The motivational spectrum of doctoral education and scientific supervision practices: a qualitative study

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Abstract. Motivation is a crucial component of successfully completing doctoral studies. Previous research has established the internal and external factors of motivation for enrolling in a doctoral program and has identified PhD students' motivational profiles. However, the practices of scientific supervision for PhD students with different types of motivation remain understudied.

The goal of the present study is to find an answer to the following research question: How do scientific supervisors describe their experience of supervising PhD students with differing motivation?

This qualitative study utilized a case study approach and thematic analysis for interpreting interview data. The study involved 10 Kazakhstani scientific supervisors and 5 international supervisors, comprising 6 men and 9 women.

The results allowed for the identification of five themes reflecting the experience of supervising PhD students with different types of motivation within the range of control-autonomy. The main challenges of modern scientific supervision of PhD students were established. The first is the mismatch between the PhD students' goals and the research focus of the educational program. The second is the gap between scientific supervisors' expectations and the PhD students' actual capacity to conduct research. The third is the PhD students' behavioral dysregulation. The fourth is the discrepancy between the declared high standards of doctoral studies and the actual admission practices. The fifth is the academic consultants' emotional exhaustion due to the long-term passivity of the PhD students. Following the logic of Self-Determination Theory, three strategies for supervising Kazakhstani PhD students with different types of motivation were identified: the research autonomy strategy, the structured progression strategy, and the structural-remediation strategy.

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The practical significance of this research lies in providing a foundation for developing educational policies and tools that would shift the identified problems from the level of individual narratives into manageable processes, thereby improving the productivity, quality, and sustainability of doctoral training.

Keywords: PhD students' motivation, scientific supervisor, PhD, emotional exhaustion, self-determination, interviews, thematic analysis.

Introduction

The doctoral degree is considered the pinnacle of academic achievement (De Clercq et al., 2021), associated with high social status, forming part of one's name, and secured in professional documents (De Clercq et al., 2021). At the same time, the decision to pursue a doctoral degree is a strategy fraught with heightened risk (Mueller et al., 2015), due to the intersection of academic, institutional, psychological, and career factors. In Kazakhstan, especially in recent years, there has been a trend of increasing doctoral student enrollment. For instance, the state order for doctoral training was: 100 people in 2005, 1,000 people in 2014 (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015), 2,094 people in 2020 (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015), and 1,686 people in 2023 (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). However, throughout the entire period of implementing doctoral educational programs, the percentage of graduates who successfully received their diplomas appears to be less encouraging: 11.8% in 2023 (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024); 15.2% in 2022 (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023); 37.3% in 2021(Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021); 33% in 2020 (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021). The reasons for this fact lie in the non-completion of dissertation research and the absence of publications in highly-ranked journals. It is important to emphasize that this problem has consequences at several levels: First, PhD students lose opportunities for career advancement. This can potentially negatively affect their psychological state, including a decline in self-esteem, increased anxiety, and professional insecurity. Second, universities lose academic and pedagogical potential. Third, society may face a deficit of innovative scientific knowledge necessary for solving pressing contemporary problems (Jaksztat et al., 2021). Despite this alarming situation, very few studies in Kazakhstan are dedicated to the issues of successful doctoral dissertation defense. Specifically, a crucial aspect like motivation for doctoral studies is understudied. This gap is critically important, as understanding the motivational mechanisms of PhD students' behavior can serve as the basis for developing strategies to enhance engagement in research activities, improve the effectiveness of educational programs, and ensure individual support for PhD students.

It should be noted that international scientific literature increasingly focuses on studying PhD students' motivation. It has been established that a lack of motivation negatively affects doctoral studies (Sakurai et al., 2017; Jaksztat et al., 2021), leads to dissatisfaction with the supervisor's support (Pyhältö et al., 2009), and influences satisfaction with the educational program (Shin et al., 2018). Therefore, motivation is defined as the most crucial component of the ability to successfully complete doctoral studies (Lynch et al., 2018).

Previous quantitative and qualitative studies examine motivation based on the PhD students' own experience. The results obtained have provided an understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors of motivation for enrolling in a doctoral program and completing dissertation research. We believe that, to gain a more complete picture of motivational mechanisms, it is appropriate to consider the perspective of scientific supervisors as key actors in the development of PhD students. Researching the views of scientific supervisors will help reveal the difficulties in interacting with inconsistently motivated PhD students, as well as the consequences for research progress.

This qualitative study was conducted with the aim of answering the following research question: How do scientific supervisors describe their experience of supervising PhD students with differing motivation?

Literature Review

Obtaining a PhD requires significant personal time and financial investment. Therefore, PhD students' motivational beliefs, including confidence in research skills, the value of the research, and the expectation of a positive outcome, directly influence the successful completion of the doctoral program (Volkert et al., 2018). Conversely, with a low level of motivation, PhD students face emotional burnout, postpone their defense, or completely abandon the pursuit of the doctoral degree (Litalien et al., 2015).

Autonomous and Controlled Motives of PhD Students

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), offers a unique approach to studying motivation, personality, and development. The authors examine various types and sources of motivation. They note that certain forms of motivation can be purely volitional, reflecting the individual's interests and values, while others are entirely external, compelling actions outside of personal values. Therefore, motives differ in magnitude, initiating phenomenal sources, accompanying affects and experiences, and behavioral consequences. The authors proposed classifying motivation along the autonomy-control continuum. Specifically, the degree of volition determines the measure of autonomy in behavioral motivation. Autonomously motivated behavior is perceived as originating from the individual and being an expression of their "self". In contrast, controlled behavior is associated with a feeling of internal or external pressure or compulsion that is incongruent and alien to the person (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Thus, the Self-Determination Theory offers a powerful lens for understanding the complex nature of PhD students' motivation. Intrinsic motivation for research activity – manifested as interest in the topic, deriving pleasure from discoveries, etc. – is ideal. However, entry into a doctoral program is often motivated by external factors such as: the desire to obtain an academic degree for future career prospects and social status; the expectations of family or the scientific supervisor; financial interest in the scholarship, among others.

