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Beyond Rhetoric: Re-imagining Internationalization of Higher Education in Zimbabwe Through a Feminist Framework

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Abstract: Traditional models of internationalization in higher education have been criticized for neglecting equity, inclusion, and social responsibilities in favor of focusing narrowly on economic objectives. This study explores an alternative feminist and collaborative framework for internationalization of higher education using a case study of Zimbabwean universities. The methodology included content analysis of documents and primary data collection. Five universities participated in semi-structured interviews with 30 participants across administration, faculty, and student leadership to explore understandings, rationales, policies, procedures, initiatives, strategies, aspirations, and challenges regarding internationalization. The findings revealed gaps between espoused priorities and lived experiences. Thematic analysis showed that incorporating diversity, representation, mutual understanding, and empowerment through feminist partnerships validated diverse knowledge and addressed intersectional needs, facilitating culturally sensitive exchanges. However, challenges of limited resources and implementing consistent, systemic changes remained. The study argues that adopting a feminist-informed and collaborative approach enriches internationalization theory and practice by centering marginalized voices in conceptualizing and implementing initiatives. By dismantling barriers and fostering empowerment, more equitable outcomes can be realized. This feminist approach holds promise for empowering all backgrounds as equal partners in higher education worldwide through wisdom and care.

Keywords: internationalization in higher education, feminist framework, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

Internationalization of higher education aims to develop globally minded graduates through cross-border initiatives and partnerships. However, critics argue that a narrow focus on economic goals has often come at the expense of other important objectives. In particular, prioritizing profit and competitiveness over social responsibilities has been found to perpetuate inequities and risks promoting cultural homogeneity (Bamberger et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2021; Naidoo, 2009).

"Intersectional feminist" scholars propose alternative conceptualizations that place social justice and empowerment at the center of internationalization of higher education. The term "intersectional feminist" refers to those scholars who seek to dismantle and transform existing hierarchical structures within academia and society that concentrate power, oppression, and domination based on gender, age, race, class, and other forms of difference (Anthias, 2012; Dumitru Tăbăcaru et al., 2022; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Central to intersectional feminist thought is the empowerment of marginalized groups and individuals. It acknowledges diversity within groups and advocates for policies addressing the specific needs of those at the margins through representation and participatory methods (Anthias, 2012). They also seek to promote diversity, inclusion, and representation across all levels of cross-border initiatives (Collier, 2018; Collins, 2015). Through collaboration, representation, and incorporating marginalized voices and lived experiences into policy and practice, more equitable models can be developed (Dumitru Tăbăcaru et al., 2022; Rosser, 2007). Relationships of reciprocity also feature strongly in feminist scholarship. Rather than top-down paradigms, feminist scholars propose more equitable partnerships where all parties mutually benefit (Collier, 2018). Their goal is to foster compassion between groups through reciprocal learning experiences (Rosser, 2007).

Ethics also lie at the heart of feminist work wherein scholars strive to conduct research and teach in a spirit of ethical rigor, avoiding harm and respecting consent (Collier, 2018). Sensitivity to intersectional diversity shapes feminist understandings of ethical practices (Rosser, 2007). Overall, feminism envisions education as a means toward empowerment, reciprocity, and ethical relations between all people (Collier, 2018).

By adopting such a comprehensive approach to internationalization of higher education, existing power dynamics can be dismantled, addresses systemic barriers, and creates more just, transformative outcomes and experiences for students and staff from all backgrounds. Thus, the purpose of this study was to re-envision internationalization using the case of Zimbabwean universities. Specifically, this study sought to understand opportunities to transform policies, practices, and partnerships through applying an intersectional feminist framework. Through this empowerment lens, this work will examine pressures on marginalized groups like women students and faculty.

Zimbabwe offers a unique context for examining the possibilities and challenges of feminist internationalization (Makuvaza, 2016).

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First, Zimbabwe developed and implemented a national policy framework on internationalization of higher education. Second, Zimbabwe offers a salient colonial and post-colonial context where international influences historically prioritized Western dominance (Makuvaza, 2016). Reforming relationships, policies, and practices could sustainably transform participation in internationalization for the benefit of all stakeholders in Zimbabwe and beyond.

