

COGNITIVE CONSENSUS OF CONTINUATION-ORIENTED STUDENTS

CONSENSO COGNITIVO DE ESTUDIANTES ORIENTADOS A LA CONTINUACIÓN DE ESTUDIOS

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ABSTRACT: This article presents the cognitive processes underlying students' decisions related to seeking and participating in graduate programs. Through a discourse analysis, it identifies the cognitive consensuses that act as pillars in participants' mental models, revealing how the needs to improve resources drive the pursuit of job opportunities linked to obtaining graduate degrees. This decision-making process is influenced by a number of contextual factors, such as family dynamics and financial and temporal considerations, which can hinder participation in graduate programs. These findings underscore the importance of understanding the motivations and barriers students face in their pursuit of academic and professional development, and offer valuable information to inform the design of policies and programs that promote participation in higher education.

Keywords: *Cognitive processes, Students, Postgraduate, Cognitive consensus, Decision making.*

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RESUMEN: Este artículo presenta los procesos cognitivos subyacentes en las decisiones de estudiantes relacionadas con la búsqueda y participación en programas de postgrado. A través de un análisis de discurso, se identifican los consensos cognitivos que actúan como pilares en los modelos mentales de los participantes, revelando cómo las necesidades de mejorar recursos impulsan la búsqueda de oportunidades laborales vinculadas a la obtención de títulos de postgrado. Este proceso de toma de decisiones se ve influenciado por una serie de factores contextuales, como dinámicas familiares y consideraciones financieras y temporales, que pueden obstaculizar la participación en programas de postgrado. Estas conclusiones subrayan la importancia de comprender las motivaciones y barreras que enfrentan los estudiantes en su búsqueda de desarrollo académico y profesional, y ofrecen información valiosa para informar el diseño de políticas y programas que promuevan la participación en la educación superior.

Palabras clave: *Procesos cognitivos, Estudiantes, Postgrado, Consensos cognitivos, Toma de decisiones.*

INTRODUCTION

The present research focuses on an analysis of the subjectivity of undergraduate students oriented to pursue a graduate degree by continuing their studies. The primary objective is to understand their perceptions regarding the possibility of continuing their studies at the graduate level by analyzing their cognitive consensuses (Jonas et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2010; Judge-Lord et al., 2020; Stremersch and Van Hoyer, 2024; Kayes et al., 2024). This subjectivity, linked to both individual experiences and academic aspirations as well as group participation in cultural contexts, significantly influences people's decisions (Soares et al., 2023; Trevisan and Mouritsen, 2023; Galasiński et al., 2023; Shepherd et al., 2023; Lawani et al., 2023; Colorni and Tsoukiàs, 2024; Ivanov and Webster, 2024). Ignoring these perceptions could hurt the planning and offering of graduate programs aimed at this student population. In contrast, by using this information effectively, more accurate strategies can be developed for offering educational services in this area of study.

The subjectivity of this particular population is difficult to access and understand, especially when attempting to address through quantitative approaches such as surveys (Wieland et al., 2024; Gatti and McAvoy, 2024; Boardsworth et al., 2024). This quantitative approach is limited by factors such as social desirability and language barriers, which may bias responses and fail to capture the richness of subjective experiences (Alvarez Maldonado et al., 2023a-b.). Therefore, this research is oriented towards a qualitative approach using the focus group technique as its main methodology, applying discourse analysis to understand the qualitative

data. The development of this research involves first describing the conceptual tools for the analysis of cognitive consensus, then explaining the qualitative methodology constituted by a focus group using projective techniques, ending with the presentation of the results of the analysis by means of a map of mental processes based on significant categories described in the conclusions.

DEVELOPMENT

Self-regulation is the category used when naming different cognitive and behavioral processes that serve individuals to achieve or maintain a desired state (Loewenstein, 1996; Lord et al., 2010; Sassenberg and Wolpin, 2008; Judge-Lord et al., 2020; Stremersch and Van Hove, 2024; Kayes et al., 2024; Annesi and Powell, 2024), processes which are a function of a perceived discrepancy between reality and standards, norms or goals that should be met or achieved (Jonas et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2010; Ezmececi and Akman, 2023; Stremersch and Van Hove, 2024; Kayes et al., 2024; Annesi and Powell, 2024).