Let's examine PhD students' motivation more closely through the lens of the SDT's tenets, according to which motivation is defined by four regulatory styles (Ryan, & Deci, 2017; 2000):

External Regulation (Controlled): This can be driven by fear, avoidance of criticism, or expectation of praise. In this case, the PhD student follows the specific instructions of the scientific supervisor without showing initiative; manuscripts are prepared solely to fulfill the individual plan, transfer to the next course, and not lose the scholarship; the topic choice is dictated by data availability

or other factors rather than research interest. With such dependence on external control, there is a very high risk of burnout, procrastination, low-quality work, and a high probability of non-completion of the dissertation research. *Introjected Regulation (Controlled):* This is manifested in performing research tasks out of a sense of duty, perfectionism, fear of failure or shame, rivalry, or a desire for self-affirmation. Therefore, even in the absence of explicit external pressure, the PhD student constantly feels an internal burden. The consequences of this motivation include chronic stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, a conflict between "should and want", and the potential for "imposter syndrome". *Identified Regulation (Autonomous):* This is observed through the recognition of the genuine need for a doctoral degree, understanding the importance of doctoral studies for personal growth, and acknowledging the importance of learning research methods to achieve goals. This motivation contributes to higher persistence and meaningfulness, improved research quality, and increased resilience to difficulties. *Integrated Regulation (Autonomous):* This is expressed when research activity becomes an organic part of the personality and value system. The desire to generate new knowledge aligns with one's identity and deep convictions. The dissertation research is perceived as a form of self-expression, rather than a "heavy burden". This form of motivation demonstrates maximal persistence, deep engagement in research, creativity, and self-regulation.

Motives for Doctoral Studies

Previous research states the complexity and diversity of motives for enrolling in a doctoral program. For instance, Churchill and Sanders (2007) identified the main motives for doctoral study as: career mobility, development and application of research skills, personal growth, and drift. Skakni outlined a similar typology, which includes three scenarios (quests) with different combinations of motives: The Quest of the Self suggests a drive for personal self-actualization, a need for recognition, and validation of one's identity. In other words, such motivation is accompanied by a search for emotional support. The Intellectual Quest is characterized by a deep interest in research, the intention to make an original contribution to scientific knowledge, and an aspiration for intellectual challenge. PhD students with this type of motivation feel a need for free research and a scientific community. The Professional Quest is strategically oriented towards a career (often non-academic), the expansion of professional opportunities, and status enhancement. PhD students with this motivation are characterized by making pragmatic decisions for the quick completion of their dissertation research for career benefits (Skakni, 2018).

Guerin and colleagues (2015) described five similar motivational directions for enrolling in doctoral studies. Intrinsic motivation, manifested as interest in research and a desire to contribute to the field of study. Influence of faculty on the decision to pursue a doctorate through showing enthusiasm for research and encouraging continued doctoral study. Research experience also influences the decision to obtain a doctoral degree. Career growth is a strong incentive for continuing doctoral education. Support from family and friends, including financial assistance, deserves special attention

Thus, summarizing the results of previous studies, it can be concluded that the key motives for enrolling in doctoral studies are grouped into three main categories: Personally-self-actualizing; Research-intellectual; Career-pragmatic. The latter group of motives is highlighted in a number of specialized works due to the fact that the international academic space is experiencing stagnation and a limited number of vacancies (Walker & Yoon, 2017). The results of a national survey of Japanese PhD students showed that career plans significantly differ

based on the scientific discipline. Along with the intention to pursue an academic career, many respondents consider employment opportunities in industry and business. The orientation towards a non-academic career is especially pronounced among PhD students in engineering specialties, whereas representatives of the social and humanities sciences more often plan to continue working in the academic sector. It was also found that characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, and institutional conditions of the university do not have a noticeable impact on PhD Students' research productivity (Arimoto et al, 2019).

Similar findings have been obtained in other national contexts. Diogo and colleagues (2022) revealed disciplinary differences in the perception of the PhD degree and associated career paths among Portuguese PhD students. Representatives of STEM fields more often view doctoral study from a commercial perspective, including expanding opportunities for entrepreneurial and management activities. At the same time, PhD students in SSLH (Social Sciences, Law, and Humanities) adhere to a more traditional concept of the PhD, where the academic community serves as the primary place of employment. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of local and international PhD students showed that for the latter, regardless of the scientific field, the PhD degree is seen as access to an academic career in their home country, where the number of degree holders is small, making the employment issue less pressing for them.

The study by Carriero and colleagues (2024) confirms and expands on the conclusions described above. Specifically, it was established that personal career priorities significantly influence the professional trajectories of PhD graduates. The authors showed that PhD students primarily oriented toward external rewards (e.g., stable salary and job guarantee) and less motivated by an internal, selfless passion for science are more likely to choose a non-academic career, including work in business structures or government service not related to research activity. The research results also indicated that the willingness to invest in one's own scientific development is closely linked to the choice of an academic career.

In summary, the choice of a specific professional trajectory is determined not only by the predominance of a certain group of motives but also by disciplinary affiliation, national context, and individual career priorities.

Motivational Profiles of PhD Students

Due to the multidimensional and dynamic nature of motivational processes, a recent research agenda has focused on studying motivational profiles, which group PhD students based on the dominant drivers of their research activity. For example, a longitudinal study by Litalien and colleagues (2024), conducted on a sample of 1,060 PhD students, identified four motivational profiles based on Self-Determination Theory: High Self-Determination: This profile combines strong autonomous and moderately controlled motivation. It is characterized by high satisfaction with their studies, persistence, better subjective perception of progress, greater publication activity, and the intention to pursue a research career. Identified Self-Determination: This profile is characterized by a motivation linked to the personal value and importance of the research activity. PhD students in this profile also have positive outcomes but show lower levels of persistence and productivity. Introjected Self-Determination: This profile is distinguished by motivation driven by internal pressure, such as guilt or the need to meet expectations. PhD students with this profile are more prone to stress, have difficulties completing their dissertation research, and are less satisfied with their doctoral studies. Low Self-Determination: This profile is specific to a low level of both autonomous and controlled

motivation. This profile is the most unfavorable, associated with a high risk of not completing the dissertation research and low engagement in research activity.

