Encounters of cultures in doctoral supervision: productive or problematic?

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Abstract:

In the ambit of higher education internationalisation, Portuguese universities have been receiving an increasing number of students from Portuguese-Speaking countries (CPLP), namely at the level of PhD studies which poses questions related with the intercultural dimension of doctoral supervision. Research in Portugal concerning this issue is scarce and this paper, focused on PhD students from the CPLP and their supervisors in the Department of Education and Psychology of the University of Aveiro, intends to answer the following questions: in the situation of intercultural doctoral supervision in which both students and supervisors are engaged, what cultural encounters occur? Are these encounters productive or problematic? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve students and eight supervisors. Results from thematic analysis indicate that different cultural encounters do occur between: pedagogical/academic cultures; linguistic backgrounds; research and knowledge cultures and communication/relational cultures. Both students and supervisors acknowledge that these encounters bring about potentials (productive view) and constraints (problematic view) which will be discussed.

Encontros de culturas na supervisão doutoral: produtivos ou problemáticos?

Resumo: No âmbito da internacionalização do ensino superior, as universidades portuguesas têm vindo a receber um número crescente de estudantes de países de língua oficial portuguesa (CPLP), nomeadamente ao nível do doutoramento, o que coloca questões relacionadas com a dimensão intercultural da supervisão. A investigação em Portugal sobre esta questão é escassa e este artigo, centrado em doutorandos da CPLP e seus supervisores no Departamento de Educação e Psicologia da Universidade de Aveiro, pretende responder às seguintes questões: na situação de supervisão doutoral intercultural, na qual estudantes e supervisores estão envolvidos, que culturas se encontram? Este encontro é produtivo ou problemático? Foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas com doze estudantes e oito supervisores. Os resultados da análise temática indicam que diferentes culturas se encontram: culturas pedagógicas/académicas; *backgrounds* linguísticos; culturas de investigação e conhecimento e culturas de comunicação. Estudantes e supervisores reconhecem que o encontro dessas diferentes culturas traz potenciali-dades (*visão produtiva*) e constrangimentos (*visão problemática*) que serão discutidos.

Palavras-chave: supervisão doutoral intercultural; ensino superior português; estudantes da CPLP.

Encuentros de culturas en la supervisión doctoral: ¿productivos o problemáticos?

Resumen: En el ámbito de la internacionalización de la enseñanza superior, las universidades portuguesas están recibiendo un número creciente de estudiantes de países de lengua oficial portuguesa (CPLP), es decir, a nivel de estudios de doctorado, que plantea cuestiones relacionadas con la dimensión intercultural de la supervisión doctoral. La investigación en Portugal sobre este tema es escasa y este artículo, centrado en estudiantes de doctorado de CPLP y sus directores en el Departamento de Educación y Psicología de la Universidad de Aveiro, busca responder a las siguientes preguntas: en la situación de supervisión doctoral intercultural ¿qué culturas se encuentran? ¿Se considera este encuentro productivo o problemático? Se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas con doce estudiantes y ocho directores. Los resultados del análisis temático indican que se encuentran diferentes culturas: culturas pedagógicas/académicas; orígenes lingüísticos; culturas de investigación y conocimiento y culturas de comunicación/relacionales. Tanto los estudiantes como los directores reconocen que el encuentro de estas diferentes culturas trae posibilidades (*visión productiva*) y limitaciones (*visión problemática*) que se discutirá.

Palabras clave: supervisión doctoral intercultural; educación superior portuguesa; estudiantes de países de lengua oficial portuguesa.

Rencontres de cultures dans la supervision doctorale: productives ou problématiques?

