

SpeakSteps



Supporting learners with foreign language speaking anxiety – one step at a time

1 The Challenge: Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Anxiety about speaking a foreign language may contribute to reduced participation and avoidance of speaking situations. Classroom-related factors may include fear of making mistakes or being evaluated, time pressure, and insufficient preparation (Böttger & Költzsch, 2020).

Classroom-related factors



Fear of making mistakes



Being evaluated



Time pressure



Insufficient preparation



For the English classroom, this raises a central question:

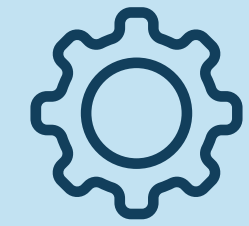
How can learners be supported in approaching challenging speaking situations in the English classroom?

2 Theoretical Perspectives

The central theoretical starting point for SpeakSteps is perceived control, which is complemented by perspectives on emotion regulation, autonomy, and self-efficacy.



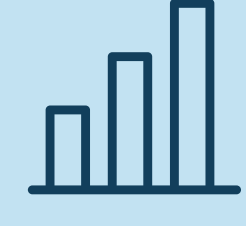
Pekrun Control-Value Theory
Control-Value Theory states that achievement emotions depend on appraisals of control and value. Control refers to the perceived controllability of actions, and value refers to their subjective importance (Pekrun, 2006).



Gross Emotion Regulation
The Process Model of Emotion Regulation states that emotions can be regulated at different stages. Strategies include modifying situations, directing attention, changing cognitive meaning (reappraisal), and modulating emotional reactions (Gross, 2015).



Ryan & Deci Self-Determination Theory
Self-Determination Theory states that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are basic psychological needs. Fulfilling these needs is linked to motivation, well-being, and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000).



Bandura Self-Efficacy
Self-Efficacy Theory describes the belief in one's capability to successfully perform specific tasks. These beliefs can be strengthened through successful performance experiences, termed *mastery experiences* (Bandura, 1977).

Didactic Perspective: Formative Feedback & Positive Error Culture

Formative feedback clarifies current achievement in relation to shared learning goals and provides guidance for the next manageable step (Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In line with positive language education, mistakes are understood not as deficits but as valuable learning data, contributing to a psychologically safe environment in which learners feel confident to take linguistic risks (Böttger & Höppner, 2025). In SpeakSteps, formative feedback complements the perspectives above by making progress visible and informing subsequent goal-setting.

3 From Theory to Design

Based on these perspectives, five theory-informed design principles provide a structured pathway towards manageable and increasingly active participation in English-speaking situations.



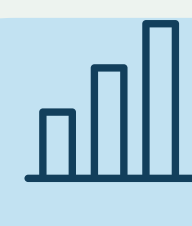
Perceived Control
clear, manageable shared goals and appropriate support



Emotion Regulation
preparation and selectable coping/support strategies



Autonomy & Competence
individual choice and attainable challenges



Self-Efficacy
visible personally managed speaking experiences



Formative Feedback
feedback on progress and manageable next step

SpeakSteps
From theory to practice

4 SpeakSteps in Practice

A flexible cycle within each textbook unit translates these principles into classroom practice. This cycle can be adapted to the communicative focus of different textbook units.



Set shared speaking goals
(curriculum-based)



Choose individual SpeakSteps
(attainable & adaptable)



Speak
(use support strategies, e.g. phrases, key words)



Reflect
(What helped?)
(What was challenging?)



Receive formative feedback
(e.g. teacher, peers)



Choose the next SpeakSteps
(apply & continue)



Lisa's SpeakSteps Example: Textbook Unit “Free Time”



Our Speaking Goal

I can express what I like and give a reason



My SpeakStep

I take initiative and start one conversation myself



Speaking Activity

partner interview or small-group discussion (with prepared phrases)



My Reflection

Prepared phrases helped me, but keeping the conversation going was difficult.



My Feedback

“You gave a clear opinion. Next: ask one follow-up question.”



