Beyond the Screen: The Lived Experiences of College Seminarians Facing Speaking Anxiety in Online English Classes

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ABSTRACT. This study investigated the speaking anxiety experienced by college seminarians in online English classes. The research aimed to describe the causes, effects, and coping strategies related to this anxiety. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and peer debriefing with nine purposively sampled participants. The analysis identified key themes such as fear of judgment, lack of confidence, and negative teaching styles as primary causes of anxiety. Manifestations included increased use of fillers, stuttering, and avoidance behaviors. Participants employed coping mechanisms like positive self-talk, regular practice, and prayer. The study concludes that supportive teaching practices significantly reduce speaking anxiety. Practically, the findings suggest that educators should create positive, interactive learning environments to alleviate anxiety and enhance language acquisition. Future research should explore speaking anxiety in diverse educational contexts and develop targeted interventions to mitigate this issue further.

1.0. Introduction

Online learning has become a widespread mode of education, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted the traditional face-to-face classroom environment. Online learning offers learners flexibility, accessibility, and diverse learning opportunities, but it also poses some challenges and drawbacks, such as technical issues, lack of feedback, isolation, and anxiety (Hodges et al., 2020; Mishra et al., 2020; Derakhshandeh & Esmaeili, 2020; Ecang & Petalla, 2022). Anxiety is a common psychological phenomenon that can affect learners' motivation, engagement, performance, and language acquisition in online settings (Veletsianos & Houlden, 2019; Aydin, 2018; Hurd & Xiao, 2010; Pichette, 2009; Hurd, 2007).

Anxiety can be especially detrimental for language learners who need to develop their speaking skills, which are essential for communication and expression (Celce-Murcia & McIntosh, 1991). Speaking anxiety, also known as glossophobia or public speaking anxiety, refers to the fear or nervousness experienced by individuals when they have to talk in front of an audience, either in person or online (McCarthy, 2019). Speaking anxiety can manifest in various ways, such as physical symptoms, cognitive distortions, emotional reactions, and behavioral avoidance (Grieve et al., 2021). Speaking anxiety can negatively affect learners' speaking performance, fluency, confidence, and self-efficacy, as well as their overall language learning outcomes (Habisbuan & Irzawati, 2019; Blegur et al., 2018; Putra et al., 2023; Azizifar et al., 2014; Damayanti & Listyani, 2020; Humaera &Pramustiara, 2022).

Speaking anxiety can also vary depending on the characteristics of the online learning environment, such as the mode of communication, the type of assessment, the level of interaction, and the use of technology (Li et al., 2020; Gkonou et al., 2017; Sari, 2022; Cavanagh, 2019; Lisnawati et al., 2019; Bárkányi, 2021). For example, some learners may feel more anxious when speaking in real-time (synchronous) mode than in delayed (asynchronous) mode or when speaking in front of a large group rather than in a small group or individually. Some learners may also feel more anxious when they have to use unfamiliar or unreliable technology or when they have to face high-stakes assessments or evaluations.

Speaking anxiety is particularly relevant for seminary students preparing to become pastors, preachers, and teachers in their future vocations. These roles require them to deliver effective and

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impactful messages, lead prayers and counseling, and communicate complex theological ideas and arguments to diverse audiences and contexts (Yue et al., 2021; De Lange & Mulder, 2017). Therefore, seminary students must develop strong communication skills and overcome their speaking anxiety to fulfill their calling and serve their congregations and students with compassion and excellence. However, seminary students may face additional challenges and pressures in their online language learning, such as the academic burden, the uncertainty about their future, the isolation from social interaction, and the adaptation to new teaching, learning, and assessment methods (Wang & Zhao, 2020; Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Rajkumar, 2020; Cao et al., 2020; Chen, 2010; Russell, 2020). These factors may exacerbate their speaking anxiety and hinder their language acquisition and performance.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to describe the speaking anxiety experienced by college seminarians in online English classes. Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to understand and interpret the meaning and essence of human experiences within their context and culture (van Manen, 2023). The study focused on the lived experiences of seminarians, exploring how they made sense of, coped with and overcame their anxiety. The central research question was: What does it mean for college seminarians to experience speaking anxiety in online English classes? The study sought to uncover the reasons behind this anxiety and the strategies used to cope with it.