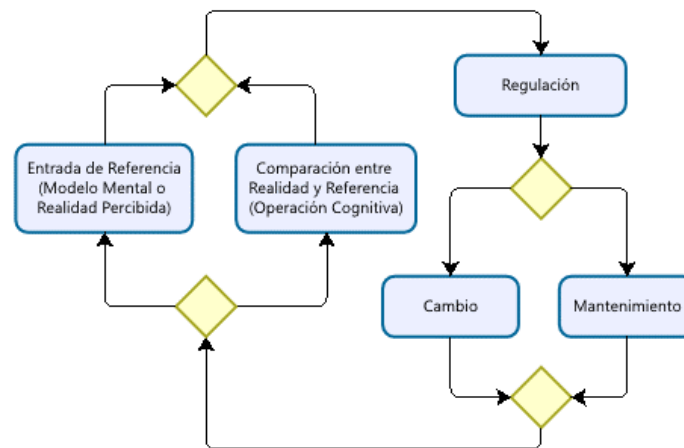
These states are represented internally, through subjective comparison of the perception of a real situation, based on cognitive elements composed of mental models (Gevers et al., 2009), which regulate discrepancies through modifications of behavior or of the cognitive processes themselves (Duckworth and Kern, 2011; Loewenstein, 1996; Tangney et al., 2004).

This process has an input function, a reference value or representative image of the desired state, as mental models; a comparison function in which a contrast is made between reality and the desired state, generating a cognitive operation; and a regulatory output function with two types of results, first, a discrepancy that generates the need to regulate behavioral or cognitive processes, which could even alter the very image that generates the discrepancy; and, second, a confirmation or similarity with the reference image, which generates maintenance of behavior and prevention of behavioral deviations; establishing through these two elements a feedback loop, which is alerted to the discrepancy between the referent and reality, establishing qualitative data at the moment of analyzing this dimension (Wiend et al., 2024; Gatti and McAvoy, 2024; Boardsworth et al., 2024).

However, it is also possible to find feedback loops in which reality is first observed, to create a reference image above this reality, seeking to raise the current performance (Sassenberg and Woltin, 2008; Lord et al., 2010; Judge-Lord et al., 2020; Mol et al., 2023; Stremersch and Van Hoyer, 2024; Kayes et al., 2024; Annesi and Powell, 2024). For this reason, the structural process would involve a first stage in which it starts with the mental reference or perceived reality, combined with a cognitive operation of comparison, which generates a second moment in which the decision is made to regulate discrepancies or similarities, ending in a third moment in which behaviors and cognitive elements are changed or maintained, affecting the first stage composed of the perception of reality and the reference models subject to comparison. The general self-regulation process is described below (see Figure 1), with the quadrants being the functions and the diamonds representing gates in which the flows derived from the functions are combined:

Figure 1

General Self-Regulatory Process



Source: own elaboration.

In this general conceptual field, one of the dominant approaches associated with self-regulation is the regulatory approach (Sassenberg and Woltin, 2008; Khafif et al., 2023; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024), which posits the theory of discrepancy and fit between three dimensions: a) the real self, b) the ideal self, and c) the duty self, it being possible to include a social self as well.

The theory proposes that perceiving discrepancies in content or attributes between the real self and the ideal self would lead to sadness, while the discrepancy between the real self and the duty self led to emotions of increased nervousness, establishing two regulatory mechanisms associated with discrepancies between the real versus duty and the ideal: the promotional approach related to the discrepancy between the real and the ideal, which seeks gains at the cost of greater risk, paying attention to good results; and the preventive approach related to the discrepancy between the real and the duty, which seeks safety by paying attention to losses; processes which are found in the general self-regulation process in the component of comparison of perceptions about reality and mental referents, and the consequences in promotional change or preventive maintenance behaviors.

In this sense, it is possible to synthesize this self-regulatory behavior as dynamic processes in which desired states are sought or undesired states are avoided through cognitive operations of comparison between referents (Sassenberg and Woltin, 2008; Jonas et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2010; Neal et al., 2017; Khafif et al., 2023; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024).

In this vision of self-regulation, an agent is established who acts in the function of standards or goals, which can be individual, but these standards or goals can also be based on social referents or norms, requiring the incorporation of social identity or a social type of self, which regulates behavior in function of group parameters beyond the person or the real self, which indicate desirable group states or attributes of group interest, affecting the goals and standards of group members who maintain a strong identification with the group through this type of social self-complementary to the real self, the ideal self and the self of duty (Sassenberg and Woltin, 2008); Jonas et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2010; Neal et al., 2017; Khafif et al., 2023; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024), used to perform the cognitive operations of comparison, present as a function in the structure of flows depicted in Figure 1.

Within the framework of this group-based self-regulation, social self-categorization should moderate most of the group effects associated with self-regulation. This social self or identification with the collective is more than social interactions because it involves sense of

belonging, involving cognitive processes founded on stereotypes, prejudices, cultural biases, and other phenomena based on social categorization, with group self-regulation processes being evidenced at an individual level by specific mental models which are shared by the group (Duckworth and Kern, 2011; Loewenstein, 1996; Lord et al., 2010; Tangney et al., 2004; Gevers et al., 2009; Marks and Panzer 2004; Neal et al., 2017; Leach and Iyer, 2024; Glezakis et al., 2024).

Figure 2

Group Self-Regulation Process



Source: own elaboration.

