

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the limitations of the quantitative approach in explaining the diversity of ways in which individuals experience and understand guidance and counseling practices in the context of education management. The complexity of the experiences of counselors, practitioners, and service participants demands a methodological approach that is able to capture variations in meaning systematically. The purpose of this study is to comprehensively explain phenomenography as a qualitative research approach and analyze the theoretical foundations, methodological principles, data collection procedures, analysis techniques, and reliability criteria relevant to guidance and counseling research. This study uses a qualitative approach based on literature review by critically analyzing the main scientific works on phenomenography and examples of their application in guidance and counseling research. The results of the study show that phenomenography is effective in identifying qualitative variations in the way individuals understand counseling phenomena through the development of hierarchically interconnected description categories, so as to be able to reveal the structure of the collective meaning of a phenomenon. The conclusion of this study confirms that the phenomenographic approach has a significant methodological contribution in enriching research and practice of guidance and counseling, particularly in supporting theory development, service quality improvement, and decision-making based on a deep understanding of human experience in education management.

Keywords: Guidance and Counseling, Qualitative Approach, Phenomenography, Variation of Meaning, Education Management.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh keterbatasan pendekatan kuantitatif dalam menjelaskan keberagaman cara individu mengalami dan memahami praktik bimbingan dan konseling dalam konteks manajemen pendidikan. Kompleksitas pengalaman konselor, praktisi, dan peserta layanan menuntut pendekatan metodologis yang mampu menangkap variasi makna secara sistematis. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menjelaskan secara komprehensif fenomenografi sebagai pendekatan penelitian kualitatif serta menganalisis landasan teoretis, prinsip metodologis, prosedur pengumpulan data, teknik analisis, dan kriteria keterpercayaan yang relevan bagi penelitian bimbingan dan konseling. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis kajian literatur dengan menganalisis secara kritis karya-karya ilmiah utama mengenai fenomenografi dan contoh penerapannya dalam penelitian bimbingan dan konseling. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa fenomenografi efektif dalam mengidentifikasi variasi kualitatif cara individu memahami fenomena konseling melalui pengembangan kategori deskripsi yang saling berhubungan secara hierarkis, sehingga mampu mengungkap struktur makna kolektif suatu fenomena. Kesimpulan penelitian ini

menegaskan bahwa pendekatan fenomenografi memiliki kontribusi metodologis yang signifikan dalam memperkaya penelitian dan praktik bimbingan dan konseling, khususnya dalam mendukung pengembangan teori, peningkatan kualitas layanan, dan pengambilan keputusan berbasis pemahaman mendalam terhadap pengalaman manusia dalam manajemen pendidikan.

Kata kunci: *Bimbingan dan Konseling, Pendekatan Kualitatif, Fenomenografi, Variasi Makna, Manajemen Pendidikan.*

INTRODUCTION

The field of guidance and counseling globally faces increasingly complex challenges as the diversity of students' psychosocial needs increases and the dynamics of the modern educational context (Akdemir, 2023). This complexity demands a research approach that is able to capture subjective experiences, personal meanings, and variations in individual understanding in depth. However, guidance and counseling research is still dominated by quantitative paradigms that tend to emphasize the measurement of variables and causal relationships (Clark-Carter, 2024; Coman et al., 2025). This condition has the potential to limit a holistic understanding of the reality of counseling practices that are contextual and layered.

In the context of education in Indonesia, the practice of guidance and counseling also faces similar problems, especially in understanding the experiences of counselors and service participants in socially and culturally diverse school environments (Wahidah & Karneli, 2025; Alamsyah et al., 2024). A numbers-based approach is often unable to explain how individuals interpret the counseling and educational decision-making process. In fact, education management policies and practices require a basis of understanding sourced from the real experience of service actors. Therefore, qualitative approaches are becoming increasingly relevant to enrich guidance and counseling practices at the local and national levels.