This study holds significant social value as it sheds light on the unique challenges faced by seminary college students experiencing speaking anxiety in online English classes. By exploring their lived experiences, the research provides insights into the psychological and emotional hurdles these seminarians encounter, fostering a deeper understanding of their struggles. The findings can inform educators and institutions on how to create more supportive and inclusive online learning environments. Finally, the study hopes to motivate seminarians to overcome their speaking anxiety and develop their communication skills, which are vital for personal, academic, and professional growth and success.

2.0. Methodology

Research Design. This qualitative study employed hermeneutic phenomenology to explore participants' experiences with speaking anxiety (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). This approach aimed to understand the lived experiences and meaning-making processes behind speaking anxiety (Smith et al., 2013). Researchers interpreted participants' experiences through their understanding of the phenomenon (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). By examining internal and external experiences, the study gained insights into the learning aspects of speaking anxiety in classrooms (Fuster, 2019). This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of speaking anxiety, uncovering its significance and pedagogical elements (van Manen, 2016).

Participants and Sampling. This study investigated the speaking anxiety of college seminarians. Purposive sampling (Creswell, 2013) identified nine participants experiencing speaking anxiety, as recommended by their English teacher and confirmed during pre-study sessions with prospective participants. All nine participants were full-time students enrolled in "Purposive Communication," a regular course designed to develop effective communication skills, particularly in public speaking. Despite the course focus, these students exhibited anxiety even during class discussions. This selection method ensured that participants had "lived" the experience of speaking anxiety in a relevant context (van Manen, 2016).

Data Collection Techniques and Procedure. To gather rich data, interviews, and observations were employed. This phenomenological study utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews as its primary data collection technique. Using an interview protocol, each participant was interviewed at least twice via video conferencing software. Additionally, virtual classroom observations were conducted, aligning with the assertion that "the backbone of qualitative research is the extensive collection of data from multiple sources," such as interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials. "[S]ome phenomenological studies involve varied sources of data, including poems, observations, and documents" (Creswell, 2013, pp. 45, 52, 79). Since the online classes on Zoom were recorded, these recordings were used for virtual class observations with the aid of an observational protocol (Creswell, 2013). The protocol focused on the seminarians' body language, voice and speech, verbal content, technological challenges, and engagement with the audience during impromptu speeches, speech readings, peer discussions, and Q&A sessions with their English teachers. Data collection via semi-structured interviews and virtual classroom observations continued until data saturation was reached, ensuring no new information emerged and providing a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon. Speech style analysis utilized Jeffersonian transcription, capturing details of participants' actions and expressions to better understand their speaking anxiety experiences (Jefferson, 2004). Overall, interview transcripts and observation notes constituted the data for this study.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Data Analysis. This analysis followed Fuster's (2019) approach to interpreting lived experiences. It involved analyzing interview transcripts and observation notes to understand the essence of participants' experiences. The analysis began with selective coding, where transcripts were read repeatedly, and key phrases revealing the core issues were circled. The next step was searching for thematic units; each word or group of words was analyzed to understand its contribution to the overall experience (Van Manen, 2023). Thematic units were identified based on this analysis. The third step was determining central themes. At this point, the thematic units were examined, and redundancies were removed. The central theme of each unit was determined using clear and concise language. Integration of themes followed; this was the most crucial step. All central themes were combined into a single theme that captured the essence of the participants' experiences about the research question. Finally, generating the general structure involved integrating individual experiences into a single description that captured the overall structure of speaking anxiety for the entire group. This culminated in a "phenomenological text" - a rich description of the participants' experiences (Van Manen, 2023; Ayala, 2008 cited in Fuster, 2019). This text was then compared to existing research for further understanding.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, member checking, audit trail, and triangulation were employed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confidentiality was maintained by identifying participants with random tags (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Ethical Considerations. This study balanced high-quality research with participant protection. After obtaining informed consent, participants were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of all information they provided. Details such as names and locations were excluded. The purpose of the study and the data usage were clearly explained to them. Participants were informed they could withdraw at any stage if they felt uncomfortable. Sensitive data were deleted or securely disposed of after the study.

3.0. Results and Discussion

The results section of this paper highlights three common central themes and the individual physiognomies (particular structures) of the participants in the study, whose lived experiences centered on their speaking anxiety. This section underscores the overall physiognomy or general structure, which constitutes the essence of the phenomenon under study—speaking anxiety of college seminarians, providing an answer to the central question. Illustrative extracts from the interview transcripts and observation notes are presented to support the central themes.