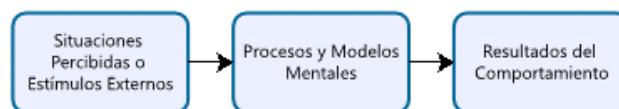
In this way, the category of self-regulation would imply a broader meaning, incorporating the traits of self-control (Duckworth and Kern, 2011; Loewenstein, 1996; Lord et al., 2010; Tangney et al., 2004; Neal et al., 2017) and reaching diverse group mechanisms aimed at enabling group members to self-manage their behaviors in a context of multiple objectives and in interaction with multiple interdependent agents, members of the group itself or members of other groups, such as customers, supervisors or work peers, establishing processes valued for the benefits to the fulfillment of group and social goals and standards (Gevers et al., 2009; Lord et al., 2010; Marks and Panzer, 2004), which are activated through social identities that promote cooperation, as can be seen in Figure 2. In this context, it is possible to understand self-regulation as multiple hybrid processes based on individual and group aspects, because different referents of comparison and different combined regulatory mechanisms are established.

This cognitive approach would address the mental processes that connect perceived situations with the results generated by behavior, establishing how people understand reality, and explaining the behavior derived from this understanding using mental models. Thus, the basic component is the mental representation of reality or external stimulus, which guides behavior, establishing a mediation between external stimuli and behavioral outcomes, mental

models composed of different ideal, normative or social referents, which indicate the subjectivity of people, explaining behavior through the way people structure and process information (Crusius et al., 2012). In the case of cognition founded on collective identity or social self (Sassenberg and Woltin, 2008; Jonas et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2010; Neal et al., 2017; Khafif et al., 2023; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024), shared and compatible mental models that establish consensus among assumptions and knowledge that guide behavior are required. The cognitive process founded on mental models is described below:

Figure 3

Mediation of Mental Processes and Mental Models



Source: own elaboration

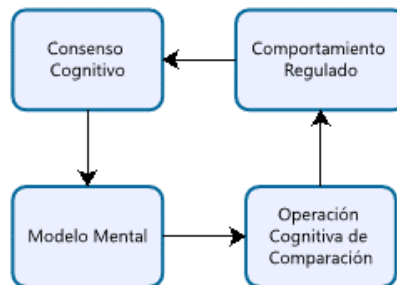
Cognitive consensus is composed of shared and compatible mental models (Gevers et al., 2009; Sassenberg and Woltin, 2008; Jonas et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2010; Neal et al., 2017; Khafif et al., 2023; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024) provides teams with the possibility of a common understanding through mental models founded on shared references, generating an improvement in the possibility of acting of its interdependent members, along with raising the performance and well-being of the group, enhancing through group-regulated behavior, the same cognitive consensus that directs it; Moreover, not having cognitive consensus would mean that the members of a group do not have a common understanding of the referents, focus and regulatory mechanisms, making possible conflicts among group members and the absence of group self-regulation.

This attribute of cognitive consensus between mental models present individually in the group members is characterized by having changing gradations, which could strengthen or weaken over time, modifying the degree of consensus between individual mental models (Gevers et al., 2009; Sassenberg and Woltin, 2008; Jonas et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2010; Neal

et al., 2017; Khafif et al., 2023; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024) and establishing longitudinal dynamics (Neal et al., 2017), which added to the multilevel situation linking individual mental models with group cognitive consensus, transforms this phenomenon into a methodological challenge in terms of longitudinal and multilevel research (Lord et al., 2010; Neal et al., 2017; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024). Cognitive consensus-based processes are depicted in a flow below:

Figure 4

Group Self-Regulation by Cognitive Consensus



Source: own elaboration.

In this sense, it would establish the dynamics of coordination and communication (Marks and Panzer, 2004; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024) would function as the mechanisms for strengthening cognitive consensuses that enable the combination of unequal agents in common purposes, while empowering the same consensus, while the lack of cognitive consensus inhibits coordination and communication due to discrepancies between their contents, approaches and regulatory mechanisms. These cognitive consensuses may be related to the establishment of the social self as the requirements of the group desirable state (Lord et al., 2010; Sassenberg and Woltin, 2008; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024), which would be another type of referent similar to the duty self or ideal self, combining group cognitive consensus with the social self or collective identity through sense of belonging or membership.

In this context, cognitive consensus guides the allocation of regulatory resources (Lord et al., 2010; Neal et al., 2017; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024), while directing attentional efforts to specific levels of regulatory abstraction. Self-regulatory processes would improve goal achievement or compliance with standards (Lord et al., 2010; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024) because they would channel the resources of attention and effort of individuals toward specific attributes of social and individual reality, based on comparison with ideals or duties (Marks and Panzer, 2004; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024), allowing regulatory resources to be used in specific interests relative to the group.