The qualitative approach is based on the assumption that social realities are pluralistic and constructed through human experience (Phillips, 2023). Qualitative research allows researchers to understand how individuals construct meaning to a phenomenon based on their context and social interactions. In the field of guidance and counseling, this approach is considered to be able to explore the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of counselors and service participants more comprehensively (Perron et al., 2023). A number of recent studies confirm that qualitative research contributes significantly to the development of context-based counseling theory and practice (Xiong et al., 2025).

One of the growing and relevant qualitative approaches is phenomenography, which focuses on the qualitative variation in the way individuals experience and understand a phenomenon. Phenomenography has a non-dualistic ontological foundation that views humans and the world as an inseparable unit (Nasif, 2025). In contrast to phenomenology, which seeks to capture the essence of experience, phenomenography emphasizes mapping the differences in collective understanding of certain phenomena. This approach

is considered very suitable for studying guidance and counseling practices that are multifaceted and dynamic (Ibimiluyi & Falana, 2024).

Although phenomenography has been widely used in education and learning research, its application in the field of guidance and counseling is still relatively limited. Most recent research focuses more on phenomenological methods, case studies, or general thematic approaches without explicitly mapping the variation in participants' understanding. In addition, studies that comprehensively discuss phenomenography from theoretical, methodological, and practical aspects in the context of guidance and counseling are still rare. This research gap shows the need for a systematic conceptual study to explain the potential of phenomenography as a valid and relevant alternative research approach.

Based on the background and gaps of the research, the purpose of this study is to examine phenomenography as a qualitative research approach in the field of guidance and counseling. This research specifically aims to explain the theoretical foundations of phenomenography, the underlying methodological principles, data collection and analysis procedures, and the reliability criteria of the research. In addition, this study aims to elaborate on the relevance and application of phenomenography in guidance and counseling studies. Thus, this research is expected to provide a clear methodological understanding for researchers in related fields.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of guidance and counseling research methodologies by introducing phenomenography as an approach that is able to systematically capture variations in the meaning of human experience. This approach enriches the treasure trove of qualitative research by offering a hierarchical description category-based analytical framework. Practically, the findings of this study can be a reference for researchers, educators, and counseling practitioners in designing research and decision-making based on understanding the participants' experiences. Thus, phenomenography has the potential to improve the quality of guidance and counseling services in the context of education management oriented to the real needs of individuals.

METHOD

Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenographic design, which aims to examine the variation in the way individuals understand and experience guidance and counseling practices in the context of education management (Åkerlind, 2025). The phenomenographic approach was chosen because it epistemologically focuses on a second-order perspective, namely how a phenomenon is perceived and interpreted by individuals, not on the phenomenon itself. This design is relevant to uncover the structure of the variation of collective meanings that emerge from the experiences of counselors, practitioners, and stakeholders of guidance and counseling services.

Data Sources and Sampling Techniques

The data source of this research is in the form of scientific literature which includes articles from reputable international journals, academic books, and scientific publications that discuss phenomenography and its application in the field of guidance and counseling (Chigbu et al., 2023). The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, with literature criteria that explicitly discuss theoretical foundations, methodological principles, data collection, phenomenographic analysis, and qualitative research reliability issues (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). This strategy is used to ensure that the analyzed data is conceptually rich and relevant to the research objectives.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is carried out through documentation studies and systematic literature reviews of scientific sources published in a certain time frame and have a direct relationship with the research focus. This process involves the identification, selection, and critical review of relevant academic documents (Farrukh & Sajjad, 2023). The data collected include the core concepts of phenomenography, data collection procedures, analysis techniques, as well as examples of their application in guidance and counseling research. The validity of the source is maintained by selecting publications from indexed international journals and credible academic publishers.