Résumé: Dans le contexte de l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur, les universités portugaises ac-cueillent de plus en plus d'étudiants provenant de pays lusophones (CPLP), notamment au niveau du doctorat, ce qui soulève des questions liées à la dimension interculturelle de la supervision. La recherche au Portugal sur cette question est rare et cet article, axé sur les doctorants provenant de la CPLP et de leurs superviseurs rattachés au Dé-partement d'Éducation et de Psychologie de l'Université d'Aveiro, a pour but de répondre aux questions suivantes: dans le cadre de la supervision doctorale interculturelle quelles sont les cultures qui se rencontrent? Cette rencontre est-elle productive ou problématique? Des entretiens semi-structurés ont été conduits avec douze étudiants et huit superviseurs. Les résultats de l'analyse thématique indiquent que différentes cultures se rencontrent: cultures péda-gogiques/académiques; origines linguistiques; cultures de la recherche et du savoir et cultures de communication. Étudiants et superviseurs reconnaissent que la rencontre de ces différentes cultures apporte des possibilités (*vision productive*) et des contraintes (*vision problématique*) qui seront discutées.

Mots-clés: supervision doctorale interculturelle; enseignement supérieur portugais; étudiants de pays lusophones

1. Intercultural Doctoral Supervision

The impact of globalisation and Higher Education Institutions' concern with internationalisation has increased the flow of international students enrolling in higher education (HE) outside their home countries, namely in postgraduate higher degree programmes (UNESCO, 2018). In many regions around the world, including Portugal, there are increasing numbers of international students from diverse cultural backgrounds attending PhD programmes, coming to 'Western' HEI from developing countries. This internationalisation of doctoral training poses "issues of supervision and culture [which] are key to understanding the complex processes that arise" (Silfver, 2016, p. 577).

In the past 15 years there has been a flourishment of research on the concept of **intercultural doctoral supervision** (IDS) which has been perceived as "…the complex art of encouraging students to incorporate their own cultural knowledges, that adapts to their cultural interaction styles, that acknowledges the places they come from" (Bell, 2016, p. 194). Within this, supervision is recognised as an "intercultural contact zone where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (Pratt, 1992, p. 4). Considering this, cultural features cannot be ignored in doctoral supervision since:

> Culture plays an intrinsic part in all research and knowledge construction. There are multiple layers of culture involved in research and in research education – the ethnic cultures of the researchers and their participants or objects of study; [inter] disciplinary research cultures; university, government, industry and community cultures; individual workplace cultures and so on. (Manathunga, 2011, p.8).

The encounter of those multiple layers of culture maximizes the complexity of supervision. Recent perspectives of IDS underline that cultural differences can be *productive* (fostering innovative research and new knowledge) rather than being *problematic* (wherein cultural differences are perceived as deficit) (Manathunga, 2011).

IDS as *productive* is based on an ethnorelative perspective focused on developing mutual, transcultural, transformative learning which arises from the encounter of different knowledge, skills and values within a "dialogic space" (Robinson-Pant, 2009). The emphasis is on the acknowledgment of the cultural knowledge and intellectual resources students bring to host universities as central features of effective supervision. Hence this perspective considers that dialogic interaction between supervisors and students' cultures provides distinctive opportunities for both to learn from each other (Elliott & Kobayashi, 2018; Manathunga, 2017). In this sense, IDS "can be understood as a pedagogical site of rich possibility" (Grant & Manathunga, 2011, p. 351). On the other hand, in what the perspective of IDS as *problematic* is concerned, linguistic

and cultural differences are constructed as deficiencies and international students are considered as being deficit in their capacity to respond to the academic demands and conventions in 'Western' host institutions (Robinson-Pant, 2009).

2. Doctoral education in Portugal: a growing intercultural contact zone

In Portugal, internationalisation has become a major concern of HE in the last decade. Framed by the demands of the Bologna Process, the pression to promote the European Area of Higher Education and by the financial crisis, Portuguese Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have been posing the question of internationalisation mainly in the need to attract foreign students namely from The Community of Portuguese-Speaking countries (CPLP). This feature is visible in the Report issued by the Ministry of Education and Science (2014), *A strategy for the internationalisation of Portuguese Higher Education*.

The investment in attracting international students has been paying off as shown in the Report of the Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência (2015): there has been a progressive increase of foreign students in Portuguese HE from 2001 to 2012 (last year in analysis in the Report). Within this, Brazilian, Angolan, Cape Verdean and Mozambican students account for 54% of the total foreign student population in Portugal. Historically, students from Angola and Cape Verde have formed the two largest groups, but the participation of Brazilian students has increased significantly in recent years to become the largest group. While in 1995/96 there were about 4000 students from the CPLP, in 2011/12 there were about 15,000.