This study contributes to the existing scholarship on internationalization, gender, and inequality by providing a specific focus on the Zimbabwean context and employing an intersectional feminist framework. By centering empowerment, equity, and social justice, the study aims to build on previous research and advance transformative practices in international higher education.

2. Literature Review

The existing body of research establishes some key themes regarding internationalization of higher education that are relevant to this study. First, traditional models of internationalization have predominantly focused on developing global competence and facilitating cross-border partnerships and exchanges (Knight, 2004). However, various critiques argue that such approaches often neglect important considerations of equity, inclusion, and social responsibilities in favor of narrow economic objectives (Bamberger et al., 2019; Naidoo, 2009).

Postcolonial scholars further highlight how conventional internationalization paradigms frequently impose Western epistemic dominance, undermining non-economic goals and local autonomy in formerly colonized nations and regions (Makuvaza, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Additionally, an emerging area of research emphasizes the value of considering diverse student voices and perspectives in the internationalization process (Dumitru Tăbăcaru et al., 2022).

Within these overarching themes, two specific topics arise most prominently in the literature. The first relates to issues of representation and inclusion. Various scholars assert that traditional models of internationalization tend to prioritize Western knowledge systems and frameworks over embracing epistemic diversity, potentially exacerbating marginalization by neglecting intersectional identities and structural barriers (Crenshaw, 1989; wa Thiong'o, 1986). Research also suggests such factors significantly shape student experiences of and satisfaction with their education. Critics argue market-driven rationales in internationalization may unintentionally promote cultural homogeneity and undermine non-economic goals (Bamberger et al., 2019; Bawa, 2020).

The second major topic examines power dynamics and imbalances, especially regarding contexts in the global South. Postcolonial frameworks emphasize the particular challenges facing regions like Africa, where internationalization strategies historically privileged Western interests over local needs and autonomy (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013; Petzold & Rucht, 2018). African scholars specifically highlight the importance of challenging dominant Eurocentric discourses and incorporating African voices and knowledge systems (Makoni, 2016).

Scholars propose alternative frameworks centered on principles of reciprocity, care ethics, empowerment, and collaboration. Such approaches emphasize the value of diversity, representation, mutually beneficial partnerships, and culturally responsive practices in internationalizing higher education (Adams, 2007; Deardorff, 2006; Collier, 2018; Manik, 2014; Rosser, 2007). Community engagement from the outset aims to foster socio-cultural learning while building capacity through reciprocal knowledge exchange. Targeted strategies also seek to dismantle systemic barriers such as financial obstacles disproportionately precluding underrepresented groups. Iterative grassroots models tailored to each context aim to empower all as equal partners in positive societal transformation.

The literature on feminist internationalization in African/Global South contexts highlights the importance of centering marginalized voices, prioritizing social responsibilities, and fostering inclusive practices. Scholars emphasize the need for models that incorporate diverse perspectives like those of students (Dumitru Tăbăcaru et al., 2022). However, research on applying feminist internationalization praxis within African higher education institutions (HEIs) specifically remains scarce.

While traditional models prioritized recruitment and profit, feminist approaches reconceptualize goals around justice, human capabilities, and multi-directional learning processes rooted locally (Adams, 2007). Representing diverse needs through intersectional consultation leads to sustainable programs with improved cultural competencies, empowerment, and equitable approaches respecting power differentials. Iterative grassroots practices tailored to each context can empower all as partners in transformative societal change.

2.1. Theoretical framework

This study draws upon intersectional feminist theory as a framework to understand the impact of internationalization and opportunities for improvement to reach its full potential. Intersectional theory, developed by seminal scholars like Crenshaw (1989), recognizes how gender interlocks with other social identities such as race, class, sexuality, ability status, and more. As Collins and Bilge (2020) note, intersectionality aims to reveal "multiple and intersecting systems of oppression, domination or discrimination".