Research Procedure

The research procedure is carried out gradually and systematically. The initial stage begins with the formulation of the focus of the study and the determination of the keywords of the literature search. The next stage includes the selection and grouping of data sources based on the suitability of the topic and their scientific contributions. After that, an in-depth reading and recording of key findings were carried out to identify variations in understanding phenomenography in the context of guidance and counseling. The entire research process is transparently documented to ensure traceability and consistency of analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using phenomenographic analysis, which aims to identify and classify qualitative variations in the way phenomenography is understood and applied in guidance and counseling research. The analysis process is iterative, starting from the grouping of similar meanings, comparisons between findings, to the preparation of hierarchically interrelated description categories. The final result of the analysis is manifested in the form of a result space that represents the structure of the variation of the collective meaning. To support the accuracy of the analysis, the researcher used structured manual recording and the help of scientific reference management software in the process of organizing the data (Donner, 2023).

Research Reliability

The reliability of research is maintained by referring to the four main criteria of qualitative research, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bang, 2024). Credibility is achieved through consistency between research objectives, data sources, and analytical techniques. The transferability is supported by the presentation of context and a detailed methodological description. Dependability is maintained through systematic documentation of research procedures, while confirmability is achieved by ensuring that findings come from the data being analyzed, not from the researchers' assumptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Effectiveness of Phenomenography in Uncovering the Variation in the Meaning of Guidance and Counseling Practices

The results of the study show that the phenomenographic approach is effective in identifying qualitative variations in the way individuals understand and experience guidance and counseling practices. Through a phenomenographic analysis of the scientific literature, it was found that the meaning of counseling practices is not singular, but is formed from various perspectives that are structurally interrelated. These findings confirm that counseling experiences are understood differently by counselors, practitioners, and educational stakeholders, depending on the context, professional experience, and conceptual framework used. This variation cannot be adequately explained through a quantitative approach that tends to reduce experience to a measurable variable. Thus, phenomenography offers a more appropriate approach to capturing the complexity of meaning in guidance and counseling practice.

Methodologically, the results of this study show that phenomenography is able to produce a category of description that represents differences in how to understand the phenomenon of counseling qualitatively (Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2022). These categories do not stand alone, but are logically and hierarchically interconnected, thus forming a structure of collective understanding. This structure allows researchers to see shifts in the level of understanding, from simple conceptions to more complex conceptions. These findings are in line with the view Åkerlind (2025) which states that the main goal of phenomenography is to uncover the variations of human experience in a structured way. Therefore, these results support the relevance of phenomenography as a qualitative research design in the context of education management and counseling services.

The effectiveness of phenomenography in this study can also be seen from its ability to identify distinguishing aspects between categories of understanding. These aspects reflect differences in focus, depth of reflection, and orientation of practice in guidance and counseling. By identifying these differentiating aspects, researchers can explain why one way of understanding counseling practices is qualitatively different from another. These findings are important because they provide a conceptual foundation for the development of more adaptive and contextual counseling practices.

Previous research has also shown that the identification of variations in meaning contributes to improving the quality of professional practice (Braun & Clarke, 2023). When compared to previous research, these results reinforce the finding that phenomenography excels in uncovering the structure of collective meaning in the context of education and human services. Recent international studies show that phenomenography is increasingly being used to understand complex professional practices, including in the field of counseling and career development (Wardak et al., 2024). The main difference of this study with previous studies lies in its focus which explicitly places phenomenography as a viable methodological approach to the field of guidance and counseling. Thus, this research fills a research gap that is still limited in the contemporary literature.

Overall, the findings on this theme explain the contribution of phenomenography in uncovering variations in understanding counseling practices. These results show that phenomenography serves not only as a qualitative data analysis method, but also as a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of meaning in guidance and counseling practices. These findings form the basis for further discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the use of phenomenography in counseling research and practice in the educational environment.

Hierarchical Structure of Category Description as a Representation of Collective Meaning

The results of the phenomenographic analysis show that the categories of the resulting description have a clear and systematic hierarchical structure. This structure reflects the level of complexity of an individual's understanding of guidance and counseling practices. At a basic level, understanding tends to focus on the procedural and technical aspects of counseling services. At a higher level, understanding develops towards conceptual reflection and the integration of professional values in counseling practice. This hierarchical structure shows that the understanding of the phenomenon of counseling is developed and dynamic.

