected through purposive sampling to get a representation of institutional types including: responsible authority (public or private); maturity/age (year of establishment); size (student enrollment); and mandate (comprehensive, science and technology, heritage, gender, etc.). This was followed by a focus group interview with the external quality assurance body. Further in-depth interviews were undertaken during subsequent workshops for: (1) ZIMCHE, (2) ToC development, (3) internationalization policy framework development and (4) policy framework dissemination.

Interview audios were transcribed and coded followed by thematic analysis, involving reiterative reading of the transcripts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process enabled identification of statements that could indicate particular understandings of internationalization and related concepts such as decolonization and transformation as well as accompanying internationalization strategies and aspirations. In doing this we adopted an eclectic approach which involved starting with pre-determined themes drawn from the relevant literature on the internationalization of HE and identifying related patterns in the data while allowing new themes to emerge from the data through reiterative reading. Individual interpretations of the data were discussed in the iterative process. The identified themes were further explored at the ensuing workshops and meetings and themes sharpened.

We now proceed to discuss the internationalization policy development through our revised conceptual framework. We begin the discussion by contextualizing the study through an expose of the historical, developmental and current HE and internationalization perspectives in Zimbabwe.

The internationalization context in Zimbabwe

McGrath et al. (2019) aver that internationalization has been an aspect of Zimbabwe’s HE since its inception as far back as 1955. The pioneering HEI (now the University of Zimbabwe) was established by the then British colonial masters as a constituent college modeled in

accordance to the University of London. The university was highly internationalized, accessing technical assistance and funding from British institutions and awarding internationally recognized qualifications “of (a) quality at par with those of British universities” (Dande and Mujere, 2015, p. 12). Upon gaining independence in 1980, the University of Zimbabwe expanded tremendously but remained the country’s sole HEI up until 1991. Thereafter the unprecedented surge in demand of HE led to the establishment of 24

T1 universities both public and private (See Table 1). Internationalization continued to be a key feature in the universities as they were modeled against the University of Zimbabwe which acted as the de facto “big brother.” The situation was to change drastically in the late 1990s following the country’s economic misfortunes, imposition of sanctions by the west, suspension from the Commonwealth and the general disconnect from the international community. This affected the quantum of inward bound foreign academics and students in Zimbabwean universities as well as limiting international cooperation.

Amidst the myriad of economic problems Zimbabwean HEIs continued to leverage internationalization albeit in a limited, ad hoc and fragmented manner. For example, in response to the diasporic explosion and the prospect of migration resulting from the flight of professionals to international destinations in search of better fortunes, HEIs undertook curriculum reforms to prepare students accordingly (McGrath et al., 2019). Consequently, Zimbabwe has continued to top the African continent literacy league tables consecutively for five years (UNECA, 2018). Despite achieving this feat, the country’s universities have not been ranked favorably on the world or continental ranking charts partly due to their failure to aggressively leverage on internationalization affordances especially with respect to increasing the international students and staff.

Some of the key legislations and policies that govern HE in Zimbabwe and may affect internationalization besides the University Acts and Charters are:

Name of university	Year of establishment
Public/state universities	
1. University of Zimbabwe	1952
2. National University of Science and Technology	1991
3. Bindura University of Science Education	1996
4. Zimbabwe Open University	1999
5. Great Zimbabwe University	1999
6. Midlands State University	2000
7. Chinhoyi University of Technology	2001
8. Harare Institute of Technology	2005
9. Lupane State University	2005
10. Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences & Technology	2015
11. Gwanda State University	2016
12. Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences	2016
13. Zimbabwe National Defence University	2017
Private universities	
1. Africa University	1992
2. Solusi University	1994
3. Catholic University of Zimbabwe	1999
4. Women’s University in Africa	2002
5. Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University	2012
6. Reformed Church University	2012
7. Arrupe Jesuit University	2018

Source(s): Garwe and Thondhlana (2019)

Table 1.
Zimbabwean
registered universities
as of July 2020

-
- (1) The Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education Act (2006)
 - (2) Research Act of Zimbabwe (Chapter 10:22)
 - (3) The National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF) (2018)
 - (4) The Zimbabwe Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ZIMCATS) (2017)
 - (5) The SADC Protocol on Education and Training (1997)
 - (6) Higher Education Policy and Doctrine Education 5.0
 - (7) The Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development Strategy Document 2019–2023.