In this way, cognitive consensus would guide the monitoring mechanism among agents as a form of group self-regulation in which the members of the group would perform a cognitive operation of paying attention to certain attributes of the behavior of their peers, directing their effort to certain specific behaviors related to the attributes of interest (Marks and Panzer, 2004; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024), and comparing with the desirable social referents. In this way, group self-regulation allows an understanding of the dynamics of how cognitive and behavioral resources are allocated to the multiple tasks of complex social systems of diverse interdependencies, driving information processing derived from perceptions, and including the management of memory access along with selective attention, to develop multifaceted tasks associated with numerous people, requiring prioritization of goals (Gevers et al., 2009; Lord et al., 2010; Marks and Panzer, 2004; Neal et al., 2017; Coelho et al., 2023; Udeshinee et al., 2024; Radzitskaya and Islamov, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research is based on a qualitative approach, due to its advantages to access cognitive consensus and mental models of social subjects (Álvarez Maldonado et al., 2023a-b), which regulate the behavior of agents. In this sense, the focus group technique was developed to identify the meanings and qualities of group thinking of undergraduate students

oriented to pursue graduate studies. The focus group is presented as a valuable tool to explore and understand the subjective contents of the studied population. To carry out this research, a focus group guideline has been developed that includes direct questions related to the possibility of pursuing a graduate degree. In addition, indirect questions are incorporated based on projective tools that make use of images, adapting the ZMET approach (Zaltman, 2014; Álvarez-Maldonado et al., 2021; Araya-Castillo et al., 2022; Letzkus Palavecino et al., 2022a, b; Álvarez Maldonado et al, 2023a, b). These images allow us to visualize the emotions and perceptions of potential users of educational services in the field of postgraduate business. The objective is to access meaningful discourses that reveal the participants' mental models, which are fundamental cognitive elements for understanding people's thinking, emotions, and behavior.

The choice to use images as a projective tool is based on the premise that mental and linguistic models are largely constructed from images (Álvarez-Maldonado et al., 2021; Álvarez Maldonado et al, 2023a, b). Furthermore, it is recognized that human communication involves a significant component of nonverbal language. These considerations support the choice of using graphic techniques that stimulate the emotions of the participants, which facilitates the elicitation of meaningful and enriching discourses for the research.

Within the framework of the focus group technique, a specific procedure was followed. Each participant drew three graphic representations addressing the issue of continuing graduate studies. These drawings served as a starting point for the focus group discussions, establishing an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and reflection. In addition to the direct questions, specific steps were implemented for the indirect technique, which included individual descriptions of the meanings of the drawings, group reflection on common images, creation of a collaborative collage, storytelling related to the problematic, free association of words, and discussion of metaphorical conditions related to universities and graduate studies.

The results obtained through this technique generated meaningful discourses that allowed the identification of constructs representative of the mental model of each participant. The meaningful discourses were coded using a qualitative approach, generating categories called constructs. These constructs can be effectively visualized in a process map diagram

developed in the conclusions. The focus group dialogue was accurately transcribed from audio recordings, and this text was analyzed using Atlas.ti software. This analysis focused on the most relevant segments that reflected the subjectivity of the population studied, which led to a coding of the discourse. The coded segments were grouped into relevant categories, and the interconnections between these categories were explored using a matrix of co-occurrences (Alvarez Maldonado et al., 2023a, b).

RESULTS

The results obtained in the course of this qualitative study provide insight into the essential mental constructs that lie at the basis of cognitive consensuses. These constructs, in turn, play a crucial role as fundamental structural elements in the complex mental models of the individuals who participated in the research. It is important to emphasize that these cognitive consensuses are not mere abstractions, but exert a palpable and determining influence on the decisions and behaviors of the subjects, analogous to the function of a map in geographical navigation, providing indispensable guidance in decision-making and the execution of actions.

The identification and analysis of these mental constructs is carried out through the discernment of representative categories, whose emergence is due to the recurrent frequency of encodings of meaningful segments present in the discourse under analysis. This analytical process not only sheds light on the underlying structure of the participants' thinking, but also allows us to gain a more complete and penetrating understanding of the intricate cognitive patterns that shape their perceptions and motivate their actions associated with the continuation of studies. In this regard, the different constructs elaborated from the categories coded through discourse analysis are detailed below in Table 1.