Shin and colleagues (2022), also using Self-Determination Theory as a foundation, developed three profiles of PhD students\ motivation: Highly Motivated PhD students: These display high autonomous and moderate controlled motivation; Unmotivated PhD students: These have low scores for both autonomous and controlled motivation; Amotivated PhD students: These possess extremely low autonomous motivation with the presence of moderate introjected regulation.

The study by Nori and colleagues (2025) established three profiles of PhD students' motivation: Dedicated Scholars: Characterized by high intrinsic motivation, including academic ambitions and personal development, with unexpressed extrinsic motivation; Academic Workers: Motivated by financial security and career stability; Status Seekers: Distinguished by pronounced extrinsic motives such as status and recognition, the need for professional advancement, and financial security.

Horta and colleagues (2024) identified two similar motivational profiles among Taiwanese PhD students: Pursuit of Personal Growth: Typical for PhD students who do not have particular career issues, are often at the top of a non-academic career, or are studying a promising subject area like Engineering, IT, etc. This profile also includes "non-traditional PhD students". The authors define this term as PhD students who graduated from technical and vocational schools or colleges rather than the mainstream education system. Therefore, their "imperfect" personal histories serve as a driver for self-improvement in an area where they believe they can enhance their knowledge and skills. Accumulation of Career Advantages: As the authors note, this profile is characteristic of the majority of PhD students. For example, in the Science and Technology (S&T) field, the doctoral degree is viewed as a token for employment and advancement in prestigious high-tech companies. For PhD graduates in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), the non-academic job market appears less favorable. However, the search for work in the academic sector is also very difficult, and graduates often end up as civil servants.

Thus, a comparison of the results of recent international studies indicates that the identified profiles follow a common logic of differentiation based on the predominance of autonomous (intrinsic) versus controlled (extrinsic) regulation.

Gaps in the Literature and the Contribution of the Present Study

Despite a sufficient number of works dedicated to studying PhD students' motivation and its impact on the successful achievement of a PhD degree, existing research primarily focuses on the PhD students themselves, their individual motives, and career trajectories. Meanwhile, the experience of scientific supervisors in supervising PhD students with different types of motivation largely remains outside of scientific analysis. This limits the completeness of conclusions regarding the mechanisms for forming and maintaining PhD students' research engagement. This is especially relevant in the context of the growing trend in Kazakhstani universities to place virtually full responsibility for the PhD student's successful defense on the scientific supervisor. The assumption is that the supervisor's guidance and control are the key factors for completing the dissertation research. However, the initial motivation of PhD students often remains outside the scope of institutional mechanisms. Specifically, during admission to the educational program, there is no deep assessment of the external and internal drivers of research activity. The risks of amotivation are not recorded. Ready-made solutions for working with PhD students demonstrating low motivation are not offered. As a result, the scientific

supervisor becomes responsible not only for the scientific component of the project but also for constantly stimulating interest, overcoming procrastination, and maintaining the PhD student's productivity, which significantly complicates their role and can lead to emotional burnout.

Thus, studying the experience of scientific supervisors will not only fill the existing gap in the scientific literature but also create a foundation for improving the selection of PhD students for educational programs, revising university policies, and mechanisms for supporting scientific supervision, which will ultimately contribute to enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of doctoral programs.

Methodology

Research Design

This research is based on a qualitative approach, which allows for a deeper exploration of the scientific supervisors' experience, revealing subjective meanings and interpretations (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The case study approach was used to obtain a holistic and contextualized understanding of the scientific supervisors' experience. This approach was chosen because it allows for a detailed study of a limited situation – in this case, the supervision of PhD students with different types of motivation within the environment of a Kazakhstani university, taking into account the institutional, cultural, and personal contexts (Yin, R. K., 2018). For the interpretation of research data, thematic analysis was applied, following a six-step procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method provides flexibility, allowing for the identification of both pre-determined and new, unexpected aspects of the scientific supervisors' experience. The credibility and confirmability of the results were ensured by discussing preliminary interpretations and describing the contexts for the transferability of the findings.

Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were aimed at exploring the experience of supervising PhD students with different types of motivation along the control – autonomy continuum. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to share their unique practices outside of the prepared questions.

Interviews were conducted online via the Microsoft Teams platform, utilizing audio and video recording functions, lasting from 35 to 60 minutes. The choice of the online format was due to the following reasons: practicality in coordinating interview times amidst busy work schedules; reduced risk of cancellation or rescheduling of meetings; the possibility of involving international co-supervisors. The online platform ensures high-quality recording of the interviews, which increases the accuracy of subsequent analysis and interpretation of the obtained data.

Participants

The study was conducted at a leading Kazakhstani university. Participants were selected via purposive sampling. The selection criteria were: Kazakhstani scientific supervisors and international consultants of PhD students. The invitation to participate in the study was made through direct appeal to potential participants. The sample consisted of 10 Kazakhstani scientific supervisors and 5 international consultants from the USA, Great Britain, Turkey, and Russia, including 6 men and 9 women.

Data Analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim into text and checked against the original audio recording. Participants' data were masked to ensure confidentiality. Data coding

and comparison were then conducted, followed by the grouping of broader thematic categories and the formulation of their names. Finally, the identified themes were analyzed and interpreted.

Results

This section describes in detail the five identified themes, which were developed based on the interview results and supported by relevant quotes from the respondents and references to previously published studies. Quotes from Kazakhstani scientific supervisors are marked with – (KZS), and those from international supervisors are marked with – (IS).

Supervising PhD students with Different Goal Orientations Regarding Doctoral Studies

Kazakhstani scientific supervisors and international consultants noted that for the majority of PhD students, the goal orientation for enrolling in doctoral studies stems from external circumstances or pragmatic considerations that are not related to research activity. One of the most common reasons is the opportunity to receive a scholarship. Specifically, in some cases, master's graduates, due to a lack of career prospects, view the doctoral program as a socio-economic alternative to mandatory employment to fulfill the state grant requirement.