Stakeholder roles and the motivation/rationales for internationalization Participants in the internationalization policy development comprised HE stakeholders who defined their roles and the motivation/rationales for internationalization as detailed in [Table 2](#). Identification of the stakeholders, their roles and the motivation/rationales T2 necessitates easy dialog and holistic planning of policy options and priorities.

In our study, HEC stakeholders were all in agreement that Zimbabwe needed a national policy in order to place internationalization firmly on the HE agenda. The rationales are in line with those in the literature ([De Wit, 2019](#); [Helms et al., 2015](#); [Jiang, 2010](#); [Majee and Ress, 2020](#)), albeit varying slightly in the categorizations of socio-economic and geo-political as well as in the specific objectives for each rationale. In terms of the academic rationales, most of the HEIs possess a wealth of experience in international collaborations, staff and students exchanges. This motivation for coming up with a policy was the desire to compete and collaborate at par with sister institutions regionally, in Africa and beyond.

The socio-economic rationales were premised on the effect of globalization on global employability wherein employers are prepared to pay high premiums on recruiting graduates with internationalized education and skills (globalism). Thus internationalization of teaching, research, outreach services, innovations and industrialization (Education 5.0) causes institutions to find solutions to local problems. Furthermore, HEIs across borders influence each other by sharing best practices to rise to international standards, and this leads to quality and relevance of HE. Internationalized curricula create international scholars and international citizens. It enhances a university's international visibility, improves the quality of programs and imparts intercultural and global skills in both staff and students through developing linkages and networks which strengthen capacities of universities.

By systematically internationalizing, Zimbabwean universities would open opportunities to collaborate with the world's top ranked universities. Internationalization at national level has potential to develop local human capital while also improving national competitiveness. Internationalization has spill-over effects to destination branding through educational tourism and creation of strategic geo-political alliances and economic relationships. Regardless of the locations, histories, ideologies, resources and ambitions of universities; internationalization should be the common denominator that unites nations and drives university business.

Considering the foregoing, a national policy was intended at bringing uniformity and teamwork in the way HEIs in Zimbabwe approach internationalization by providing direction and guidance on how to comprehensively address broader national priorities and institutional interests. A truly internationalized HEI was imagined as one with internationalized curricula and mind-sets, has students and staff from diverse countries and has active student and staff exchange programs, research collaborations, networks with other international institutions as well as staff and students who appreciate international education.

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Stakeholder	Role/interest	Rationale/Motivation
Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development	The chief driver of internationalization in Zimbabwe, taking special interest in the fulfillment of the internationalization goals, regulating and resourcing internationalization to ensure a level playing field with standards comparable to other international HEIs	Academic Increase in foreign students in line with government's drive to re-integrate Zimbabwe into the international community
Ministry of Home Affairs & Cultural Heritage through its various agencies including the Registrar General's Office and Immigration Office	Developing friendly visa and immigration frameworks for International staff and students; considering tax rebates for HEIs actively involved in internationalization, to promote development of facilities; guaranteeing safety of international staff and students	Academic, Geo-political Accurate statistics and information
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade through its Embassies/Consular Services in foreign countries	Actively market and recruit international students for Zimbabwe's HEIs; ensure safety and security of international staff and students	Academic, Cultural, Socio-economic, Geo-political Cooperation from local HEIs
HEI leadership	Oversee the offering of quality programs and award qualifications	Academic, Socio-economic Collaboration with local and international partners in teaching and research; enriching institutional cultures; as well as participation in the global economy
Academics	Training and supervision of students; Innovation and research	Academic Interaction with the international community through staff exchange, sabbaticals, research collaborations, presence of foreign students etc.
Students	Knowledge, skill acquisition and employability	Academic, Socio-economic Well-resourced HEIs offering quality and transferable programs
Alumni	HEIs' ambassadors - provide HEIs with feedback and support	Academic, Socio-economic Reputable HEIs
Quality assurance agencies	Register, accredit and audit HEIs/ programs; provide evidence-based information to support stakeholder decisions (e.g. government, students, employers)	Academic, Socio-economic Enhancing the quality of education through internationalized and relevant curricula; quality research and innovation; exposure of staff and students