Location is also key, as one's experiences are shaped greatly by regional attributes. For example, international opportunities may be constrained differently for students from rural vs. urban areas due to resource disparities (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Geography intersects with other identities and is shaped by colonial histories, impacting partnerships and initiatives across borders. Socioeconomic status influences the experience of place, for example. Efforts involving the global South frequently contend with lingering power dynamics between regions (Bannerji, 2019; Naidoo, 2009). The specific context shapes both obstacles to equality and opportunities for positive change. Adopting geographical perspectives could bring to light barriers like inadequate transportation infrastructure affecting disability inclusion depending on facilities at host institutions (Shaw, 2012). Location-based understanding provides crucial insights into localized support requirements. History and place combine with other identities, requiring sensitivity to diversity within international collaborations.

Using an intersectional feminist lens reveals issues that are often overlooked in traditional approaches to internationalization. For instance, an intersectional analysis could expose the specific obstacles that women encounter when accessing cross-border opportunities because of the interplay of gender and other forms of oppression and vulnerability (Jones et al., 2021). Targeted support could facilitate more equal participation.

Discrimination and challenges may also arise based on intersections of identity. For example, female students sometimes encounter prejudice when studying abroad due to systemic issues intersecting with lingering colonial ideologies that still influence cross-border relations. Scholars have argued that power imbalances in international partnerships seldom account for how

such dynamics shape the experiences of marginalized groups (Naidoo, 2009). Acknowledging oppression rooted in geography, history, and their link to present-day attitudes is important for fostering more empowering collaborations across diverse contexts.

Intersectionality further helps uncover opportunities to transform internationalization. Collaborations between global women's groups, for example, show promise in advancing social justice aims through exchange of best practices (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Research also suggests international initiatives yield most impact when led by community stakeholders (Shaw, 2012).

Integrating intersectionality into policy and program evaluation could illuminate specific barriers faced by students with disabilities due to ableism within international systems (Shaw, 2012). Critics argue traditional approaches fail to consider diversity in student identities that shape experiences (Jones et al., 2021).

Overall, applying an intersectional feminist lens enriches understanding of internationalization by illuminating diverse lived realities and power structures at play (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Naidoo, 2009; Shaw, 2012). This in turn can inform more inclusive and equitable approaches to enhance its benefits while mitigating shortcomings. The following methodology section outlines an intersectional analysis of university policies and stakeholder interviews to better comprehend impacts and identify opportunities for reform.

2.2. Zimbabwe as a case study

Zimbabwe is a compelling case study for exploring more equitable models of internationalization in higher education. As a former British colony, Zimbabwe has experienced the effects of Western cultural dominance and colonialism on its education system. Therefore, examining internationalization through an anti-colonial, feminist lens that empowers local voices is important (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

Previous research showed Zimbabwe's early internationalization prioritized Western neoliberal agendas over access, quality, and relevance (Makuvaza, 2016; Musakwa, 2020; Takavarasha, 2018). However, internationalization also challenges Zimbabwean HEIs to balance competitiveness with social responsibility (Chinyama, 2019; Muzavazi et al., 2021). This requires partnership approaches reflecting local needs to avoid perpetuating inequalities (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013).

Zimbabwe continues facing persistent gender, socioeconomic, and ethnic disparities impacting society and education (Bondarev, 2020; Gadzikwa, 2017; Tinarwo, 2021). A traditional Western model risks exacerbating rather than addressing these problems (Mira & Odeh, 2019). Therefore, collaborative governance mechanisms ensuring benefits are shared by all through intersectional voices are essential (Nherera, 2000; Ziki, 2020).

Zimbabwe also has a rich, diverse cultural heritage that needs respect and representation in cross-border learning (Dlodlo, 2014). By applying principles of diversity, representation, and empowerment, internationalization can foster intercultural competencies and global solidarity among students and staff.

As Zimbabwe's internationalization efforts continue evolving, particularly through the national internationalization of higher education policy framework approved for implementation in January 2020, there is opportunity to address power imbalances shaping the field from colonial times (Petzold & Rucht, 2018). Integrating feminist principles and collaboration can create more equitable, inclusive outcomes for higher education and society. Zimbabwe's unique background and current needs make it ideal for advancing socially just internationalization conceptualizations

informing global practice and policy (Manik, 2014; Bommasani et al., 2021).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research design

The study pursued two research questions:
1. What are the opportunities and challenges of internationalization approaches in Zimbabwean universities?
2. How can internationalization be advanced in Zimbabwe through a feminist collaborative framework?