Table 1
Constructs identified in discourse analysis

Category	Operationalization	Examples of Significant Segments
Postgraduate Cost	This category refers to the costs associated	a) “What I drew, for me, the family, mainly, for me the meaning is cost and sacrifice, since it means, instead of

	with postgraduate studies.	being with my wife and my daughters, sharing, playing, talking, the project of improving the quality of life of the family, in terms of economic issues”. b) “The peso sign I agree with my compadre, who also has a better salary, but at the same time a postgraduate degree, a master's or postgraduate degree is money, and if that part is not there, no matter how much you have of other things, you will not be able to achieve it, because with candy balls you pay us nothing, and here paying for college is money.” c) “Look, I like working in sales, I didn't, I didn't say no, what worried me a lot was the issue of instability, of reaching the goals. So, when I was allowed to study I focused 100% on my career and I quit in fact to be able to focus on my career because it absorbed me too much...”
Need to Increase Resources	This category refers to the economic motives for studying for a postgraduate degree, as well as the economic requirements to be able to fulfill this purpose.	a) “We are going to coincide again with the issue of money. Mine is like a little silver jar, like the one that came out with the elves, the pot, in fact, well, we all chose to study for money, and I started studying for the same reason, because where I worked, I always reached a certain limit, and I could not go higher, because I did not have any professional studies, I don't have a family, I don't have children, I don't have anything, I only live with my mother and, well, my dog, but the ideal is always to give the best to those who are with me, so it doesn't cost anything to study a little more”. b) “I still like to travel, I would still like to travel, not only in Chile, no, I would still like to travel around the world and for that, I still need to earn more money, and I know how more or less, it is a sacrifice to spend money to be able to study because I am already paying for this career now, so I know how much it costs, so that is what I intend to do, later on”. c) “For everything you need money. For whatever you want you need money, not only for education, in fact, for pleasures, for living for health.”
Employment	This category refers to the work environment for the study of a postgraduate degree.	a) “An arrow that for us means a new path, a new job, which can be, or a new place to live, changing cities. It can also be an option, which is what it boils down to, to look for a new horizon for academics. And with me, it goes hand in hand with the family”. b) “Already, this is an area of work, and I like the work I do. And well, I also want to continue studying, because I already have a technical career, I am a financial technician and now I am studying

		engineering, and later I want to take some more courses offered by the university, which are free, that will help me to increase my resume and increase my salary because it is not much what I earn without a degree, and that is how it is with everything in the public administration, the more degree you have, the more you earn, so I would like to have a higher position, and that would be more related to my first drawing”. c) “And the third is a door, I believe that studying, having a degree, advancing, opens many doors, doors to work, doors to give you pleasure, also like the kids, it also opens doors to earn a little more in your salary, you achieve a lot (in the) time, then you recover a little time. I know that many people say that time is not recovered, but if you have economic stability, you have your degree, you can make the most of that time and live 100%, and the pleasures, some people like to travel, I like to travel, to have my things, to buy my things, chocolates, many things so, for that reason and all this has a base, there is always a base. My grandmother has always said, she was a person with little education, she went as far as first grade and if she had studied, she would have had much more today”.
Lifestyle	This category refers to the way of life and its relationship with the continuity of postgraduate studies.	a) “I also chose my family because they will always support me and I know that if I am well, they will be well, so if they make me happy by deciding to study a postgraduate course, they will feel happy, and I will be able to share those fruits with them and it will probably motivate me to continue improving myself. And there is always time, no matter how hard you study, you always find the time to dedicate to it. And that time probably does not matter the quantity of time, but the quality. So, we can dedicate ourselves, even if it is only one weekend a month, but it will be worth it and that is important, I feel that they value the time very much when we enjoy it as a family because it is not very often, it is more valued. On the other hand, when you have something very easy, some children don't want to spend time with their parents, they get bored. My daughters, on the contrary, when they see that there is time, they do it by jumping on one leg. They are big girls and that gives me joy, it gives me happiness. And whatever makes my family and me happy, I will do it”. b) “It must also be said, the door opens the door to a better job, to have better stability, it also opens the door to the bank, because if you already have a degree, the

	bank looks at you differently and can access your house, but a mortgage and pay for your house as you work, but it opens the door because if you earn less than \$300,000, you don't even exist for the bank. And it also opens the door and opens the door for you, both for work, as I told you, in the bank so that you can get money, credit for having given you better stability and it also helps you with your tastes, because if you open a door, you have a good job, you will be able to give yourself the pleasure that you did not give yourself before and prioritize because in the end everything in a family, in a family is prioritized. Yes, like this this month, but next month I have to buy less of this because I already have it. And at that moment, when you are already stable, it helps you in everything, the trips with your family, even though I don't have children, I had to mature quickly for my family, so, if you know that what they took care of you or what they raised you with cost you, you have to give it, and that door is the one you are going to open for all your family that comes after you". c) "I think that, for those of us who are older here, we all had a life before, I mean, we all started, I got out of high school and started working and started earning money, I liked it, I liked the money, and I said, why am I going to study, and I went on, but what happened? But what happened? Later I found that the doors were closed because I could not earn more, and being ambitious, I said, no way, how can I not earn more, I started to see and I said to study, because I can earn a little more, so it is clearly that, I think we all did the same, we all left, we started to work and we realized that it was not what we needed, we wanted more".
Knowledge Update This category refers to the possibility of updating and improving in the professional field.	a) "I chose self-realization because, as well as I have developed all this, if now I have grown during all this time studying, knowing, and with the support of my family, with the support of many friends and all this has fulfilled me as a person. I have grown a lot". b) "and I also drew, well, I tried to draw a brain that symbolizes the knowledge that effectively is to always try to be studying Well, knowledge is power, and it is always necessary to know more, not to stay with what we can have today". c) "I believe that knowledge, that is, as if there the decision would be missing, because when one does not make the decision is where it starts, with the decision, and that gives us knowledge, then that knowledge will