Why College Seminarians Experience Speaking Anxiety When Speaking English in Their Online Classes

Physiognomy A: Causes of Speaking Anxiety

The study uncovered from the analysis of the interview transcripts and observation notes a key theme described as "Experiencing Speaking Anxiety" that has two physiognomies: "Causes" and "Manifestations" (Table 1).

Table 1
Their experience of speaking anxiety

Central Theme	Physiognomies	Categories
I. Experience of Speaking Anxiety	A. Causes of Speaking Anxiety	1. Fear of being judged 2. Lack of confidence 3. Teacher as a factor
	B. Manifestations of Speaking Anxiety	1. Trembling hands 2. Frozen body 3. Mental block

The causes of speaking anxiety include fear of judgment, mistakes, and lack of preparation, which affect self-confidence. The manifestations include nervous habits, physical changes, hesitations, and eye contact problems. Anxiety during public speaking is quite common among diverse groups, and several factors contribute to it, as confirmed by participants' experiences in the study.

Fear of being judged. The study found that speaking anxiety among college seminarians caused by fear of being judged or criticized for errors, pronunciation, or grammar affected their self-confidence and led them to compare themselves to more fluent peers. They felt nervous, self-conscious, and hesitant to communicate verbally in online classes. During class observations, this nervousness was evident through their stammering. The excerpts below illustrate their fear of being judged.

> Extract 1:
> Participant 3: It's like I get flustered or that I might be judged. Also, the more I worry about grammar and the way my accent sounds, the more mistakes I make. The more I also can't think properly.

Grammatical and pronunciation errors increased speaking anxiety and impaired effective communication. Participants worried about being judged or corrected for their language mistakes, which affected their confidence and fluency.

Lack of Confidence. Speech anxiety also stems from insecurity and lack of confidence. Participants compared themselves to fluent peers. Teachers' expectations and feedback also affected their anxiety. The excerpt that follows reveals a participant's insecurity.

> Extract 2:
> Participant 6: When there is someone who [is] extremely good and fluent [in] English in the class, I find myself saying "Wow", he is good" like that I look down [upon] myself.

The Teacher as a Factor. The teacher's actions significantly influence learners' speaking anxiety. The transcript shows how teachers can create anxiety by judging, criticizing students, and setting very high standards. Participants feared speaking English to competent teachers and fluent peers. This is evident in the excerpts below.

> Extract 3:
> Participant 1: Students are afraid to speak English because the teacher is excellent. [teachers are] a teacher not a judge; they [should not] judge students… it is like when judging, it is more on criticizing.
>
> Participant 3: Expectation probably of the teacher… if [students] failed to give the correct answers [they were] asked to sit down immediately. And then you are compared to others who are better… The teacher's standards are very high.

Physiognomy B: Manifestations of Speaking Anxiety

The study revealed that trembling hands, a frozen body, and mental blocks are common manifestations of speaking anxiety among college seminarians.

Trembling hands. Speaking anxiety can cause physical symptoms such as trembling, sweating, a racing heartbeat, and palpitations, as well as behavioral signs like scribbling, twitching, and avoiding eye contact. Participants 3 and 4 exhibited physical symptoms. The excerpts below illustrate how speaking anxiety manifested through trembling hands.

> Extract 4:
> Participant 3: I can feel my heartbeat beating so fast, and then while I am speaking, I cannot feel anything anymore**;** my hands are trembling and shaking.
>
> Participant 4: My hands are shaking, and I am starting to sweat.

Frozen body. Comparing the individual to a statue or a frozen body illustrates the experience of college seminarians when they had momentary paralysis, unable to progress in their speech. This freezing reaction is common when anxiety triggers the fight-or-flight response, causing a noticeable pause in motion and verbal expression, as demonstrated in excerpt 5. Participant 7 compared himself to a statue when he froze during the presentation of his report.

> Extract 5:
> Participant 7: The worst case was becoming like a statute in front… having stage fright… because of that I failed to elaborate [on] the report and just cried.

On the other hand, observation notes revealed that Participant 6 appeared frozen and confused during speech activity.

Mental Block. Several participants experienced a mental block during public speaking, which arises from a mix of performance pressure, fear of embarrassment, and innate nervousness about addressing a crowd. Participant 2's behavior and expressions below exemplify this concept.

