Culturally diverse Muslim students: Strengthening cultural competency of HDR supervisors

Nigar Sultana*
Rosemary Kerr*
*Curtin University

What's your research question?	How to best enhance HDR supervisors' experience and cultural competency in terms of supervising Muslim HDR students from diverse cultural backgrounds? How can universities better support supervisors in terms of supervising Muslim students from such diverse backgrounds?
Main point of your idea…	Given that Academics are under significant pressure to take on HDR students and the majority of such students are from an overseas location, supervisors need to be supported to effectively manage students from such diverse cultural backgrounds. Specifically, it is often assumed that Muslim students across the globe are a homogenous group and as such, the same supervisory strategies are applicable to those students. However, researchers on the HDR student experience find that there are significant cultural differences among Muslim students depending on the geographical location from where they originate. These cultural differences have a significant influence on the academic and personal expectations, needs and beliefs of these Muslim students. It is crucial to help supervisors improve their understanding and awareness of the influence of such cultural differences among Muslim students, which will, in turn, enhance doctoral experiences for both supervisors and students.
Importance of your idea…	Findings from such an examination would not only be useful to supervisors in their day-to-day supervision of such students but also for university management who, having become aware of the challenges of effectively supervising students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, would better support supervisors by developing professional development guidelines, recommendations and resources.
What is the context?	An increasing number of HDR supervisors from the Faculty of Business and Law and, in fact across Australian universities, are supervising HDR students who are Muslim but from diverse backgrounds and countries such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, other Arab countries, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Although these students are predominantly of the Muslim faith, they have differing needs, expectations and requirements heavily shaped by the cultural influences of their region and country.
Does it require a methodology? If yes, what is it?	Qualitative. Semi-structured interviews will be utilised given the need for both structured and open-ended questioning.
What (if any) are the meta issues?	Although Muslim HDR students belong to the same religion, they are heterogeneous groups whose expectations, beliefs and experiences are heavily shaped by the cultural background they came from. As such, all Muslim students cannot be treated in the same manner in terms of their supervision. Therefore, there is a greater need for universities to make HDR supervisors more aware and as such acknowledge cultural differences to effectively supervise Muslim students from different cultural backgrounds.

What are the implications for SoTL?	Although there are many studies focussing on the student experience, the HDR supervisor experience is under-researched. The impact of student culture and the supervisory experience appears to be a gap. Supervisor understanding, knowledge and experience of the needs and background of students are critical for any doctoral student's successful completion of a HDR degree.
Is there a professional practice outcome and is it applicable across disciplines?	Results from the study will have a number of practice and inter-disciplinary outcomes including: 1. Stronger supervisory experience accruing to the supervisor in the form of an improved understanding on strengthening effective relationships with Muslim students from such diverse background; 2. Increased retention rates for HDR students; an area of increasing university focus; 3. Higher timely completion rates for doctoral students; 4. A better alignment of supervisors' interests with that of HDR students; and 5. Greater support for students in fulfilling their learning experience.
What is your key question to or insight sought from the 'critical friends'?	I am principally a quantitative researcher and qualitative research is new to me, I am seeking feedback from my 'critical friends' with regards to viability of the project, literature review, methodologies etc.