		begin to generate everything and money is like part of the fruit of the trunk and the consequences of money, because we can get things with money, but the base I think would be like the decision, the initiative, how we start”.
New Employment Opportunities	This category refers to the possibility of improvement in the work environment, about a postgraduate degree.	a) “Already, this is an area of work, and I like the work I do. And well, I also want to continue studying, because I already have a technical career, I am a financial technician and now I am studying engineering, and later I want to take some more courses offered by the university, which are free, that will help me to increase my resume and increase my salary because it is not much what I earn without a degree, and that is how it is with everything in the public administration, the more degree you have, the more you earn, so I would like to have a higher position, and that would be more related to my first drawing”. b) “And the third is a door, I believe that studying, having a degree, advancing, opens many doors, doors to work, doors to give you pleasure, also like the kids, it also opens doors to earn a little more in your salary, you achieve a lot (in the) time, then you recover a little time. I know that many people say that time is not recovered, but if you have economic stability, you have your degree, you can make the most of that time and live 100%, and the pleasures, some people like to travel, I like to travel, to have my things, to buy my things, chocolates, many things so, for that reason and all this has a base, there is always a base. My grandmother has always said, she was a person with little education, she went as far as first grade and if she had studied, she would have had much more today”. c) “So, studying commercial engineering, while it is true that it will generate a higher income for me, I know that studying a postgraduate degree, for example, will generate a higher salary and that will provide my family with greater stability”.
Postgraduate for Travel	This category refers to an internationalization and travel function in relation to postgraduate studies.	a) “At least from my point of view, I mentioned it because I know these people who have degrees and generally have done a master's degree or postgraduate studies outside the country. So I think that gives something very important to a person in their professional career. So I think that, at least for me, the professors who have studied outside the country, I think that this, at least for me, as the topic, like going abroad, to another country, is like that point, like, like being

	able to do it. Clearly, it opens labor doors for you. But I also believe that getting to know other cultures as well, but also, I mean, learning another language is very important for us commercial engineers. I think that learning another language is very important and you can also acquire that by studying a master's degree or a postgraduate course”. b) “Well, my first drawing is an airplane. I consider that one of my plans is to leave Chile and I think that studying outside of Chile is a great possibility, like first learning another culture and you can grow in many ways. So, it is my priority. Well, if I didn't consider my family, today I live alone with my mom, it's because clearly, the desire is to go away together and then try to study abroad”. c) “There are two things that I like very much, which are traveling and riding a motorcycle, and those who know me, I try to travel as much as possible on my vacations, by car, by car, whatever it is. And well, I have traveled almost all of Chile, from Iquique to Puntarenas, by car and walking and with cousins, with friends and I had a good time, but my dream is to do the same, but on a motorcycle, but not only Chile, but the world. I have seen many reports of travelers who go out alone on a motorcycle, a BM bike, a Tiger, it doesn't matter, and they spend a whole year touring the world, everywhere, they go through the coolest parts, the worst rain, everything. And that would be great. And for that I would like to continue studying, because for that you need lucas (money), to travel”.
Postgraduate Access This category refers to the possibilities of accessing postgraduate studies.	a) “It depends on the area in which you are going to work. I don't know how the issue is that later, of course, I don't know if I have already finished my university career, if I have a master's degree, if I go to study, if I go to a certain line of specific profession to study, to work, but you have to start to realize that there is a year or two years and you realize that I am behind because the area I am working in has already started to change its technology or something new is developing, So, you have to start studying again, but not at the best, with the same intensity that I am now, but you have to add a certain amount of time to be able to keep yourself updated and not be told hey, move aside, and let someone else pass by”. b) “I also considered it a door, because studying a postgraduate degree opens many doors to work, and in