A qualitative research design was employed using document analysis and semi-structured interviews. This approach was well-suited to explore diverse perspectives and power dynamics shaping internationalization experiences (Jones et al., 2021; Shaw, 2012).

3.2. Document analysis

A directed content analysis was conducted on internationalization plans and policies from five purposefully selected public and private universities in Zimbabwe. The universities were located in diverse cities and provinces to allow for geographical representation across the country. Relevant documents published between 2018 and 2022 were compiled using online university databases and websites.

An initial coding framework was developed based on key intersectional concepts of inclusion, social justice, equity, representation, power dynamics, and attention to identities/aims. This framework guided an iterative, line-by-line analysis of documents to identify themes. Document type, year, university characteristics, and convergence/divergence with intersectional principles were also recorded.

3.3. Participant selection and data collection

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data source. Participants were recruited using purposive maximum variation sampling to obtain diverse perspectives in terms of gender, age, role, institution, length of involvement, and other social locations. An initial recruitment email was distributed through internationalization conveners at the five case universities. Individuals expressing interest via response email were provided a letter of information and gave written consent to participate.

A total of 30 participants were interviewed, representing a range of gender, ages, roles, lengths of involvement, and other social locations across the five universities. While the sample size was moderate, efforts were made to gather a variety of perspectives. Strategies employed ensured diverse viewpoints were collected from stakeholders. The interview protocol was peer-reviewed and piloted.

Interviews lasted 25–40 min and were conducted remotely via videoconference during the COVID-19 pandemic for convenience and safety. With ongoing consent, interviews were recorded, anonymized, transcribed verbatim, and stored securely. Given the qualitative, exploratory nature of the study, the diverse sample allowed for information-rich data despite limitations in broader generalizability acknowledged by the researcher.

3.4. Data analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic approach was used to code the anonymized transcripts in NVivo. This well-established qualitative analysis method allows themes to emerge

directly from the data through careful examination, comparison, and interpretation of patterns. By applying Braun and Clarke's approach, we ensured the findings accurately represented participants' views in a structured yet flexible manner. The NVivo software assisted in systematically organizing the rich interview content and tracking the development of themes throughout the coding process.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings are organized under six main themes that emerged from the data analysis, as shown in Table 1. Within each theme, the findings from the document analysis and interviews are presented together to provide a holistic understanding. The overarching research question explored opportunities to reconceptualize internationalization in higher education through an intersectional feminist framework centering equity, representation, and empowerment.

Six main themes emerged from the data, shown in Table 1. The themes presented in Table 1 provide analytical insights into both the current state and future directions of internationalization in Zimbabwe. For example, the theme of "Equitable Access" directly addresses the research aim to understand barriers faced by marginalized communities. The sub-theme of "Financial Barriers" reveals a specific issue impeding participation. By linking findings back to the research aims in this way, the analysis is strengthened. The findings are then discussed in relation to extant literature on internationalization critiques and alternative feminist visions.

The first theme of Equitable Access and Participation highlights financial barriers as a significant issue impeding the participation of low-income and disabled students in internationalization activities. The lack of targeted efforts to remove financial barriers echoes critiques' position that internationalization has historically been inequitable, failing marginalized groups (Langa, 2018). Addressing funding obstacles through inclusive strategies, as called for in the literature, is needed to address these barriers and provide more opportunities for underrepresented groups.

The second issue is community involvement, which has often been neglected or tokenized due to Western models of internationalization that prioritize academic partners and elite institutions (Makuvaza, 2016; Takavarasha, 2018). The findings of this study reinforce the need for reciprocal and respectful community engagement that recognizes the value and contribution of local actors and stakeholders.

The third theme on identity and diversity revealed limited representation of marginalized identities in leadership roles. This finding relates to critiques' view that existing power dynamics perpetuate exclusion if not dismantled (Makuvaza, 2016; Mira & Odeh, 2019). Diversifying perspectives at high levels leads to more equitable policies and practices.

The fourth theme on curriculum and research highlights the over-reliance on Western curriculum models in internationalization initiatives without recognizing diverse knowledge systems, echoing concerns about cultural dominance through rigid curricula (Makuvaza, 2016; Takavarasha, 2018). Incorporating multiple ways of knowing nourishes intercultural learning.