> Extract 6:
> Participant 1: It is the experience of a mental block [and on my mind, I would say] "What will I say next?"
>
> Participant 2: If [I am] unprepared, [my mind] blocks out.

Table 2
How college seminarians make sense of their speaking anxiety

Central Theme	Physiognomies	Categories
II.Making Sense of Speaking Anxiety	A. Personal Challenges in Speaking Anxiety	1. Use of fillers and stuttering 2. Language errors
	B. External Influences on Speaking Anxiety	1. Audience Expectation 2. Discriminations

The observation notes confirmed that Participant 2 displayed symptoms of anxiety and difficulty, including signs of mental blocks, delayed responses, and popping knuckles.

How seminarians made sense of their speaking anxiety

The second central theme from analyzing the interview transcript and observation notes was "Making Sense of Speaking Anxiety." Two significant physiognomies of this theme were identified: "Personal Challenges in Speaking Anxiety" and "External Influences on Speaking Anxiety." Table 2 presents the central theme, these two physiognomies, and their respective categories.

Physiognomy A. Personal Challenges in Speaking Anxiety

The use of fillers, stuttering, and language errors constituted the personal challenges that participants in the study encountered when they experienced speaking anxiety.

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Use of Fillers and Stuttering. Participants used verbal fillers such as "ahh" and "heh heh" to manage nervousness, highlighting the challenge of recalling the next parts of their speech. These fillers acted as linguistic buffers, reflecting their efforts to navigate speaking anxiety while maintaining verbal flow. Observation notes revealed that Participant 4 struggled with using fillers, unfinished thoughts, unsteady eyes, and constantly looking around. Additionally, participants described how anxiety manifested as stuttering and difficulty with words, indicating a mental barrier that hindered clear expression. This often led to feelings of irritation and self-doubt during public speaking.

> Extract 7:
> Participant 5: It is like I am starting to stutter, stumbling over words . . . Oh no, what am I saying?

Language Errors. Participants admitted that public speaking in English often leads to a loss of vocabulary and knowledge, attributing this to nervousness. They compared this to private prayer in English, which is less challenging than recalling words and forming sentences in public. Participant 2 emphasized how anxiety can affect linguistic readiness, noting that stress can disrupt the articulation of thoughts and lead to grammar mistakes. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9 expressed a desire to stop using English due to traumatic experiences or feelings of shame caused by language errors.

> Extract 8:
> Participant 2: . . . the thought that [what you wanted to say] to say disappears because anxiety has overtaken you [and your] grammar is wrong, the flow of thoughts of the main idea is also incorrect.

Physiognomy B: External Influences on Speaking Anxiety

Audience expectations, social biases, and discrimination were the external influences on speaking anxiety that the participants in the study experienced.

Audience Expectations. Participants expressed concern about making mistakes when speaking English, which made them hesitant to use the language. The fear of being judged by others, including classmates, was prominent. For example, Participant 5 recounted getting distracted by classmates' mockery during speeches, which was confirmed in the observation notes. Participant 8's experiences further exemplify this issue, reflected in their excerpts and demeanor.

> Extract 9:
> Participant 3: Many people are listening, many looking at you, and then the expectation of the teacher. Then, included are the grades, pressure also from grades.
>
> Participant 5: I get distracted… [by] people's eyes, especially of my friends. It is like they tease you when you are reciting.

Discriminations. English was considered difficult, and the participants tried to avoid learning it due to their background and upbringing, where bias and discrimination heightened their fear and difficulty in public speaking. Teachers assumed that seminarians had excellent oral and written English proficiency, a bias that contributed to their speaking anxiety. Participant 9 expressed concerns about the impact of his tribal accent on his English pronunciation, which resulted in a traumatic episode of bullying. His tribal accent was confirmed in the observation notes.

> Extract 10:
> Participant 7: That thought that you need to have perfect grammar… it is also the pressure [that contributes to my speaking anxiety].
>
> Participant 9: I belong to a tribe; it affects so my tone, the way I speak, the pronunciation of words… I get bullied.

Coping with their speaking anxiety in online learning

The third central theme that emerged from the interview transcript analysis and observation notes was "Coping with Speaking Anxiety". Two significant physiognomies of this theme were identified: "Coping Strategies" and "Learning Environment." Table 3 presents the central theme, these two physiognomies, and their respective categories.