These findings indicate that variations in understanding are not random, but rather organized in specific patterns that can be analyzed systematically. Phenomenography allows researchers to identify these patterns through an iterative analysis process that compares meanings between data sources (Guisasola et al., 2023). These results support a phenomenographic non-dualistic ontological assumption that views the relationship between individuals and phenomena as a single entity (Lazarevska, 2022). Thus, the hierarchical structure of the description category represents the collective way individuals interpret counseling practices in the context of education management.

In the context of guidance and counseling research, this hierarchical structure has important implications for the development of theory and practice. The findings suggest that counsellors' understanding of their practice can vary widely, and these differences affect the quality of services provided. Previous studies have confirmed that more

complex understandings tend to result in practices that are more reflective and responsive to the needs of service participants (Hudyma et al., 2024). Therefore, the results of this study provide an empirical basis for the development of counselor training programs that are oriented towards improving the quality of conceptual understanding.

When compared to phenomenographic research in other fields, the hierarchical structure found in this study shows similarity in patterns. International research in the context of higher education and professional development has also found that description categories generally range from simple understanding to more comprehensive understanding (Zhang et al., 2022). However, the contribution of this research lies in its application in the context of guidance and counseling, which is still relatively rarely studied using a phenomenographic approach.

Thus, the results on this theme confirm that the hierarchical structure of the description category is the main scientific finding that answers the research question. The structure not only illustrates the variations of understanding, but also provides insight into the direction of development of counseling practices. These findings reinforce the argument that phenomenography has significant methodological value in qualitative research of guidance and counseling.

Methodological Implications and Phenomenographic Contribution to the Development of Guidance and Counseling Science

The results of this study show that phenomenography makes a significant methodological contribution to guidance and counseling research. This approach allows researchers to systematically examine human experience without reducing the complexity of meaning. The findings suggest that phenomenography is able to bridge the gap between theory and practice by uncovering how counseling concepts are understood in real contexts. This is in line with the goals of qualitative research that emphasizes a deep understanding of social phenomena and education (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, the results of this study strengthen the position of phenomenography as a relevant approach to developing experiential guidance and counseling theory. By uncovering variations in collective meaning, phenomenography provides an empirical basis for reconstructing more contextual theoretical concepts. These findings support the view that theories in guidance and counseling should be developed from an understanding of the real-life experiences of practitioners and service participants (Sue, et al., 2022).

Practically, the results of this study show that the use of phenomenography can help counseling practitioners reflect on their practices more critically. By understanding the variation in perspectives on counseling practices, practitioners can identify their own positions of understanding and develop more adaptive practices. Previous research has shown that reflection based on the results of qualitative research contributes to improving the quality of professional services (Ramos et al., 2022). Therefore, phenomenography has great potential to support deep understanding-based decision-making.

Nonetheless, the study also identified some limitations, especially related to reliance on literature data and not directly involving field empirical data. These limitations can affect the breadth of the variations in meaning identified. However, the phenomenographic literature review approach still makes an important contribution as a conceptual and methodological basis for further research. Further research is suggested to combine phenomenography with empirical data collection to enrich the findings.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that phenomenography is a feasible and relevant qualitative approach for guidance and counseling research. The resulting scientific findings support the research objectives and make significant theoretical and practical contributions. Thus, this research provides a solid foundation for the development of future guidance and counseling research and practices.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that phenomenography is a qualitative research approach that is relevant and suitable for use in the field of guidance and counseling, especially in the context of education management. Through a systematic literature review, phenomenography has been proven to be able to reveal qualitative variations in the way individuals understand and experience counseling practices in a structured manner through the development of hierarchical description categories. These findings answer the research objectives by showing that phenomenography makes a significant methodological contribution in enriching theoretical understanding and supporting the development of human experience-based guidance and counseling practices. Thus, this approach has the potential to be a strong methodological alternative for further research, especially to generate more contextual and reflective decision-making and service quality improvement.

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