The fifth theme on the importance of feminist principles and practices in creating more holistic and transformative internationalization approaches, feminist principles, and practices supports literature advocating relationship-centered collaboration over one-way transfer models through participatory methods (Manik, 2014). Meaningful engagement transforms hierarchies into partnerships.

The sixth theme on organizational practices and outcomes highlights how internationalization initiatives can yield more sustainable and impactful results through inclusive, relationship-centered approaches. This affirms feminist scholarship advocating community-based models of internationalization that prioritize cultural learning through collaborative partnerships (Manik, 2014; Rosser, 2007).

The final theme on challenges and limitations reflect calls in sources for community-based solutions integrating empowerment through consistent, well-resourced implementation (Makuvaza, 2016; Mira & Odeh, 2019). Targeted remedies informed by stakeholders can achieve fuller realization of benefits for all.

Table 2 presents a concise overview of how interview data supplement document analysis by providing nuanced lived experiences. Participants offer informed recommendations, adding value by directly informing the research aim to identify opportunities for improvement. Table 2 incorporates direct participant quotations to lend credibility and bring the findings to life.

The findings presented in Table 2 revealed gaps between espoused priorities and lived experiences, highlighting the need

Table 1
Summary of the main themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
1. Equitable access and participation	Financial barriers	No targeted efforts to address financial barriers for low-income and disabled students
2. Community involvement	Stakeholder representation	No involvement of community voices and non-academic stakeholders in strategic planning
3. Identity and diversity	Leadership representation	Limited representation of marginalized identities in leadership roles
4. Curriculum and research	Epistemic diversity	Predominant use of Western curriculum models without acknowledging diverse knowledge systems
5. Feminist principles and practices	Collaborative practices	Applying feminist principles led to more meaningful cross-cultural exchange and understanding through collaborative practices
6. Organizational practices and outcomes	Cultural learning, relationships, competencies, and equitable approaches	Initiatives became more sustainable and impactful due to broad representation and improved organizational practices and outcomes
7. Challenges and limitations	Resourcing, competing priorities, and integration	Challenges remained around resourcing, competing priorities, and integrating feminist principles consistently across institutions

Table 2
Thematic, document and interview analysis

Theme	Document analysis	Interview analysis
Prioritizing diversity and representation	Lack of specific strategies for including diverse genders, ethnicities, religions, etc.	"I don't see enough diversity in leadership positions. It's important to have people like me involved in decision-making processes." [Student, female] "I feel like internationalisation is just a buzzword. There's a lack of concrete strategies to include diverse genders, ethnicities, religions, etc." [Faculty, male]
Strengthening mutual understanding	Mention of mutual understanding but no action steps	"I think mutual understanding is important, but we need to move beyond just talking about it. We need action steps." – [Administrator, female] "Current initiatives are mostly Western ideas being transferred, not much real exchange of perspectives." [Faculty, male]
Disempowering foreign knowledge and skills	Overemphasis on utilizing local talent without importing some foreign experts	"I feel like need to import foreign experts, instead of overutilizing local talent?" [Administrator, female] "Internationalisation should be a two-way process to benefit both sides. We need to recognize the value of local knowledge and skills." [Faculty, male]
Addressing intersectional needs	Silence on tailored support for those facing multiple barriers	"I'm tired of feeling like I'm the only one who understands the struggles of students like me. We need tailored support for those facing multiple barriers." [Student, female] "We need to understand different students' lives outside the classroom and how this shapes their experiences." - [Faculty, female]
Building community partnerships	Only one HEI referenced community advisory boards	"I've seen some HEIs have community advisory boards, but they're not really engaged in decision-making processes." - [Administrator, male] "We need consistent engagement with us at the planning stages, not just informing us of decisions after the fact." - [Faculty, female]
Overcoming resource and implementation challenges	No discussion of budget or staff capacity issues	"It's great to have all these ideas, but how are we going to fund them? We need targeted funding and training to turn intentions into realities." [Faculty, male] "I think there's a lack of understanding about the resource and implementation challenges we face. It's not just about having the right intentions." [Student, male]
Addressing financial barriers and isolation	No mention of financial barriers and isolation affecting women and marginalized groups	"Financial barriers and isolation are real issues that affect many of us, especially women and those from rural areas. We need more scholarships, grants, and mentorship programs to help us access and participate in international opportunities." [Student, Female]
Establishing collaborative grassroots partnerships	No evidence of collaborative grassroots partnerships between equal stakeholders	"Collaborative grassroots partnerships are essential for achieving mutual understanding and respect. We need to involve local communities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders in designing and implementing internationalisation initiatives that are relevant and beneficial for all parties." [Faculty, male]
Applying feminist principles of inclusivity, equity, and care ethics	No reference to feminist principles of inclusivity, equity, and care ethics	"Feminist principles of inclusivity, equity, and care ethics are important for creating transformative outcomes through internationalisation. We need to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and valued, that everyone's rights are respected and protected, and that everyone's well-being is cared for and supported." [Administrator, female]
Guiding internationalization with intersectionality frameworks	No indication of intersectionality frameworks guiding internationalization	"Intersectionality frameworks can help us overcome the challenges and limitations of traditional internationalisation models. We need to recognize and address the multiple dimensions of identity, power, and oppression that shape our experiences and interactions in cross-cultural contexts." [Administrator, male]