(continued)

Table 2.
Stakeholder roles and the motivation/rationales for internationalization

Stakeholder	Role/interest	Rationale/Motivation
Research council and Research institutes	Disseminate research opportunities to HEIs to facilitate timely response and uptake of research; broker linkages with international research bodies to ensure inclusion of local researchers on researches of an international appeal; liaise with industry and commerce so that they trust local HEIs enough to channel problems requiring research to local HEIs for solutions	Academic, Socio-economic Research collaboration; synergies in sharing of facilities, research outputs and human resources
Industry and commerce	Provide student internship and employment	Socio-economic Qualified, competent, innovative and entrepreneurial graduates
Media	To analyze and provide vital information to readers, stakeholders and the general public	Academic, Cultural, Socio-economic, Geo-political Reliable and timely information
Professional bodies	Ensure quality professional qualifications	Academic, Socio-economic Involvement in program development and accreditation
Recruitment agencies	Recruit international students/ graduates on behalf of HEIs/ employers	Academic, Cultural, Socio-economic, Geo-political Relevant and accurate information
Parents	Parents pay tuition fees and provide additional financial support	Academic, Socio-economic Accountable, transparent and reputable HEIs
Development partners and funding organizations	Provide financial/resource support to HEIs	Academic Accountability and transparency
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	Provide support to HEIs	Academic, Socio-economic Expect support from HEIs & student volunteers
Wider society	Social interests	Academic, Cultural, Socio-economic, Geo-political Employable graduates of high integrity

Table 2.

From a cultural perspective, the internationalization policy thus sought to put Zimbabwe's HE on the world map by creating synergies among local HEIs so that they focus on complementing each other rather than engaging in unhealthy competition. This approach would help in continuously improving quality as well as promoting and internationalizing local knowledge. Internationalization would also help to cultivate inter-culturalism, sensitivity, international competence, awareness, tolerance and consciousness.

With respect to geo-political rationales, stakeholders viewed internationalization as essential for regional and international peace, stability and security. Countries can compete and collaborate at par through symbiotic development and creation of synergies. As [Helms et al. \(2015\)](#) concedes internationalization "was seen as a beneficial tool for foreign policy especially with respect to national security and peace among nations." (p. 9).

This section dwelt on an analysis of individual stakeholder rationales for the internationalization policy. The next section discusses the "agreed" intended outcomes of the internationalization policy following the ToC developed and agreed by all stakeholders to depict the measurable deliverables.

Intended outcomes and priorities

As [Bedenlier and Zawacki-Richter \(2015\)](#) enthuses, outcomes depict the results of internationalization activities. The ToC enabled intended outcomes of the internationalization policy examined in the previous section at a specific stakeholder level to be considered and reformulated at a higher level of interaction amongst all HE players. The initial process of identification of the intended outcomes started during the scoping study and stakeholder interactive workshops whilst the final agreement and prioritization was done collectively during the ToC exercise. The narratives and priorities given for each of these outcomes are explained below:

- (1) Increased presence of international students and staff; academic staff mobility was considered to be of critical importance as it allows for knowledge sharing, exchange and capacity building in areas that may not have local capacity while positioning Zimbabwe as a citadel of African knowledge. Achievement of this outcome hinges on the efforts by the Government of Zimbabwe to rebrand and make the country more attractive to boost international students' numbers. The recruitment of international staff will assist in facilitating skills transfer and promotion of local faculty profiles. Having both foreign staff and students will promote the development of competencies in managing diversity.
- (2) Active memoranda of agreements/understandings (e.g. in teaching, research and infrastructure and resource sharing); establishing and maintaining international partnerships and collaborations with governments, universities and institutions will increase opportunities for Zimbabwean scholars to access international grants for research, scholarship and facilities without disadvantaging local knowledge systems.
- (3) Increased impact research and publications; research collaboration has been a common feature in HE and it is one of the proven ways of implementing internationalization. It allows for inter-exchange of ideas, sharing skills and resources including laboratories and workshops.
- (4) Increased innovations and intellectual property outputs; The transformation of Zimbabwe's HE sector into an economically viable industry through knowledge production and innovation is critical for achieving Zimbabwe's vision 2030 of becoming a middle-income economy. The program of establishing innovation hubs at universities and industrial parks led by the parent Ministry will promote innovation, entrepreneurship as well as research and development in Zimbabwe. It will also create fertile ground for collaboration between students, academics and industry necessary to foster industrialization and modernization through innovation and research and improve community livelihoods;
- (5) Increased harmonized programs and relevant curricula; Zimbabwe's HEIs are encouraged to internationalize their curricula so that the programs offered are not only fit for purpose for local students but also for the global consumers of HE programs. This will help to sell a unique brand of heritage-based Education 5.0 anchored on indigenous knowledge systems to the global community. That way, Zimbabwe will become a destination for an African-flavored HE by local, African as well as global students and researchers.
- (6) Favorable international rankings; a well-structured approach to internationalization would give momentum to research thereby attracting experienced academics (local and foreign) who want to contribute to Zimbabwe on temporary or full time basis.

- (7) Institutional capability, culture and awareness; The parent ministry will assist in the recruitment of foreign students. Further, internationalization structures such as partnering with recruiting agencies as well as the establishment of international offices will help institutions to attract students to Zimbabwe.

The intended outcomes outlined above were expected to generate impact, defined as a change, effect, or benefit to the quality of life in terms of socio-economic, cultural, environmental, health, technological, political and legal and technological pillars, beyond academia. These pillars were seen as anchored by cross-cutting aspects such as new products, policies and behaviors; improving efficiency and efficacy of existing practices and improving sustainability. Such impact would result in the production of economically engaged graduates who not only find employment locally and internationally but are also able to create enterprises for themselves and become employers. This way HEIs can be seen as transforming themselves into agents of the industrialization and modernization of the Zimbabwean economy for sustainable socio-economic transformation.

These intended internationalization outcomes informed the development of a national internationalization policy through the strategies and identification of other enabling policies as shown in [Table 3](#).

T3

Critical reflections on the policy development framework

It is essential to reflect on the effectiveness of the methodology in order to highlight areas of good practice and areas that had to be changed or those that still need improvement. The internationalization project sought to develop and adopt a framework for internationalization aimed at creating a globally responsive and competitive HE system that addresses the needs of the country. It revealed the challenging process of mobilizing diverse institutions to co-develop a national internationalization policy that all institutions could identify with. The methodology of policy development exhibited its strengths in the following:

- (1) The evidence-based multi-pronged approach which involved consultations at various levels including the scoping study, seminar with the quality assurance body, ToC workshop with Vice Chancellors, workshop with key stakeholders and working meetings with all registrars provided a scientific and rigorous basis for policy development.
- (2) The ToC enabled debate and agreement amongst stakeholders regarding the rationale, goal, risks and intended outcomes of the internationalization policy.
- (3) The buy-in by all key stakeholders gave them a strong sense of ownership of the process and product. These stakeholders willingly provided funding on a cost-sharing basis effectively doing away with any possible funding dilemmas associated with national policy development.
- (4) Multi-sectoral involvement, as highlighted in literature ([Reinholz and Andrews, 2020](#)), was critical to the successful ToC. For example, key Ministries which facilitate mobility such as Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs needed to be engaged to lobby for the development of policies that support staff and student mobility.
- (5) HEIs worked together at strategic levels highlighting the effectiveness of collaboration in developing national policy frameworks.
- (6) As noted by the registrars who were tasked with collating ideas into a draft of the policy framework document, the exercise benefitted from the diverse expertise and practices of their institutions to ensure that there was full representation.