		reality, there are many things that you can open to find what you are looking for, what can give you satisfaction as a person and also in terms of work”. c) “Yes (...) Because if, apart from that, we want to improve academically, we know that with better studies, and better knowledge one can opt for something better, more doors open for you either in the country or you can go abroad, which are the options one can opt for”.
Effects of Studying a Postgraduate Degree	This category refers to the consequences of studying for a postgraduate degree.	a) “This is the first image I made. Which is two trees: one tree, the first tree, which has no fruit, and a second tree with fruit. That reflects like, if I keep studying, I think my harvest is going to be better, I'm going to have more, more fruits on my tree, as well as, I think it's going to be a, a more prosperous life.” b) “It must also be said, the door opens the door to a better job, to have better stability, it also opens the door to the bank, because if you already have a degree, the bank looks at you differently and can access your house, but a mortgage and pay for your house as you work, but it opens the door because if you earn less than \$300,000, you don't even exist for the bank. And it also opens the door and opens the door for you, both for work, as I told you, in the bank so that you can get money, credit for having given you better stability and it also helps you with your tastes, because if you open a door, you have a good job, you will be able to give yourself what you did not have before and prioritize because in the end everything in a family, in a family is prioritized. Yes, like this this month, but next month I have to buy less of this because I already have it. And at that moment, when you are already stable, it helps you in everything, the trips with your family, even though I don't have children, I had to mature quickly for my family, so, if you know that what they took care of you or what they raised you with cost you, you have to give it, and that door is the one you are going to open for all your family that comes after you”. c) “an arrow that for us means a new path, a new job, which can be, or a new place to live, a change of city. It can also be an option, which is what it boils down to, to look for a new horizon for the academic subject. And with me, it goes hand in hand with the family”.
Family Dynamics	This category refers to family support and its	a) “and studying would mean, perhaps, being able to continue improving conditions, but if I had to go back to school or not, it would depend a lot on the support

	relationship to postgraduate studies.	that the family means to me, because if I study now, it is because I have their support, if they had told me no, I would not be studying, simply (...)" b) "The other one is good, it is related to my mother because she has always been the one who has supported me in everything: a big house, a giant one, yes, something that gets lost in the matter, yes, not a small matter, I think most of us have always lived in small houses, and I don't know, always in a small house. Well, it is not so, so, small, because there are only two of us living in the house, but even so, it is a small house. So, sometimes I work as a partner, who does not work, who works, that is, who is, who has already passed this branch, we work as a waiter, already, events in houses, in giant houses to get lost. So that's what it is, it's like studying and continuing to study so as not to lose the thread to reach a related goal, like that, a giant question..." c) "For me, undoubtedly the family. But not only, I am not talking only about my case, for example, about my wife and my two daughters, but I also include the group of friends I have, the, and, rest of the family, my in-laws, cousins, uncle who also, maybe they don't always tell you, but when you are there they give you that support or that pat on the back. Very good compadre, follow him. So that support encourages you to want to fulfill your dream of a trip, to continue to fulfill yourself, to acquire more knowledge, and to do what you want to do. The main base.
Time to Study a Postgraduate Degree	This category refers to the time requirements and demands of studying for a postgraduate degree.	a) "But there's also a time issue, for example, sometimes there are classes on Saturday, and you have them all afternoon, and I get home at four o'clock. and it's kind of like, without a trip to the beach, and that's also a sacrifice." b) "That's what I mean, that not only an issue that is related to some money, having, it was like the time that is going to be spent, if the money as well, and it's going to mean me doing a postgraduate degree, the cost." c) "I don't know, it will depend on each one, how you look at it, because I agree with what my colleague says, that is, the decision to start studying, to start a professional career, that is, I don't know, for university, then to start studying for a master's degree, which is two years again and you will have to invest time again.
Disincentives to Study	This category refers to the limitations	a) "Yes, it's like you compromise some things, and like that, with the money you spend, suddenly, when you