> *«Sometimes PhD students enroll simply for the scholarship, for the sake of their career, and then they don't perform well. I've noticed this trend»* (KZS).
>
> *«One of the main problems is that the majority enroll in doctoral studies for the scholarship, but they are not ready to go to the defense. Because when the end of their studies approaches, they have no foundation, often no publications»* (KZS).
>
> *«There are people who enroll in doctoral studies, receive the scholarship for three years, and then can be dismissed due to their own will or health reasons. It's good if they are dismissed. But there are some who are not dismissed... And when they complete and leave, unfortunately, I no longer have any leverage over them, and they know it. I'll say more: now there are PhD students who don't even pick up the phone»* (KZS).
>
> *For many working PhD students who combine professional activity with studies, the scholarship serves as a stable additional income. This option becomes especially attractive for employees of educational organizations and civil servants, where a PhD degree can provide advantages in career advancement, and in the short term, offer financial support.*
>
> *«Currently, one PhD student who completed the program works at the department, and now it is in her interest to defend her dissertation»* (KZS).
>
> *«People enroll with some other motivation, not related to preparing a dissertation, perhaps with a job perspective»* (IS).
>
> *«Honestly, they enroll for their supposed background, which will be useful to them in their professional activity in the future»* (KZS).

International practice indicates that pursuing doctoral studies to build a career outside the academic environment is becoming an increasingly common choice for PhD students (Arimoto et al., 2019; Horta & Li, 2024). This is because doctoral training implies the formation of unique skills in analyzing extremely difficult and unstructured problems, searching for root causes, developing and testing hypotheses, identifying weaknesses in argumentation, foreseeing the consequences of decisions, and more. PhD students with many years of experience in a specific professional field, viewing the PhD degree as an opportunity for further career growth, also

often enter Kazakhstani doctoral programs. However, as scientific supervisors note, this group of PhD students rarely achieves research success. We believe the reason for this is their heavy workload at their primary workplace, which leads to emotional burnout against the background of combining two complex and resource-intensive activities.

> *«Now PhD students want to have their cake and eat it too. They hold onto a managerial position, and at the same time, they want to be a PhD doctor. Of those who hold such a position, none defends in the third year. By the end of the third year, most PhD students not only don't have a Scopus article, they have nothing at all»* (KZS).

> *«Two female PhD students – one from the presidential administration, the other from the National Security Committee – I don't know how to motivate them; it's constant excuses and pretexts»* (KZS).

Another significant motivating factor is the social prestige of doctoral studies and the PhD degree. Specifically, in the Kazakhstani cultural context, academic achievements are given great symbolic value, and a PhD degree can serve as a serious source of social capital. Therefore, enrollment in doctoral studies in this case is not defined by a deep interest in research activity or the intention to build an academic career.

> *«Someone enrolls simply to be a PhD student... There was one case: our 'product' (she finished our bachelor's and master's) tried to enroll in the doctoral program for two or three years in a row. Finally, she enrolled. When she enrolled, I said, 'Finally, you got in.' For her, the status – to become a PhD students – was more important. If the primary interest is to become a PhD student, for example, to tell her friends, colleagues, 'You know, I am also studying for a PhD,' then, of course, that is a different mindset. I don't know if such a PhD student will defend»* (KZS).

> *For some PhD students, doctoral study is a temporary strategy, allowing them to buy time before potentially enrolling in a doctoral program at a foreign university.*

> *«In this regard, natural scientists and technical specialists have enough random people in the doctoral program who come to bide their time. Someone enrolls in a doctoral program simply to wait until they can go abroad. Unfortunately, our funding is insufficient to provide the PhD student with the necessary reagents and equipment»* (KZS).

> *«A PhD student won a program in Hungary; now she plans to defend her anthropology dissertation there. I hope she defends»* (KZS).

> *«Distinguished Kazakhstani PhD students often go abroad to get a PhD in the US or Europe. Like, for example, my PhD student Armanzhol»* (IS).

> *Scientific supervisors also highlighted specific goal orientations for male and female PhD students. For some male PhD students, continuing doctoral studies serves as an avoidance of the potentially undesirable obligation of military service.*

> *«There was one male PhD student who performed poorly in the master's program. I asked him, 'Why did you come? What motivated you?' He said, 'To avoid being drafted into the army'»* (KZS).

> *«Someone is trying to avoid the army»* (KZS).

Separate female PhD students who are on maternity leave view doctoral studies as a socially acceptable and status-enhancing form of «tiding over» In this context, doctoral study provides a presence in the professional environment, as well as financial support in the form of a

scholarship. Such motives are determined by life circumstances, and thus, the doctoral program acts as a tool for the temporary resolution of personal problems. This undoubtedly reflects on their engagement in research activity and resilience to difficulties in their studies.

> *«One PhD student was on maternity leave; there's nothing you can say to that»* (KZS).

> *«The feeling is that they are simply spending time during maternity leave, as a supplement to earnings, some kind of image. This is awful, it's not smart»* (KZS).

> *Scientific supervisors noted that, in their observations, such controlled motivation generally does not lead to research productivity and obtaining a PhD degree. Such PhD students do not show initiative in conducting research, perform research tasks superficially, and demonstrate procrastinatory behavior. Unfortunately, supervisors state that PhD students with a pronounced interest in research activity are in the minority; the majority of PhD students are dominated by various types of extrinsic motivation.*

> *« With such motivation, the result is zero. No matter how much you push, no matter how much you pull, it's useless»*(KZS).

Supervising PhD students with Varying Levels of Research Skills

Kazakhstani scientific supervisors, and especially international consultants, reported that a very common problem is the PhD students' insufficient or fragmented understanding of the key aspects of conducting research. This «procedural gap» between the expectations of scientific supervisors and the actual research skills of PhD students leads to delays in completing research tasks, errors, and an increased stress level for the PhD students.

> *«The problem is that PhD students have a very limited idea of what it takes to conduct research. PhD students lack basic training. They have funding and support, but they don't know how to develop a topic or area of research and how to manage the process»* (IS).

> *« PhD students think they will just get on a conveyor belt to get a doctoral degree. They do not understand research data collection, idea development, or the work involved. Hence, the low percentage of completed research»* (IS).

> *«There are motivated and capable PhD students, and there are those who lack training. You cannot come to doctoral studies from scratch. You need a scientific background, a scientific foundation. Therefore, there are those who are a bit slow» (IS).*

> *«The PhD student does not want to deal with translation, or study the specifics of publishing in ranked journals. It's all very difficult for them»* (KZS).