This increase, which is related to the historic ties that Portugal has with these countries and with the existence of special access regimes to Portuguese HE within cooperation agreements, is visible not only in graduation and master degrees but also in PhD programmes. Since 2005/06 there has been a growth in the number of PhD students from the CPLP at a cumulative annual rate of almost 30%. In 2011/2012, 12.3% of total students attending PhD programmes were from the CPLP.

Despite this significant rise of CPLP students in Portuguese HEI, studies focused on this public are scarce and we could not find studies specifically about PhD students. In addition, the studies on CPLP students tend to focus on a problematic perspective of what it means to study in Portugal, identifying several constraints concerning: adaptation to a new country/culture and homesickness (Ambrósio et al, 2017); adaptation to a new educational system and to different teaching-learning methods (Jardim, 2013); language issues (Ambrósio et al, 2017; Semedo, 2010); discrimination and prejudice (Doutor et al, 2018); interaction with national students (Ambrósio et al, 2017); and financial problems (Ambrosio et al, 2017; Jardim, 2013).

3. The study

3.1. Research questions and institutional context

Considering the issues summarised above, this paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of work exploring IDS focusing on the Portuguese context. Acknowledging that "in intercultural supervision, culture is not something that can be easily ignored or forgotten in the pursuit of new knowledge and the socialisation of research students into disciplinary, or increasingly interdisciplinary, cultures" (Manathunga, 2011, p.10), this paper intends to answer the following research questions: in the situation of intercultural doctoral supervision in which both students and supervisors are engaged, what cultural encounters occur? Are these encounters productive or problematic?

A qualitative study was undertaken in the Department of Education and Psychology (DEP) of the University of Aveiro (UA) in 2017/2018, with a focus on the PhD Programme in Education. The UA offers 52 PhD programmes (http://www.ua.pt/PageCourses. aspx?t=4&b=1) in diverse scientific areas and had, in 2017/2018, 1132 international students (total number of about 13.000 students): 536 enrolled in PhD programmes, 373 in masters and 206 in graduation degrees. Concerning the nationalities of the students enrolled in PhD programmes, 307 (57%) came from the CPLP as discriminated in the following table:

Nationality	Number of students
Brazil	202
Angola	43
Cape Verde	27
Mozambique	24
East Timor	8
Sao Tome and Principe	2
Guinea Bissau	1

Table 1. Nationality of the CPLP students enrolled in PhD Programmes at the UA (2017/2018)

The DEP is one of the UA's departments with the highest incidence of CPLP doctoral students in the four PhD programmes it offers:

PhD Programmes	Total n. of students	Foreign students	CPLP students
PhD Programme in Education	128	62	54
PhD Programme in Multimedia in Education	59	21	17
PhD Programme in Psychology	17	2	2
PhD Programme in Gerontology and Geriatrics	16	1	1
	220	**86**	**74**

Table 2. Students attending the DEP's PhD Programmes (2017/2018)

So, in 2017/2018 these four PhD Programmes had 220 students and 39% were foreign students (n=86). 86% of the foreign students were from the CPLP (n=74). The curriculum-based PhD Programme in Education, the focus of this study, had the largest percentage of foreign students: 48% (n=62). Of these, 87% came from the CPLP (n=54):

Nationality	Number of students
Brazil	26
Angola	21
Mozambique	5
East Timor	1
Sao Tome and Principe	1

Table 3. Nationality of the CPLP students enrolled in the PhD Programme in Education (2017/2018)

So, most of CPLP students are Brazilian (48%) and Angolan (39%), which meets national trends. This high percentage of students from the CPLP enrolled in this PhD programme justifies the pertinence of this study. Moreover, previous studies (Araújo e Sá, Costa, Guerra, Lopes, Lourenço & Pinto, 2020) show that this fact has been experienced with some tension by supervisors who are concerned about students' competences for the development of their doctoral projects, highlighting their difficulties in European Portuguese, in academic writing and in research methodologies. In other words, supervisors experience the situation of intercultural doctoral supervision essentially as a barrier to the supervisory process and to theses development, highlighting the obstacles arising from the heterogeneity of students' academic, linguistic and cultural profiles.