imposed, prevent continuation postgraduate studies.	which the of	pay for college, and you see it at the end of the year, and you realize how much you spent studying, and what you could have done with that money, still... the only thing, the only thing that comforts you, is that you will have a card, and be able to opt for a better job, or a better life. And that also has to do with continuing to study. In other words, it's like a contradiction. b) "Most of us who study, some people, if we decide to study in the evening, it is because strictly speaking we do not have that time during the day because we dedicate it to work and then, in my case, studying has always been very complicated, always, always, because being a housewife, also, because I have to be doing things around the house and work and on top of that I do not miss any of the subjects. So, I had, I ended up with dark circles under my eyes, horrible. However, I could not stay as I said before, so sometimes on Saturdays and Sundays I did not go out anywhere I talked to my family and I told my partner to please take care of the girls this weekend and take them to have a nice time so that they did not deserve to be locked up because mom could not go out, so we compromised and next week I had more rest, so we all went out. But today as a family it is important to have support, in this case from us who have a family, for example. The support of your family was very important because otherwise, I don't think I would have made it if I had had, maybe, I don't know, let's say a partner who didn't support me, who wasn't, I don't know why he was, maybe he wanted to boycott me or things like that, it would probably have cost me more. Then the support of my daughters, of my family. It has been very important. c) "And here in the third one I made a kind of collage or something like that, of several situations and several images that, due to lack of time, maybe, something that I like a lot is to travel, and the university, suddenly, it's very restrictive, long weekends or things like that. And well, also the money, when you pay for college too... it's expensive. I could easily take a good vacation with what I pay for college, so that, too, could be a problem for me to continue studying.
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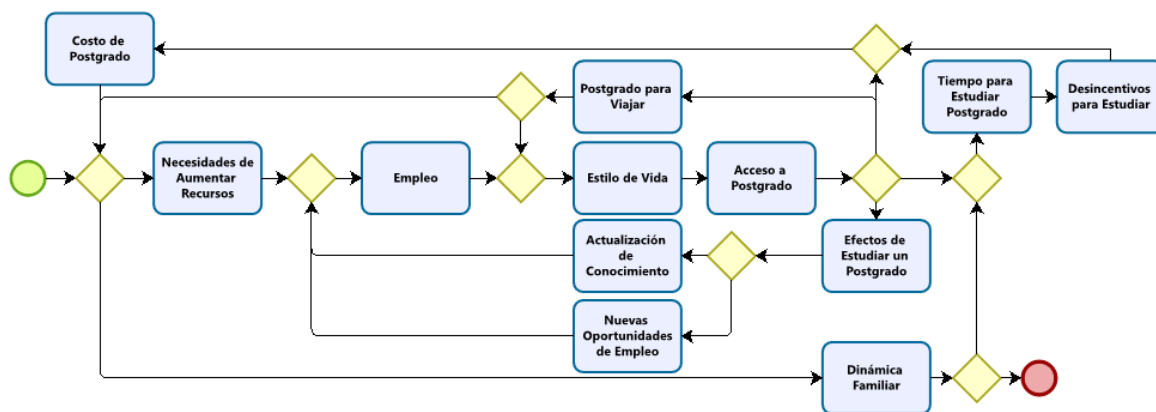
Source: own elaboration.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The categories used to code the discourses of students oriented to pursue continuing studies are used to articulate a mental model that represents the cognitive consensus of the group, which is used to regulate behavior in the research subject. This cognitive consensus is then represented by the following process map indicative of the group mental model in Figure 5, followed by a discussion of its main findings:

Figure 5

Perceptions Process Map



Source: own elaboration.

The mind map representative of the cognitive consensus provides a holistic view of students' perception of continuing graduate study. The map begins with the Cost of Graduate Study, indicating that the costs associated with graduate study are an important initial consideration for students. This cost is directly related to Needs to Increase Resources, suggesting that students may need to increase their financial resources to cover these costs. From here, the map branches off in several directions, each representing a different aspect of the graduate student experience. On the one hand, we have Employment, which connects to New Employment Opportunities and Knowledge Upgrading, indicating that graduate study can improve employment prospects and provide an opportunity to update and upgrade professional skills. On the other hand, we have Lifestyle, which connects to Time to Study a Graduate Degree and Disincentives to Study, suggesting that graduate studies may affect the student's lifestyle and present challenges in terms of time and possible barriers.

In addition, the map also considers Graduate to Travel, indicating that some students may see graduate school as an opportunity to travel or study abroad. This connects to Access to Graduate School, which considers the possibilities of accessing graduate studies. The consequences map concludes with Effects of Graduate Study and Family Dynamics, which consider the consequences of graduate study and how family support may influence this decision. In summary, this conceptual mind map provides a comprehensive view of the factors that students may consider when deciding whether to pursue graduate study. Each student may give different weight to each factor depending on his or her situation and career goals.

CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained provide a solid basis for outlining a mental model representative of the cognitive consensuses identified, which establish connections between various constructs. This mental model, in turn, acts as a conceptual map illustrating the underlying cognitive processes, allowing for a deeper understanding of how students make decisions related to seeking and participating in graduate programs.

In this context, the model reveals how the need to improve and expand resources can be the driving force behind the search for more fulfilling job opportunities. These opportunities, in turn, may be linked to the pursuit of graduate degrees, which is perceived to improve one's lifestyle and advance one's career. The decision to embark on graduate studies is influenced by the perception that this investment in higher education will lead to an updating of knowledge and the creation of new job opportunities. However, this decision-making process does not occur in a vacuum. It is shaped by several contextual factors, such as family dynamics and financial and temporal considerations. For example, the financial costs associated with higher education and the time required to complete a graduate program can act as significant disincentives for some students, even when they recognize the potential long-term benefits.

In conclusion, the findings of this qualitative study have allowed us to delineate a mental model representative of the cognitive consensuses that guide students' decisions about seeking and participating in graduate programs. This model reveals the interconnectedness of various constructs, highlighting how individual needs to improve resources can motivate the pursuit of more fulfilling career opportunities linked to obtaining graduate degrees for lifestyle enhancement and career advancement. However, this decision-making process is influenced by a variety of contextual factors, including family dynamics and financial and temporal considerations, which can act as significant disincentives.

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