Furthermore, scientific supervisors in the social sciences and humanities state that for many PhD students, the gap between career ambitions and actual research skills becomes insurmountable. In this case, instead of painstaking scientific work, PhD students opt for the shortest but destructive path – the services of agencies offering "guaranteed" publication for a fee.

> *«There are PhD students who brilliantly manage the preparation and publication of scientific articles in ranked journals. And then there are, of course, those who pay money in some dubious journal. Therefore, sometimes the requirement for mandatory publications in such journals seems excessive. On the other hand, the reasons for this requirement are understandable»* (KZS).

> *«Due to the difficulty of publishing, many PhD students turn to 'predatory' journals, which harms the reputation of researchers. But if the PhD student is genuinely conducting quality research, they can publish in respectable journals for free»* (KZS).

PhD students who circumvent the requirements for a doctoral degree in this manner effectively do not acquire the implied skills of independent research. This problem can become a serious challenge for the academic community. The consequence is the devaluation of the doctoral degree as a guarantor of a high level of research competence. International consultants are very categorical on this point.

> *«Many PhD students seek to publish in Scopus journals, which is a mandatory condition for obtaining a PhD degree in Kazakhstan. They believe that two articles in a Q1 or Q2 journal are equivalent to obtaining a PhD degree. It's the opposite! This leads to corruption, where companies are paid for publications. This is not good. They get a PhD degree but do not achieve the level of a researcher»* (IS).

> *Alongside this problem, scientific supervisors and international consultants highlight capable PhD students with a genuine desire to engage in research activity. This category of PhD students represents a valuable resource for the scientific community.*

> *«I am working with one female PhD student who I think will manage. She works with me, asks questions, and is responsive. But, again, you can't rely only on international consultants on this issue»* (IS).

> *«One of my PhD students graduated with a bachelor's degree from ENU; I taught them a course there. Afterward, he studied for a master's in Russia, and there, let's say, he greatly enhanced his skills in scientific activity. He gained good research experience. In the first semester of the first year of his doctoral program, he published in a quite serious journal. In principle, he can write articles himself; he was simply given a topic and provided with equipment. My participation is minimal in this case – just to suggest something, look at the data if something doesn't align.... And I haven't noticed him suffering much. It turns out that he fulfilled the article requirement within the first year of study... I think he could skip three years of study and go straight to the defense, but this is not possible according to the regulations»* (KZS).

> *«I've had several students with good ideas and a willingness to adapt to new methods»* (IS).

Supervising PhD students with Different Self-Regulation Patterns

Scientific supervisors in the natural sciences emphasize that doctoral study requires high autonomy and self-regulation. They note that good material and technical conditions for conducting research, a relevant topic, and the high research qualification of the scientific supervisor do not guarantee the PhD student's progress in case of their behavioral dysregulation. Due to the high cost of reagents needed for experiments, supervisors refuse to continue working with PhD students who show signs of low self-regulation.

> *«Everything depends on the PhD student themselves, their determination... You can have a good base, topic, and scientific supervisor, but not do anything yourself. I had such a PhD student; he attended for one year and was dismissed. I said I didn't want to waste time or reagents on a topic you are not going to pursue»* (KZS).

> *Scientific supervisors described the supervision of PhD students as a cycle of stimulation activity and fruitless control. The interview results highlight two types of behavior for unproductive PhD students. The first involves the PhD student completely avoiding meetings with the supervisor because they «have nothing to show» meaning the assignments given by the supervisor have not been completed. This is classic behavior*

driven by shame and fear of judgment. In the second case, the PhD student's behavior follows this pattern: «The PhD student sends raw material – receives recommendations – does not correct – disappears for a long time». This described situation demonstrates not only the PhD student's lack of progress but also the crisis of the supervisor's reactive position. Specifically, the scientific supervisor, limiting themselves to formal corrections of «raw material» misses the proactive control of the research activity. Furthermore, they ignore the deeper reasons for the PhD student's long-term lack of results, including loss of motivation, lack of research competence, loss of interest in the topic or research in general, procrastination, learned helplessness, lack of self-organization skills, and external circumstances (health problems, family issues, financial difficulties, etc.). This position of scientific supervisors can be explained by the fact that the majority of PhD students are, unfortunately, unproductive in research activity. This is evidenced by the interview themes presented above. In addition, high teaching loads do not allow for spending a lot of time on in-depth work with problematic PhD students. Emotional burnout of the scientific supervisor also occurs, a topic that will be described in more detail below.

*«As a rule, PhD students do not do much in terms of their dissertation and consequently avoid meetings because they have nothing to show the scientific supervisor» (*IS).

«I have one such PhD student who has done nothing for three years – neither a dissertation nor articles. He seems to send me something, I make comments, he doesn't correct it, and I receive nothing back» (KZS).

Scientific supervisors also described a paradox: a PhD student has fulfilled all the key formal criteria necessary to complete the research (articles in international and Kazakhstani peer-reviewed journals), but cannot overcome the final barrier – completing the dissertation writing. In this situation, the focus shifts from research inadequacy to psychological aspects, including the PhD student's identity crisis (Cong-Lem et al., 2024). In this case, the PhD student ceases to perceive themselves as a «scientist» and self-realization and social status find support outside the academic environment. This occurs against the backdrop of a conflict between the «academic world» (requiring significant time and emotional investment, especially in the final stages) and the «real world» (offering immediate reward and stability). Dissertation preparation can be perceived as monotonous and excessively large-scale work, causing a feeling of overload and anxiety. Furthermore, the pursuit of an unattainable ideal generates procrastination and blocks active actions, thereby postponing the dissertation's completion indefinitely.

«I have a PhD student: articles are done, everything is done, just write the dissertation. But he still hasn't defended... Some haven't defended even with articles available. You see, maybe these are just adults whose other side of life – the economic side – is pulling them away; they no longer need the diploma, and they just disappear. It happens» (KZS).

One scientific supervisor gave an example illustrating the transformation of their role from an «academic mentor» to an «integral mentor», forced to compensate for the PhD student's lack of internal discipline. This situation underscores the importance of not only research skills but – also metacognitive awareness, which allows for independently regulating, realizing, and controlling the process of dissertation research (Tuononen et al., 2023), as well as reflecting on one's strengths and weaknesses and deepening the understanding of personal research strategies (Harrison & Vallin, 2018). In the absence of metacognitive awareness, even a capable

PhD student may fail. It should be acknowledged that the described supervision strategy attests to the high personal involvement of the scientific supervisor. However, such a practice may only be effective in the short term.