for a more feminist, collaborative approach centered on inclusion, empowerment, and mutual understanding at all levels of internationalization. The forthcoming paragraphs provide an analysis of the areas for reform emerging from the findings in comparison to scholarly calls for community involvement, challenging curriculum dominance, recognizing diverse identities, prioritizing equity over profit, and centering empowerment through grassroots partnerships (Bondarev, 2020; Makuvaza, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Takavarasha, 2018). This situates the study's contributions within the broader debate.

The first theme, prioritizing diversity and representation, aligns with the call to move beyond deficit perspectives that position the global South as aid recipients (Deardorff, 2006). Scholars advocate for recognizing diverse cultural contributions through leadership that reflects local communities (Adams, 2007). The second theme, emphasis on mutual understanding rather than one-sided knowledge transfer, supports feminist concepts of internationalization based on reciprocity and equal partnerships (Collier, 2018). This approach addresses critiques of traditional Western-centric approaches and cultural imperialism (Naidoo, 2009).

Third, the theme overemphasizes on utilizing local talent without importing some foreign experts. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of empowering local knowledge and skills through two-way learning processes aligns with community-centered approaches that prioritize expertise and empowerment. Some scholars also note rising influences of digital technologies expanding forms of knowledge production and exchange in internationalized learning contexts (Dumitru et al., 2023). It upholds the civic role of higher education in enhancing human capabilities through collaboration rather than competition (Nussbaum, 1997).

Previous studies have highlighted the risk of marginalizing local knowledge by prioritizing Western models in HEIs (Jones et al., 2021; Shaw, 2012). The absence of community engagement in planning reflects criticisms of top-down approaches (Naidoo, 2009). Addressing intersectional needs and recognizing the influence of backgrounds on experiences go beyond one-size-fits-all solutions, reflecting frameworks that consider the effects of gender, class, ethnicity, and other social factors on internationalization (Adams, 2007; Rosser, 2007).

Building community partnerships through early and consistent engagement respects stakeholder consultation as a crucial aspect of culturally sensitive and grassroots-led internationalization models (Bamberger et al., 2019). This approach enhances sustainability and localized impacts. The challenges of resource constraints and implementation gaps are connected to critiques of neoliberal rationales that sideline access and equity in under-resourced public systems (Makuvaza, 2016). Targeted remedies are necessary.

Financial barriers and isolation, particularly affecting women and marginalized groups, have been extensively documented (Collier, 2018). Addressing these systemic barriers through targeted support and inclusion is crucial (Adams, 2007; Deardorff, 2006).

Scholars argue that collaborative grassroots partnerships between equal stakeholders best serve the mutual understanding goals of internationalization (Shaw, 2012). Establishing initiatives rooted in intersectional needs and priorities through advisory boards can contribute to social justice objectives (Collier, 2018; Naidoo, 2009).