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Intended outcome	Enabling policy(ies)	Policy strategies
1. Increased presence of international students and staff	(1) Non-discrimination	(1) Align internationalization with national strategic vision (2) Exploit the “Zimbabwe is open for business” mantra (3) Benchmark with international institutions (4) Participate in international HE expos (5) Develop and implement aggressive marketing of HEIs (6) Establish a budget for internationalization
2. Active memoranda of agreements/understandings (e.g. in teaching, research and infrastructure and resource sharing)	(1) Training (2) Intellectual Property (3) Research (4) National Qualifications (5) Minimum Body of Knowledge (6) Funding (7) Post study work promotion	(1) Aligned work permit to contracts’ duration. Annual renewal fees can be levied without having to re-do the application process (2) Introduce online applications to reduce permit processing times (3) Fund contact leave and sabbaticals (4) National research grants (5) Facilitate access to research resources such as workshops, laboratories and equipment to external researchers who work with local academics
3. Increased impact research and publications	(1) Intellectual Property (2) Research	(1) Ensure that foreign academics working in Zimbabwe participate in knowledge transfer and capacity building endeavors (2) Ensure that there is a minimum body of knowledge expected of senior students pursuing degrees by research (3) Support initiatives for embracing Diaspora academics who want to support collaborative research (e.g. the Institute for International Education African Diaspora Fellowship Programme initiative
4. Increased innovations and intellectual property outputs	(1) Intellectual Property (2) Research	(1) Prioritize the establishment and maintenance of international partnerships (2) High interest must be espoused in the advancement of innovation, knowledge creation and development (3) Involve foreign scholars in collaborative research locally and internationally (4) Encourage and incentivize co-authoring of publications with foreign scientists and scholars

(continued)

Table 3.
Intended outcomes of
internationalization
policy

Intended outcome	Enabling policy(ies)	Policy strategies
5. Increased harmonized programs and relevant curricula	(1) Curriculum review (2) Student and staff exchange (3) National & Global credit accumulation transfer (4) Industrial attachment/ work-related/ internship (5) Minimum Body of Knowledge	(1) Increase international partnerships (2) Conduct Tracer Studies (3) Engage professional bodies and Alumni (4) Benchmark with international institutions through studying their course outlines, sending staff on contact and Sabbatical leave, staff and student exchanges, dual awards of degrees, joint supervisions of research students, participation in international research conferences (6) Maintain an informative website
6. Favorable international rankings	(1) Intellectual Property transfer (2) Admission credit (3) National Research Funding	(1) Increase high impact research outputs (2) Benchmark curricula with international institutions (3) Develop world-class infrastructure (4) Partner with industry and commerce (5) Increase engagement of international staff and enrollment of international students (6) Establish international offices at HEIs and at the Ministry
7. Institutional capability, culture and awareness	(1) Monitoring and evaluation	(1) Establish internationalization offices at HEIs and at the Ministry (2) Monitor internationalization implementation at national and institutional levels (3) Every HEI should have an approved institutional internationalization policy or strategy

Table 3. Source(s): Authors' compilation based on findings of study

- (7) The cross-referencing with policies that supports or that is in conflict with the policy outcomes ensured policy coherence and synergy.

Despite these explicit issues, there are some issues that have to be taken into consideration if this methodology is to achieve the intended results. For example, the presence of a strategically positioned player to drive the process and elicit the commitment and participation of other players is critical. In this respect, the study demonstrated that the role of a respected, trusted quality assurance agency, with an oversight mandate over HEIs and linked to the responsible Ministry and other related sectors was critical for success. The quality assurance agency accessed HEIs in the scoping sample; interviewed high profile staff; and mobilized HEIs to participate in policy development. The role of visionary leadership is also key to the success of the process.

Conclusion

The major contribution of this study was to address a well-acknowledged gap in literature relating to limited documentation on internationalization policy development methodologies (Thondhlana et al., 2020) and frameworks (Gornitzka et al., 2003). The ToC emerged as a critical step in the policy development process as stakeholder develop clear strategies in order to chart the way toward a common goal. Furthermore, the study evidenced the critical need

for stakeholder partnerships for effective knowledge transfer (Zych et al., 2020). To this end the research intensive and rigorous evidence-based collaborative process which included cycles of engagement (including interviews and a series of workshops) between researchers, key stakeholders and government departments resulted in the creation of knowledge and interventions that are more likely to be embraced and implemented due to strong institutional buy-in and ownership.

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