Table 3
Coping with their anxiety when speaking English in class

Central Theme	Physiognomy	Categories
III. Coping with Speaking Anxiety	A. Coping Strategies	1. Positive thinking 2. Practice 3. Prayer and trust in God
	B. Learning Environment	1. Classroom games 2. Supportive environment and peer teaching 3. Teacher'sroleand engagement

Physiognomy A. Coping Strategies

Positive thinking, practice, prayer, and trust in God were the coping strategies that the participants in the study employed when they experienced speaking anxiety.

Positive Thinking. Common coping strategies included positive self-talk, as narrated by Participant 1, who highlighted positive thinking and conversational understanding. Participant 3 emphasized learning and self-comfort over anxiety. Meanwhile, Participant 4 sought to boost confidence by recognizing their skills and trusting their performance. Humor and intentionally smiling were common approaches; Participants 1 and 4 used jokes and smiles to reduce speaking anxiety. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 demonstrated a positive and mature attitude toward making mistakes. They coped by seeking feedback, accepting correction, learning from errors, viewing mistakes as part of the learning process, and not fearing judgment.

> Extract 11:
> Participant 1: Making sudden jokes helps me feel less anxious when speaking English. I also put on a smiley face.
>
> Participant 4: . . . instead of focusing on my fear, I will focus more [on] the presentation. I am not going to think that I am not nervous.
>
> Participant 3: It is okay, but I will still listen to the corrections. And that is really how it is, especially for teachers. And that is their job, to teach.
>
> Participant 5: [I thank them] for correcting me because it's a part of life to make mistakes. I am grateful for your guidance even though I do make mistakes.

Practice. As highlighted by Participants 3, 4, and 5, preparation and rehearsal were key factors, demonstrated by their focus on pre-class book reading and material revision. Participant 3 underscored the significance of regular interaction and consistent daily practice for English proficiency, recommending an approach that extends beyond academic study to include active everyday participation. Participants 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 used breathing techniques to soothe anxiety before engaging in conversation.

> Extract 12:
> Participant 5: I will pause, and then I will practice [using] tongue twister.
>
> Participant 4: Breathe deeply, inhale, exhale, and then close your eyes, and then after that, take another breath before speaking in front for real.
>
> Participant 3: . . . For daily communication or to speak English, it's really about practice, not just wanting or casual studying. Practice vocabulary… keep adding vocabulary in English. For me, what I do is read.

Prayer and Trust in God. Participants 1, 4, and 9 included a spiritual element in their coping strategies, specifically prayer. They found comfort, fortitude, and direction by aligning their thoughts and actions with their spiritual beliefs. This approach helped them manage their emotions and provided a sense of meaning and higher connection, leading to a more assured and tranquil presence during public speaking events. The final coping strategy described by the participants was their dependence on God, placing much of their assurance in divine support. Participants 1 and 4 credited their confident speaking abilities to the guidance they received from God, as illustrated in the following excerpts.

> Extract 13:
> Participant 1: But for me, the Lord will give me wisdom on what to say. Of course, the audience is only the Lord.

> The wisdom that we pray comes from the word of God.
>
> Participant 4: I rely on the Lord on what he can grant me. I let the Lord take care of me… in every presentation. I will say, "Lord, please help me. I hope I can get through this."
>
> Participant 9: Prayer is really powerful. Every time I speak in public or anywhere, it's prayers that guide me.

Learners use various strategies to manage language apprehensions, such as positive self-talk, memory recall with pauses, and breathing techniques. They embrace corrections, practice consistently, and rely on prayer and faith. Some participants maturely recognize errors as part of learning and actively seek feedback. They aim to prepare for future roles as pastors and educators who require public speaking. These narratives provide insights into addressing speaking anxieties in different contexts.

Physiognomy B: Learning Environment

Classroom games, a supportive environment, peer teaching, and the teacher's role and engagement constituted the learning environment that helped reduce the speaking anxiety experienced by the participants in the study.

Games in Class. Participant 2 suggested that an interactive and dynamic teaching style, including using questions and games during lessons, is more impactful for boosting engagement. Participants believed that classroom games could improve learning by making them more interested in the language and reducing their speaking anxiety. The use of classroom games was supported by the observation notes and evidenced by the excerpts that follow.