3.2. Participants, data collection and analysis

In this study, we explore encounters of different cultures within doctoral supervision by drawing on semi-structured interviews (45 to 70 minutes) with 12 PhD students and (their) eight supervisors. The interview schedules were validated by experts in the area and included the following main topics: intercultural and plurilingual dimensions of research and supervision processes. They were conducted in Portuguese, audio recorded and transcribed. All participants signed an informed consent.

The selection of students relied on some criteria: students with active enrollment for at least 3 years; students who completed the thesis in 2017/2018; students from different CPLP countries; students with different supervisors. Three students had finished their doctoral studies and nine were nearly finishing. Six were female and six were male and were aged between 33 and 60 years. Six came from Angola, three from Brazil, two from East Timor and one from Mozambique. Their mother tongues were very diverse: Portuguese (five students), Kimbundu (two), Nhungué (one), Umbundu (one), Tetum (one), Kikongo (one) and Indonesian (one). Six of them were conducting the empirical study in Angolan context, three in Portuguese context, two in East Timor and one in Mozambique. Concerning supervisors, seven were female and one was male and were aged between 40 and 64 years. They were all Portuguese and had been working as teachers/researchers at the DEP for more than 15 years where they had been experienced supervising CPLP doctoral students.

Considering the number of participants in the study, the results should not be generalised to the whole Portuguese higher education system. Instead the results should provoke some questioning and reflection on an issue – IDS in Portuguese HEI – that has not been a research focus in Portugal.

Interviews were submitted to thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013) and the themes that emerged, from an iterative process that combined data analysis with literature review, were the following:

- Linguistic backgrounds – statements that refer to the encounter of different mother tongues and Portuguese language varieties. This encounter underlines the role of language competences in oral and written communication and thesis writing and the mediating role of languages in knowledge construction (Ambrósio et al, 2017; Araújo e Sá, Hu, Pinto & Wang, 2020).
- Pedagogical/academic cultures – statements referring to the encounter between different learning backgrounds, teaching and learning approaches/methodologies and working time management. This encounter gives rise to different views concerning, for instance, supervision and plagiarism (Manathunga, 2011; 2017; Wisker, 2012).
- Research and knowledge cultures – statements related to the encounter between modes of research implementation and knowledge development activities (research focus; research methods and tools; relationship between theory and empirical work) (Manathunga, 2017; Wisker, 2012).

- • Communication and relational cultures – statements that refer to the encounter between different views and practices sustaining personal relationships such as: interaction routines; rules that organise communicational behavior; degree of closeness between supervisor and student; directness and indirectness (Ambrósio et al, 2017; Dimitrov, 2008).

4. Main findings

Findings are structured according to the main themes of analysis. Within each theme, data are presented and discussed by providing an account of students and supervisors' voices. Statements, translated from Portuguese into English, are illustrated by quotes which give representative perspectives of the larger group of participants. Supervisors are identified with the letters SU, followed by a number, and students are identified with letters ST, also followed by a number.

4.1. Linguistic backgrounds

The question of students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and the ways these influence (negatively) the process of doing a PhD is the most present in both students and supervisors' voices. All students underline that not having Portuguese as mother tongue or not dominating European Portuguese causes several difficulties and tensions related, mainly, to thesis writing:

> Speaking Portuguese and writing in Portuguese is quite different. My thoughts are done in my mother tongue and only then in Portuguese. Writing, grammar, spelling… this is a new learning step. (ST1)
>
> Angola has not adhered to the Orthographic Agreement and I write for the Angolan context. My supervisors said "you have to write like a Portuguese". I replied "but I am Angolan". (ST10)

These difficulties are also underlined by all supervisors. Students' linguistic backgrounds and (lack of) competences in European Portuguese are perceived as problematic and although some supervisors state that they are willing to accept other Portuguese language varieties they underline the need to correct the final version of the thesis:

> I think the thesis could be written in Brazilian Portuguese, in Angolan Portuguese… because students will take their thesis to their countries. So sometimes I tell them to write in their languages to make life easier for them and then ask someone to correct the final version. (SU1)

One supervisor poses the question of his (lack of) knowledge concerning Portuguese language varieties, underlining that although he would not mind accepting other varieties in thesis writing he cannot do it since he does not know what is correct or incorrect in those varieties:

> There are writing questions related to Portuguese language varieties. We are more aware of Brazilian Portuguese. But in relation to African countries, we have more difficulties which are related to ignorance. What is specific to Angolan Portuguese? What is specific to Mozambican Portuguese? I do not know. (SU4)

Besides this question concerning language varieties, three supervisors underline the mediating role of languages, as ST1 above, in the sense that they influence knowledge construction, namely scientific writing:

> Timorese do not think like us; the language structure is different. That makes all the difference. She wrote three hundred pages in Portuguese which forced her thinking in a different way. (SU7)

Difficulties are also felt in written and oral interaction related not only to the research work but also to daily interaction, leading to communicational misunderstandings that affect the relationship between students and supervisors:

> Sometimes I send a message to my supervisors and they ask me what I mean. For me the language is correct, and if I send that same message to an Angolan we will understand it. (ST5)
> I felt offended several times because I didn't understand. In a meeting with my supervisor he said "siga, força!" I thought he was telling me to leave his office immediately. I was very upset. Then I looked for the meaning of that sentence and it was an incentive! (ST3)

Another difficulty underlined by some students concerns the construction of data collection instruments that are applied in their (home) research contexts:

> When we discussed my questionnaire, I said: "Maybe in Portuguese this is the correct way to ask the question, but in Angola you can't do it like that. My students will not understand." (ST8)

This difficulty is also acknowledged by three supervisors who mention question formulation and different perceptions concerning some notions:

In the questionnaire we tried to adapt the questions to the research context because the student told us that we could not formulate the questions that way. For example, for us housewife is not a job but for them it is. So, we put this professional option in the questionnaire. (SU8)

4.2. Pedagogical/academic cultures

Studies on IDS show that a traditional norm is to "expect students from international contexts to fit into the learning culture and practices of the host university, effectively becoming enculturated and assimilated into its beliefs and practices" (Wisker, 2012, p. 286). This is also present in this study, in both students and supervisors' voices.

All students emphasise differences in pedagogical/academic cultures both as productive and problematic. Productive in the sense that they believe that being in a different pedagogical/academic culture allows them to learn and to develop professionally:

It is a different university reality. And the level requirement is also higher. From the point of view of learning and professional development, I think it is very good. (ST2)

Within this, four underline that they develop a more constructive conception of supervision:

I expected to have the type of supervision that we have in Angola which is based on severity and pointing out shortcomings. That is the concept we have there. My expectations fell apart and this idea was deconstructed: supervision is helping to solve problems. I will proceed this way with my students from now on. (ST9)

Simultaneously, they have difficulties in fitting into this pedagogical/academic culture which is considered more rigorous and demanding and which "plays with different rules" (ST8) concerning, for instance, written feedback:

I was used to it this way: when the teacher asks you to correct an assignment or a text, you must keep his comments on the text, the track changes. I correct it as asked but I keep his comments there. It is a question of respect. Because of this, I had serious problems with my supervisor. (ST5)

"Different rules" also apply to working time management and eight students state that they have to adapt to behaviours and practices concerning punctuality and work organisation:

> We have punctuality problems. We are always late for meetings. Nowadays I never get late when I have a meeting with my supervisors. It is a question of seriousness. And here, everything is scheduled, everything! And at first, I did not realise the added-value of this. (ST2)

Likewise, four supervisors feel differences in time management questions mostly in what compliance with deadlines are concerned:

> I'm having a meeting with a student in the afternoon today, and on Friday I told him: "You must send me your text so that I can analyse it before our meeting." And he sent me the text yesterday at midnight! I did not read it! (SU5)

Nonetheless, it is plagiarism that appears in supervisors' voices as one of the main constraints deriving from the differences between pedagogical/academic cultures, mainly when referring to African students:

> They have difficulties in understanding what plagiarism is. They do not under-stand that copying a paragraph without using quotation marks is plagiarism. (SU1)

Five African students corroborate this perception as illustrated in the following quote:

> I sent a power point presentation to my supervisor and I kept the sentences as they had been written by the authors and she said "Oh my God, be careful with this! Looks like you are the author of the papers". In Angola, I never learned this is wrong. (ST9)

Supervisors relate this with students' previous educational backgrounds which in-fluence learning strategies and students' competences such as critical thinking and autonomy:

> The graduation they took in their countries was very repetitive. They had a re-petitive schooling. So, in the beginning they feel lost and often say "But I want you to tell me how to do it". For instance, if you tell them that a question in the interview schedule is not clear, they just take it off without much thought. (SU7)

Another important issue that arose from the voices of three students is that they feel that supervisors have some initial stereotypes concerning their competences:

> The Portuguese are the good students, the Brazilians are medium and the Africans are the bad ones. I feel this hierarchy in the way teachers speak and teach. It seems that I have no potential to give my opinion. (ST3)

These stereotypes hinder students from feeling framed in a new pedagogical/academic culture, concurring to a sense of inability and loneliness.

4.3. Research and knowledge cultures

The dialogue across research/knowledge cultures is considered the most intricate in supervision. Some studies emphasise a need for negotiation between culturally inflected ways of constructing knowledge as a means for breaking academic imperialism and for generating knowledge innovation (Manathunga, 2017; Wisker, 2012).

This dialogue is, for instance, visible when a student wants to focus his thesis on a Timorese concept - *tarabandu* - which supervisors never heard about. Hence, he tried to make this concept intelligible for them and felt quite acknowledged for being able to do so:

> When I spoke about *tarabandu*, my supervisors asked: "What is *tarabandu*?". I explained it is a traditional law to ensure environment and agricultural protection. It is a Timorese concept. At first, they did not understand. So, I looked for papers in English to give them. After reading them, they understood and fortunately accepted the focus on this concept. I was glad I taught them a new concept. (ST4)

One of his supervisors recalls this episode, highlighting that supervising this student allowed to acknowledge the existence of "culturally inflected modes of knowledge constructions" (Wisker, 2012, p.281), underlining the need to respect those research and knowledge cultures:

> When I corrected his first assignment, I eliminated the *foku nu bandu*, the essence. He said I had not understood the essence of *tarabandu*. And he spent days finding papers that could explain me what *tarabandu* was. We have to start thinking in a different way, we have to combine research cultures and value other types of knowledge. (SU3)

On the other hand, six supervisors feel that 'Western' ways of conducting research are more rigorous, highlighting students' shortcomings:

> They have difficulties in understanding what research is, defining research objectives... Portuguese students have this difficulty too but it is different. I think they [CPLP students] are less accurate and rigorous in data analysis…they see results where they do not exist. (SU2)

This is related to a strong pression students feel "to meet European research standards", which is a source of distress and anguish:

> My supervisor said: "Congratulations! You were able to meet European standards". It was very difficult for me, I thought I would never be able to achieve those standards. (ST7)

At the same time, seven students emphasize that doing their doctorate at the DEP allowed them to know different and "more rigorous" (ST6) ways of conducting research, namely regarding research methodologies:

> Aveiro opened a new world to me in what research methodologies are concerned. In Brazil, there is a preference for theoretical frameworks and methodology is sometimes neglected. Here I feel a bigger methodological rigour. (ST12)

4.4. Communication and relational cultures

In what communication and relational cultures are concerned, seven students realise that they have to adapt to different interaction routines and communication behaviours:

> In Angola, when you express your opinion it is considered a threat and an act of disrespect. Hence, people prefer not to say anything. Here people are more comfortable in expressing opinions, in disagreeing. (ST9)

This need for adaption to interaction routines and communication behaviours is acknowledged by supervisors. As highlighted in some studies, usually southern students do not question their supervisors for respect which is often interpreted as lack of criticality (Dimitrov, 2008). Three supervisors recognise this:

> Out of respect they do not question their teachers. One of my African students told me: "We generally don't do that, because not agreeing or saying we have a doubt shows that we are saying that our supervisor is failing as a teacher." (SU3)

Related to this question of respect, four supervisors realise that they must be aware of the meanings of non-verbal communication in order to avoid misunderstandings:

> African students have a very warm nonverbal communication. They are always smiling, shaking their heads showing they understand. Nevertheless, I have concluded that frequently they do not understand. I had to learn that smiling does not mean that they understand what I'm saying. This nonverbal communication really messed me up at first. Now I know that in the first year they say 'yes' and smile but that is a behavior that shows they want to be integrated and that they respect us. (SU1)

At the same time, five students emphasise that the degree of closeness of the relationship with supervisors is different from their initial expectations and from what they were used to:

> Our way of working is not limited to the relationship between student and supervisors. It is more than that, it's a family relationship, different from what it we have in Angola. Apart from research work, my supervisors are constantly worried about me. (ST9)

This closest relationship required by some students makes five supervisors acknowledge the need to adapt to different interactional styles:

> I relate to X in a different way from the way I relate to Portuguese students. When I receive an email from her that ends with "kisses" I cannot reply "attentively". It does not make sense. I think that we have built a Brazilian relationship. But I feel good in this relationship. (SU6)

5. Discussion and research implications

Summarising the findings, in this study different cultural encounters occur in the intercultural contact zone of doctoral supervision. These encounters, which influence the process of doing and supervising a PhD, are considered both productive and problematic by students and supervisors.

For students, they are productive in several aspects allowing them to: improve language competencies in European Portuguese; know and adapt to different communication and relational cultures; develop what they consider to be a "more rigorous" theoretical and methodological knowledge; develop professionally; improve skills related to

research work organization; share research and knowledge cultures with supervisors. On the other hand, cultural encounters are perceived as problematic for instance in the: tension between students and supervisors concerning the need to respect European Portuguese; existence of supervisors' stereotypes concerning students' competences; differences between educational systems and pedagogical cultures.

Supervisors consider cultural encounters productive in the sense in that they allow for: the development of their intercultural competence regarding knowledge (e.g. knowledge of diverse contexts and views), skills (e.g. interpret and adapt to different behaviours) and attitudes (e.g. openness, respect, empathy); the acknowledgment of the mediating role of languages in research; the acknowledgment of the existence of culturally inflected knowledge constructions. On the other hand, they emphasise as problematic several points: lack of students' competences in European Portuguese; lack of students' research competences; lack of supervisors' knowledge concerning the specificities of Portuguese language varieties; differences between educational systems and pedagogical cultures; different research and knowledge cultures. These problematic issues make supervisors underline that supervising CPLP students requires more time, commitment and patience.

These findings show that for students these encounters of cultures bring about more potentials than constraints. In contrast, for supervisors they are more problematic than productive, highlighting more constraints than potentails to the process of supervising students from the CPLP. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that there is mutual learning in these encounters of cultures within doctoral supervision (Elliott & Kobayashi, 2018; Manathunga, 2017). In a few supervisors we can recognise the emergence of "transformative voices" (Xu & Grant, 2017) and new modalities of knowledge construction that consider the need to develop paradigms and practices that acknowledge different academic knowledge traditions and contexts.

In the light of these results, and in order to boost the potentials (*productive view*) and minimise the constraints (*problematic view*), it is important that HEI and, specifically, supervisors deepen knowledge concerning students' contexts, knowledge traditions and educational backgrounds as a way to acknowledge "the cultural, historical and linguistic knowledge that international students bring to their studies" (Kidman, Manathunga & Corn, 2017, p. 1210). It is crucial to deconstruct the idea that cultural heterogeneity is an arena of "deficit discourses" (Robinson-Pant, 2017) and, within this, discuss the imposition of language standards and of European Portuguese as "default referent" (Seidlhofer, 2001).

Moreover, and considering that Portuguese HEI have been receiving an increasing number of students from the CPLP, it is essential that HEI play an active role in training supervisors for IDS so as to make them able of bridging cultures and contributing to the construction of knowledge that promotes plural perspectives.

Funding

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