> *«I have one female PhD student; she is very capable. But she cannot independently organize her research activity. Therefore, I set a day every week when she comes and works on her dissertation and articles right next to me. Because she does nothing on her own»* (KZS).

Selection Criteria for PhD Students

Some scientific supervisors in the social sciences and humanities highlighted the problem of PhD students changing specialties upon entry. Respondents noted that this trend leads to methodological, substantive, and organizational difficulties, negatively impacting research outcomes and the academic quality of dissertations. The main difficulties faced by scientific supervisors when supervising PhD students who have changed specialties include: a Lack of fluency in the basic terminology of the chosen scientific field. Insufficient research skills. Lack of understanding of the subject of the dissertation research. Absence of deep scientific interest in the dissertation topic. The experience of scientific supervisors indicates that such doctoral selection practices reduce the quality of dissertation research, lead to delays in dissertation preparation, and increase the risk of completing the doctoral program without a defense, result in formal publications, and increase the workload on the scientific supervisor.

> *«I had a PhD student who studied tourism for her bachelor's and master's degrees, and she entered the doctoral program without any background in international relations. It was very difficult for her, and she engaged in plagiarism»* (IS).

> *«They come from outside sociology and face difficulties in mastering the theoretical aspects of research. This is a doctoral program; it requires conceptualization of terms and the ability to develop methodology. They break down at this... I observe this not only in my PhD students but also in others. The most resilient survive, not the best prepared»* (KZS).

> *«We have people from transport who came into regional studies... It is very difficult to work with them»* (KZS).

> One scientific supervisor in the natural sciences shared a positive experience of supervising PhD students who came from a different specialty. In the described case, an *«interdisciplinary shift»* occurred – an evolutionary transition from Technical Physics to Nanomaterials. The PhD students' background became their competitive advantage, not a drawback. Thus, the key success factors in this case were the combination of a chance opportunity, motivation, and personal readiness to realize it, as well as the supportive role of the scientific supervisor who saw the research potential in a *«random»* person.

> *«You know, it's actually great when people from other specialties enter the doctoral program. PhD students came to me from Technical Physics to Nanomaterials. They submitted documents thinking it was a specialty in their department. And then, when they were admitted, they were so surprised that it was a different department and they ended up with me... These 'accidental physicists' turned out to be very much non-accidental people... There are people who enroll by chance. Maybe it's not even about the person being from a different specialty; it's about motivation, because many view the doctoral program as a transfer point»* (KZS).

Scientific supervisors stated the problem that the most capable PhD students are not the ones enrolling in the doctoral program. This rhetoric reflects the mismatch between the declared high standards of doctoral studies and the actual admission practices. The direct and negative assessments of the scientific supervisors attest to the depth of their disappointment and the acuteness of their perception of the problem.

«For some reason, they are not recruiting the best PhD students» (IS).

«The PhD students are actually weak. Because now, unfortunately, only about 10% of truly strong, deserving PhD students go into doctoral studies, and the rest are all random people» (KZS).

«The PhD students are very weak. I don't understand why they go into doctoral studies. It's a claim to building an academic career, a love for the scientific environment, an understanding of complex theories» (KZS).

One scientific supervisor metaphorically summarized his long-term observation of «natural selection» in the doctoral program: «Practice shows that people who come into the doctoral program by chance are like suitcases without handles, and time eventually gets rid of them» (KZS). Unfortunately, such PhD students bring no real scientific benefit but demand a disproportionately large amount of the supervisor's resources and time.

Emotional State of Scientific Supervisors

Scientific supervision in a doctoral program involves a long-term, intellectually and emotionally demanding interaction (Pyhältö et al., 2023; Rönkkönen et al., 2023). The scientific supervisor must not only evaluate the PhD student's research progress but also empathize, motivate, and provide support amidst the academic difficulties, uncertainties, and professional crises inevitably faced by novice researchers. This component often remains «invisible» in the structure of scientific supervision, but it influences the PhD student's psychological well-being and the attainment of a PhD diploma (Cornér et al., 2017; Mackie et al., 2019). The main problems faced by scientific supervisors include the conflict in assuming dual responsibility for themselves and the PhD student, the contradiction between high expectations regarding the PhD student's research progress and the real unsatisfactory results, and the blurred boundaries between control and friendship in relationships with PhD students (Han & Xu, 2023). These difficulties become a source of various emotional experiences for the scientific supervisor. While positive resolutions lead to joy and love (Halse & Malfroy, 2010), negative emotions such as disappointment (Sambrook et al., 2008), as well as signs of frustration and burnout, are unfortunately more common, as demonstrated by most participants in this study.

The results of the interview analysis allow for the identification of two typical situations that cause psycho-emotional exhaustion in scientific supervisors. The first situation is due to the passivity of the PhD student, who, for a long time, takes no active steps regarding the dissertation research and preparation of scientific articles, fails to contact the supervisor, or communicates formally without progress. In this case, the supervisor experiences increasing frustration and irritation due to the feeling of their own ineffectiveness. This is accompanied by elements of emotional burnout, including the loss of meaning in supervision. These states intensify depersonalization – a shift of responsibility onto the PhD student's personality – resulting in supervision becoming a formal process. In the second situation, the PhD student fails to complete the dissertation research despite having all necessary articles published and

research data collected. Therefore, the supervisor faces ambivalent feelings. Alongside pride for the achieved scientific results, disappointment grows, fueled by emotional fatigue from constantly «prodding» the PhD student. There is a sense of incompleteness that the invested efforts did not convert into a formalized result. Against this background, emotional detachment gradually begins to form.

> *«I am such a demanding scientific supervisor, but my strength is not enough»* (KZS).
> *«We have more cases where the scientific supervisor loses interest due to the PhD student's lack of progress»* (KZS).
> *«I realized that it all, of course, depends on the person. If a person wants to do it, they do it. If they don't want to, then there is nothing»* (KZS).