Applying feminist principles of inclusivity, equity, and care ethics aligns with recommendations for transformative outcomes through reciprocal exchange (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Rosser, 2007). Centering diverse lived experiences and power dynamics enriches the role of education in fostering global citizenship (Jones et al., 2021; Shaw, 2012).

While challenges persist in terms of resources and institutional change, the findings demonstrate how intersectionality frameworks can guide more empowering, sustainable, and impactful approaches (Adams, 2007). Through iterative consultation, internationalization can have a transformative impact on societies (Nussbaum, 1997; Jones et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings reflect a feminist and socially just reconceptualization of internationalization that promotes empowerment and inclusion in cross-border learning processes, as advocated in the existing literature. The findings provide actionable strategies, including the establishment of advisory boards to ensure community representation and decision-making. Targeted resources and anti-oppression trainings can promote equitable and socially just internationalization, fostering mutual understanding on a global scale. With iterative consultation, these inclusive practices hold promise for transforming outcomes positively in the long term.

5. Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations

This study explored opportunities for reforming internationalization in Zimbabwean higher education through an intersectional feminist lens. The findings provide several key implications and opportunities for progressing more equitable and socially just approaches in practice.

First, there are limitations to acknowledge. The sample size was moderate and included self-selecting participants, restricting broader generalizability. Implementing substantial structural changes also faces challenges of resistance to change within institutions. Therefore, ongoing evaluation of reforms' feasibility and impacts is imperative through iterative consultation processes.

In terms of practical implications, the findings point to several policy and practice recommendations. Universities could establish Community Advisory Boards with grassroots stakeholders to provide iterative consultation from the start of initiatives. Doing so would help address power imbalances and ensure programs reflect local needs. Conducting equity audits of policies, curriculum, hiring, and governance would help identify systemic barriers facing underrepresented groups, informing targeted support, and training opportunities.

In terms of policy, university leadership should develop action plans outlining strategies, timelines, and metrics for integrating feminist principles across all levels of internationalization. For example, setting representation goals, allocating dedicated funding, and standardized diversity and mandatory cultural competence trainings could help realize espoused commitments to equity. National education authorities could support such efforts through revised funding models.

Areas for future research also emerge. Larger, longitudinal studies could help evaluate the effectiveness and longer-term outcomes of adopting feminist-collaborative internationalization frameworks on transforming organizational culture and student experiences. Examining impacts on specific areas like curriculum reform, diversifying faculty recruitment, and leadership models would provide valuable insights. Comparative case studies in other regional contexts could explore adaptation and opportunities for cross-institutional learning.

This study contributes novel understandings around reconceptualizing internationalization according to feminist principles of inclusivity, empowerment, and justice. By dismantling barriers through representation and collaborative grassroots partnerships, higher education holds promise for fostering global citizenship and solidarity through education. With ongoing stakeholder participation, this vision aims to empower all

peoples as equal partners in internationalization's transformative role for societies worldwide. However, sustained evaluation and iterative refinement through community engagement are imperative to realize inclusive and equitable outcomes in practice. While challenges remain, this study provides a roadmap toward social justice through collaborative border-crossing learning.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes understandings of internationalization from an intersectional feminist perspective within the unique Zimbabwean postcolonial context. While resource constraints and resistance to change present ongoing challenges, centering stakeholders and applying principles of equity, representation and empowerment hold promise for addressing critiques of traditional deficit models. Limitations include the moderate sample size limiting generalizability. Future research should employ longitudinal or comparative case study designs to better evaluate impacts of reform efforts over time. Recommendations call for targeted actions including establishing advisory boards, auditing policies/practices, and dedicated funding to implement collaborative grassroots approaches respecting diverse identities and knowledges. With iterative stakeholder participation, internationalization can play a transformative role in dismantling barriers and empowering all as equal partners in border-crossing learning processes. Overall, this research provides a roadmap for progressing inclusive, socially just, and mutually beneficial internationalization outcomes through empowerment-centered feministic collaboration.

Ethical Statement

This study does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by the author.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest to this work.

Data Availability Statement

The data that supports the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy concerns of the participants. However, anonymized data are available from the on reasonable request. Requests should be made to garweec@gmail.com and should include a brief description of the intended use of the data.

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