My Next SpeakStep

Next time I will ask a follow-up question to keep the conversation going



Our Speaking Goals

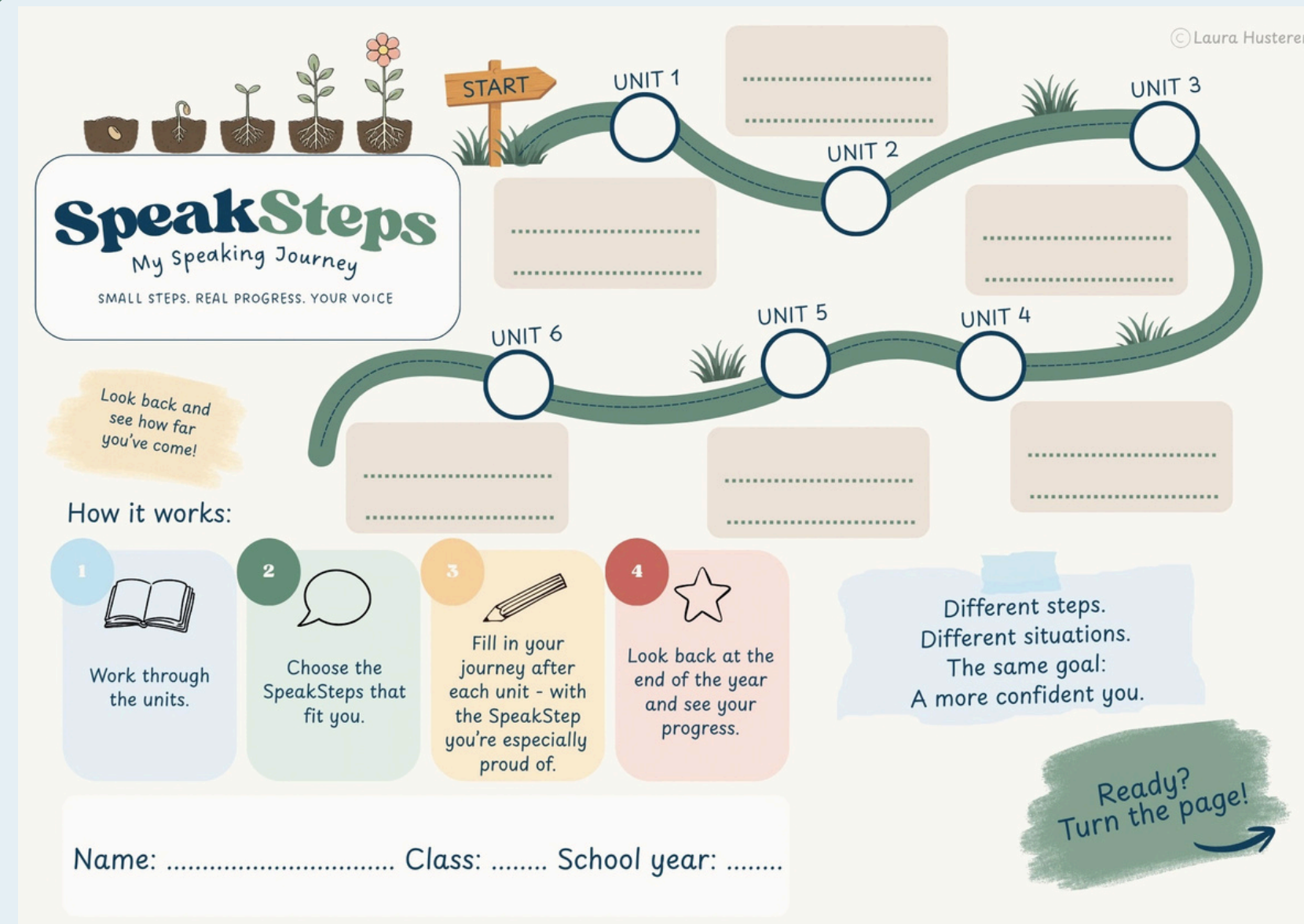
- 2 shared, communicative goals per unit
- curriculum-based
- observed by the teacher



My SpeakSteps

- 2 individually chosen steps
- optional to share with the teacher

5 Materials: Ready to use and adaptable templates for classroom implementation



My Speaking Journey
visualizes personal speaking progress across units



Student Booklet
guides goal-setting, strategy choice and reflection within each unit



Teacher Observation & Feedback Sheet
supports manageable observation of shared goals and brief formative feedback

6 Key Takeaway



SpeakSteps is a teaching concept based on theory that offers structured, manageable ways to approach English-speaking situations. Future classroom implementation should explore how students perceive and engage with the SpeakSteps approach.



Explore the Full Set of SpeakSteps Materials

- Student Booklet
- Teacher Materials
- Implementation Guide



References

Scan for the full reference list.