Discussion

This research is arguably one of the first to study the experience of scientific supervision of PhD students with different types of motivation. The results provide important information for future research on PhD students' motivation and the development of support strategies for scientific supervision in the Kazakhstani context. Specifically, it sheds light on the aspect, little described in the literature, of the mismatch between the goal orientations of a significant portion of PhD students and the research logic of PhD programs, and the associated challenges for supervision. The data complement international observations about the increasing proportion of PhD students studying for career and socio-economic benefits outside the academic environment (Arimoto et al., 2019; Horta & Li, 2024). However, this study identified a specific national motivational context, including additional income in the form of a scholarship, «tiding over» strategies (combining with maternity leave or an alternative to military service), social prestige, and a «bridge» to foreign doctoral programs. Collectively, this forms a continuum of motivation from autonomously research-driven to predominantly controlled and amotivated, with varying probabilities of productive research outcomes and a varying «cost» of supervision.

A second finding is the established gap between the expectations of scientific supervisors and the PhD students' actual capacity to generate research ideas, design research, collect and analyze data, and finalize manuscripts. In such circumstances, the time required for research implementation is extended, and formalism increases, including paid publications without scientific novelty or publications through agencies in «predatory» journals, which devalues the educational goals of the doctoral program and undermines confidence in the doctoral degree.

The study established that the PhD student's self-regulation acts as a mediator between motivation and outcome (Chen et al., 2025). In particular, scientific supervisors in the natural sciences emphasized the high cost of PhD student behavioral dysregulation. This is expressed in the overuse of expensive reagents, missed deadlines, and, consequently, in some cases, the supervisor's refusal to continue working with a PhD student with a low level of self-regulation. Furthermore, the interview results indicate a predominance of interaction patterns such as avoiding meetings with the supervisor and dropping out of communication after submitting «raw» manuscripts and receiving recommendations for improvement. The described patterns demonstrate the limited effectiveness of a reactive supervision strategy for this group of PhD students. Consequently, it is advisable to apply a proactive approach to scientific supervision: staged task breakdown, formalization of criteria and deadlines, increased frequency of feedback,

etc. To mitigate such risks, it is appropriate to institutionalize multi-factor selection of PhD students, including the diagnosis of self-regulation and executive functions.

The phenomenon of an uncompleted dissertation despite the existence of necessary publications and collected research data deserves separate attention. We believe the nature of this phenomenon lies at the intersection of motivation and identity (Cong-Lem et al., 2024). This includes the loss of self-identification as a researcher, a shift in values toward faster external rewards, and perfectionistic procrastination when faced with the voluminous, monotonous work of finalizing the dissertation. We suggest that incorporating metacognitive practices (reflection, awareness of strengths and weaknesses, monitoring one's own decisions, etc.) into supervision would reduce PhD students' behavioral dysregulation.

Most of the narratives cited record the emotional exhaustion of scientific supervisors (Sambrook et al., 2008), especially with the long-term passivity of PhD students or getting stuck at the dissertation text preparation stage. In such circumstances, the supervisor's increased investment of time and emotion does not convert into progress, which triggers frustration, ambivalence, irritation, and distancing. This negative cycle reduces the quality of research interaction, increases the transactional costs of educational programs, and undermines the culture of supervision. Under the circumstances, it is evident that organizational mitigation mechanisms must go beyond the individual resilience of the scientific supervisor. Firstly, this concerns the redistribution of the teaching load, which must account for the supervisor's mentoring work. Secondly, ensuring scientific supervisors have access to various forms of support, such as regular departmental supervision or inter-vision, coaching, and brief restorative practices. Thirdly, it is advisable to include the monitoring of scientific supervisors' psychological well-being in annual quality reviews of educational programs, given that the psychological well-being of PhD students is inseparable from that of their supervisors.

Strategies for Supervision of PhD students with Different Types of Motivation

The results of the conducted research allow for the identification of three strategies for supervising Kazakhstani PhD students, following the logic of Self-Determination Theory.

Research Autonomy Strategy can be applied to autonomously motivated PhD students. The scientific supervisor needs to support the PhD student's autonomy while maintaining high research standards and discipline, minimizing external pressure, but ensuring access to resources, rare but deep feedback, expert evaluation, and a scientific environment. This strategy preserves the PhD student's internal drive while simultaneously reducing the risks of methodological drift and defense delays.

Structured Progression Strategy is applicable to controlled-motivated PhD students who rely on extrinsic regulators such as requirements, deadlines, rewards, or sanctions. When working with such a PhD student, the supervisor must ensure a predictable structure and rhythm of actions, translating external requirements into identified regulation. Thus, clear regulations, visible progress, and structured feedback reduce procrastination and errors, while micro-interventions focused on meaning gradually shift the PhD student's motivation toward greater autonomy. This increases the likelihood of timely defense and publication productivity.

Structural-Remediation Strategy is advisable for use with amotivated and unstable PhD students, who are characterized by low self-efficacy, high distractibility, and a «jerky» work style. The implementation of this strategy involves building a clear organizational framework, including regulations, a calendar plan, manuscript quality checklists, a predictable meeting

rhythm, and transparent escalation rules. Additionally, the supervisor must purposefully develop the PhD student's deficient skills (academic writing, research methods, planning, etc.). The implementation of this strategy requires significant time and resource investment from the supervisor. However, the effect may be short-term.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study presented several interesting results regarding the experience of supervising Kazakhstani PhD students with different types of motivation. Nevertheless, the study is not without certain limitations that require further investigation. A limited number of scientific supervisors restricts the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, a mixed-methods design could be chosen for future research. Possible disciplinary selectivity, as the study participants were predominantly representatives of social-humanities and natural sciences. It would be advisable to include scientific fields not covered in this work, such as engineering, medicine, and others, in the sample for future studies. It is likely that more reflective scientific supervisors who more frequently encounter critical doctoral study trajectories participated in the study. Therefore, we assume that a stratum of other supervision practices with predominantly successful cases was not included in the sample, which could be the subject of future research. The focus on the perspectives of scientific supervisors and international consultants without analysis of the PhD students' experience creates an asymmetry of viewpoints and a risk of overestimating the PhD students' deficits. We recognize this as an important direction for future research.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the experience of supervising PhD students with different types of motivation. The results indicate that cases of supervision involving PhD students with low motivation for research activity predominate. Crucially, not a single interviewed supervisor reported a positive outcome from interaction with such a PhD student. However, a significant consequence for the scientific supervisor is the negative impact on their emotional sphere. This is expressed in frustration and burnout, especially during prolonged passivity of the PhD students.