> Extract 14:
> Participant 2…the interactiveness with questions being asked is fun, but it can also be nerve-wracking not being able to answer, but it can keep the attention of many.
>
> Participant 5: Maybe we could have [some games] in class. Students enjoy class more when it is lively, and that's where we learn more.
>
> Participant 8: Making occasional activities lightens the mood of students, even small games or interactions… it lessens stress.

Supportive Environment and Peer Teaching. Participants highlighted the importance of communication, interaction, and peer support in language learning. Group discussions, dialogues with fellow learners, and peer teaching were seen as crucial for improvement and reducing anxiety. Emotional support and dynamic teaching styles, including classroom games, were also emphasized. Peer teaching fostered mutual support, engagement, and a positive self-perception, with students providing feedback and grades to classmates in activities, promoting a nurturing atmosphere and valuable feedback for improvement.

> Extract 15:
> Participant 1: It is really helpful for us classmates to speak in English, so if we have conversations in the class… when you always talk to someone in English, you will learn more if you are using the language.
>
> Participant 5: … as a class, if someone is falling behind, we should help each other improve… [teach one another].
>
> Participant 9: Remind them . . . who are the students that you can rely on to help them.

Participants suggested peer discussions, extensive vocabulary practice, and compassionate correction as enjoyable and educational approaches. They preferred expressing themselves freely without the pressure of perfection.

Teacher's Role and Engagement. Teachers play a crucial role in alleviating students' speaking anxiety by offering constructive feedback, as noted by Participant 1. Participants 3 and 4 highlighted the importance of demonstrating empathy and understanding and avoiding an atmosphere of intimidation. Additionally, Participants 6 and 7 emphasized the significance of teachers being well-informed, enthusiastic, and maintaining a positive outlook, as illustrated in the following excerpts.

> Extract 16:
> Participant 1: So, it is better for the teacher to correct me but not in a harsh way like "Ah that is wrong!" … the teacher must be supportive but at the same time strict as well.
>
> Participant 3: Every teacher should . . . have a heart for their students, approach through observing, be aware of the situation and surroundings. This way, they will not be ignorant of what is happening to the students.

General Structure of the Essence of Speaking Anxiety

The study explored the speaking anxiety experienced by college seminarians in online English classes through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The central theme identified was "Experiencing Speaking Anxiety," which was divided into two main aspects: causes and manifestations. The causes included fear of judgment, lack of confidence, and teacher influence. Participants feared being judged for errors in pronunciation and grammar, which affected their self-confidence and led to nervousness and hesitation. Insecurity and comparisons with more fluent peers, along with teachers' high expectations and critical feedback, heightened this anxiety. Manifestations of speaking anxiety included physical symptoms like trembling hands and sweating, mental blocks that made it difficult to recall and articulate thoughts, and behavioral signs such as stuttering, use of fillers, and avoidance of eye contact.

College seminarians identified personal challenges and external influences that shaped their anxiety. Personal challenges included using fillers, stuttering, and language errors, while external influences involved audience expectations, social biases, and discrimination. To cope with their anxiety, participants employed strategies such as positive thinking, regular practice, and spiritual support through prayer and trust in God. A supportive learning environment, including classroom games, peer teaching, and teacher engagement, was essential in reducing speaking anxiety. Interactive and dynamic teaching styles, emotional support, and constructive feedback from teachers helped create a nurturing atmosphere. Overall, the study highlighted the complex interplay of personal and external factors in speaking anxiety and emphasized the importance of supportive strategies and environments in helping seminarians manage and overcome their anxiety.

Discussion

The research explores the crux of English-speaking anxiety among college seminarians through a hermeneutic-phenomenological lens, examining their subjective views and lived experiences. It identifies four primary anxiety triggers: concern over judgments from others, self-confidence deficit, teacher influence, and digital communication unease, referencing prior studies (Humaera & Pramustiara, 2022; Shi, 2015; Damayanti & Listyani, 2020) alongside seminarians' accounts. The paper delves into how this anxiety expresses itself—through shakiness, nervousness, mental blanks, and linguistic mistakes—and its repercussions on speech coherence and mastery (ChegeNdumia & KirimiIreri, 2018). Also highlighted are the internal and external hurdles that challenge seminarians in managing speaking anxiety, which encompasses self-doubt, evasion, anticipation of the audience, societal prejudices, and peer intimidation (Mesri et al., 2017; Daud, 2019).