The obtained results have three key management implications. The advisability of correcting the selection criteria for admission to doctoral programs, taking into account the PhD student's research potential and self-regulation, is emphasized. The supervision strategy must be constructed in accordance with the PhD student's type of motivation. Providing institutional support for the psychological well-being of scientific supervisors is critically important, through the recognition of mentoring work, the reduction of teaching load, the organization of supervision, and professional development in the field of scientific supervision.

The practical significance of this research lies in providing a foundation for developing educational policies and tools that would shift the identified problems from the level of individual narratives into manageable processes, thereby improving the productivity, quality, and sustainability of doctoral training.

Authors contribution

Tokatligil Yuliya – Conceptualization, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, writing of the original draft, editing and critical review, funding acquisition.

Saliyeva Aigul – formal analysis, preparation of the original draft of the article.

Karmelyuk Anastassiya – data collection, preparation of the original draft of the article.

Saliyeva Kamilla – data collection.

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Мотивационный спектр докторантуры и практики научного руководства: качественное исследование

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Аннотация. Мотивация является важным компонентом успешного завершения обучения в докторантуре. Ранее проведенные исследования установили внутренние и внешние факторы мотивации к поступлению в докторантуру, выявили мотивационные профили докторантов. Однако малоизученными остаются практики научного руководства докторантами с разными типами мотивации.

Цель настоящего исследования заключается в поиске ответа на следующий исследовательский вопрос: как научные консультанты описывают свой опыт научного руководства докторантами с различающейся мотивацией?

В настоящем качественном исследовании использован подход case study и тематический анализ для интерпретации данных интервью. В исследовании приняли участие 10 казахстанских научных консультантов и 5 зарубежных консультантов, в числе которых 6 мужчин и 9 женщин.

Результаты позволили выделить пять тем, отражающих опыт научного руководства докторантами с разными типами мотивации в диапазоне контроля – автономии. Установлены основные вызовы современного научного руководства докторантами. Первый – несоответствие целевых установок докторантов исследовательской направленности образовательной прог-раммы. Второй – разрыв между ожиданиями научных руководителей и реальной способностью докторантов реализовывать исследовательскую деятельность. Третий – поведенческая дисрегуляция докторантов. Четвертый – несоответствие между декларируемыми высокими стандартами докторантуры и реальной практикой приема. Пятый – эмоциональное истощение научных консультантов при долговременной пассивности докторантов. В логике теории самодетерминации выделить три стратегии научного руководства казахстанскими докторантами с разными типами мотивации: стратегия исследовательской автономии, стратегия структурированной прогрессии, структурно-ремедиационная стратегия.

Практическая значимость настоящего исследования заключается в предоставлении основы для разработки образовательных политик и инструментов, которые бы перевели выявленные проблемы из уровня индивидуальных нарративов в управляемые процессы, повышающие продуктивность, качество и устойчивость подготовки докторантов.

Ключевые слова: мотивация докторантов, научный консультант, PhD, эмоциональное истощение, самодетерминация, интервью, тематический анализ.

Докторантурадағы мотивациялық спектр және ғылыми жетекшілік тәжірибесі: сапалық зерттеу

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Аңдатпа. Мотивация докторантураны сәтті аяқтаудың маңызды құрамдас бөлігі болып табылады. Алдыңғы зерттеулер докторантураға түсуді ынталандыратын ішкі және сыртқы факторларды және докторанттардың мотивациялық профильдерін анықтады. Дегенмен, әртүрлі мотивация түрлері бар докторанттарға жетекшілік ету тәжірибесі әлі де зерттелмеген.

Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты келесі зерттеу сұрағына жауап беру болып табылады: ғылыми жетекшілер әртүрлі мотивация түрлері бар докторанттарға жетекшілік ету тәжірибесін қалай сипаттайды?

Бұл сапалы зерттеу сұхбат деректерін түсіндіру үшін кейс-стади әдісі мен тақырыптық талдауды пайдаланды. Зерттеуге он қазақстандық супервайзер және бес халықаралық кеңесші, оның ішінде алты ер азамат және тоғыз әйел қатысты.

Нәтижелер бақылау-автономия спектрі аясында әртүрлі мотивация түрлері бар докторанттарға жетекшілік ету тәжірибесін көрсететін бес тақырыпты ашты. Қазіргі заманғы докторанттардың жетекшілік етуінің негізгі міндеттері анықталды. Біріншісі – докторанттардың мақсаттарының білім беру бағдарламасының зерттеу бағытымен сәйкес келмеуі. Екіншісі – ғылыми жетекшілердің күтулері мен докторанттардың ғылыми-зерттеу жұмыстарын жүргізудегі нақты мүмкіндіктері арасындағы алшақтық. Үшіншісі – докторанттардың мінез-құлқының бұзылуы. Төртінші – докторантураға білім берудің жарияланған жоғары стандарттары мен қабылдаудың нақты тәжірибесі арасындағы сәйкессіздік. Бесінші – докторанттар арасындағы ұзақ уақыт енжарлығынан ғылыми жетекшілердің эмоционалды шаршауы. Өзін-өзі анықтау теориясының логикасы аясында әртүрлі мотивация түрлері бар қазақстандық докторанттарға жетекшілік етудің үш стратегиясы анықталды: зерттеу автономиясы стратегиясы, құрылымдық прогресс стратегиясы және құрылымдық-сауықтыру стратегиясы.

Бұл зерттеудің практикалық маңыздылығы анықталған проблемаларды жеке әңгімелер деңгейінен докторанттарды дайындаудың өнімділігін, сапасын және тұрақтылығын арттыратын басқарылатын процестерге айналдыратын білім беру саясаты мен құралдарын әзірлеуге негіз беруде.

Түйін сөздер: докторанттардың мотивациясы, ғылыми жетекші, PhD докторы, эмоционалды шаршау, өзін-өзі анықтау, сұхбат, тақырыптық талдау.

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