Furthermore, this study examines coping mechanisms for dealing with speaking apprehension's internal and external barriers, influencing proficiency. Internally, the learners grapple with coherence disruption and excessive use of fillers leading to stutters, harsh self-evaluation, language blunders, and avoidance—each contributing to speech disfluency. Utilizing sources like Erdiana et al. (2020), Abdullah and Mohammed (2023), Foundas et al. (2013), ChegeNdumia and KirimiIreri (2018), and Marzec-Stawiarska (2014), it clarifies how these issues impede effective communication. Externally, learner challenges stem from public expectations, social disparities, and verbal harassment, underscoring the need for supportive, inclusive environments that negate prejudice and bring down learners' anxiety (Daud, 2019).

Moreover, the article illustrates various strategies that seminarians employ to combat speaking anxiety, including constructive self-dialogue, mindful pausing, breathing techniques, consistent practice, embracing missteps, and spiritual reliance through prayer, referencing authors such as Landkroon et al. (2022), Bodie (2010), Forbes and Leitzelar (2019), Lightbown and Spada (2013), and Groover (2020). It cites correction acceptance and emotional growth as key defensive tactics against speaking anxiety, showcasing the positive impact of embracing mistakes for better resilience and language learning.

The research stresses the importance of crafting exposure-rich activities conducive to English-speaking practice in educational scenarios. Proposing leisure-based practices for a more low-pressure environment as suggested by Djahimo (2018), supporting Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) and Horwitz (2010) on language immersion, and advocating diverse teaching methods, backed by Hew and Cheung (2010). Hattie and Timperley (2007), Brown (2007), Krashen (1982), and Boud et al. (1999) also underline the significance of free-spirited expression, balanced expectations, and peer-assisted learning in enhancing verbal skills.

4.0. Conclusion

The study discovered that college seminarians, regardless of their academic level, experienced significant anxiety during online speaking tasks. This anxiety was attributed to factors such as poor internet connections, fear of audience reactions, lack of social interaction, technical issues, and home distractions, which negatively impacted their speaking coherence and fluency. The transition

to online learning has introduced further anxiety, which is mitigated through teaching methods and student coping mechanisms. However, avoidance behaviors may impede language learning progress, though accepting corrections is recognized as an effective strategy. Effective solutions to counter this problem include creating positive learning environments and teacher-student interactions that alleviate anxiety and improve language proficiency, especially for those training to become teachers or preachers. The research emphasizes the importance of supportive pedagogical approaches in the context of increasing online education to enhance students' public speaking confidence. Teachers should foster a pleasant and interactive online atmosphere, provide skill-enhancing activities, offer prompt feedback, maintain a safe learning space, and be able to identify and address students' anxiety to suggest appropriate coping strategies.

5.0. Limitations of the Findings

The study has several limitations. Firstly, the small sample size of nine participants, all college seminarians, limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data through interviews and observations introduces potential biases, such as social desirability bias, which may affect the accuracy and reliability of the results. Lastly, the study's focus on the specific context of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, with its unique challenges like technical issues and isolation, may limit the applicability of the findings to traditional face-to-face learning environments or other online learning contexts outside of the pandemic.

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6.0. Practical Value of the Paper

The study offers significant practical value by enhancing teaching strategies, improving student support, and informing curriculum development. It provides insights into effective teaching methods, such as creating a supportive learning environment, using interactive teaching styles, and incorporating classroom games to reduce speaking anxiety. Additionally, the findings emphasize the need for a supportive learning environment, encouraging the development of activities that offer constructive feedback, peer support, and coping mechanisms like positive self-talk and breathing exercises. Furthermore, understanding the specific challenges faced by seminarians allows educators to design courses that build confidence, reduce fear of judgment, and promote regular practice and interaction in the target language, ultimately fostering a more engaging and less intimidating learning experience.

7.0. Directions for Future Research

Future research could explore speaking anxiety among students in different educational contexts, such as traditional face-to-face classes versus online classes, or among students from diverse cultural backgrounds, to identify unique factors and commonalities. Longitudinal studies tracking the effectiveness of various coping strategies over time would provide deeper insights into how students manage and overcome speaking anxiety, following them throughout their academic journey to determine which strategies are most sustainable and effective. Finally, intervention-based research could focus on developing and testing specific interventions to reduce speaking anxiety, including experimental designs that implement various teaching methods, technological tools, or psychological support programs to evaluate their impact on students' anxiety levels and speaking performance.

8.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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