

## **CHAPTER-I**

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### **TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MAKATON IN A NURSERY CLASSROOM**

**Anna Sin**

*Nazarbayev University, Republic of Kazakhstan, 010000, Nur-Sultan city, 53 Kabanbay*

*Batyr Ave.*

*[anna.sin@nu.edu.kz](mailto:anna.sin@nu.edu.kz)*

#### **Abstract**

The present study examined teachers' perspectives of a visual support based language teaching tool 'Makaton' for preschool students in early years classrooms. Despite being used worldwide, only a few studies on Makaton as a tool to support spoken English in preschool education were conducted. This paper focuses on a study of Makaton being used at a school in the capital of Kazakhstan where students learn English as a foreign language. The qualitative case study drawing on data from class observations and interviews with teachers focused on the extent to which teachers believe this tool facilitates the development of basic functional English for EY learners. This paper will share results which reveal teacher perceptions of the positive benefits Makaton has on the development of language for ESL students and challenges in using this tool in an EY environment. The results are useful for EY pedagogues who are interested in exploring alternative methods to support preschool English learners. It is also a novelty study as Makaton is not widely used and there has not been any research done on Makaton as an ESL teaching tool in the context of Kazakhstani EY education. Therefore, this paper aims to stimulate dialogue on the use of Makaton in the local context.

**Keywords:** Makaton, Early Childhood Education, Inclusive Education, English as an Additional Language, Second Language Acquisition

**Bio notes.** *Anna Sin is a graduate of Nazarbayev university, currently working as a learning support educator at QSI Astana. Her main research and professional interests are special needs and behaviour support at school.*

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the extent to which Makaton facilitates the development of basic functional English from nursery teachers' perspectives in one international school of Astana. Makaton is a system of gestures and symbols used along with simple talk, which is based on British Sign Language (BSL). It was originally designed for people with learning disabilities and speech impairments, and is now used around the world, in over 40 countries (Autism Care, 2006; Makaton Development Project, 2006). Since then, it has been used as a communication tool by people of all abilities, and even as an instrument to teach English as a foreign language. Researchers of the developed world such as Mistry and Barnes (2013) and Ford (2010) conducted studies on using Makaton to teach English to young non-native learners.

The research site implemented Makaton as a teaching tool to support and enhance preschool students' spoken English. Nursery teachers of the school expressed that their main concern was the language barrier of the students and them not speaking even basic English. The school's language of instruction is English, therefore, to live a successful student life further on students need to be able to communicate in English. Teachers reported that only international students could effectively communicate with the teachers and each other in the English language. Consequently, those children tended to have very rare interactions with the local students as the latter naturally chose to communicate in Russian (their native language). This created language and social barriers between the two groups - students and peers, and students and teachers. This is a real concern as once they would move to the primary school stage, the gap in foundational language skills could potentially cause disparity in academic performance (Miller & Garcia, 2008).

The need to enhance students' spoken English is not exclusive to this one school. The issue of ESL learners not reaching their learning outcomes created the demand of learners' parents to effectively study English at earlier stages (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2014). The State Program of Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020, confirmed that there is a high necessity for creating effective theoretical and practical linguistic support for teaching English in Nursery and Primary schools.

More importantly, Makaton has been used to not only enhance the ESL experience of non-native speaking learners, as mentioned previously, but also to promote inclusivity and equity as the tool was originally designed to support more complex language and communication needs. Mistry and Barnes (2013) argued that Makaton when used as an ESL teaching tool provides a more inclusive approach to teaching as it assists learners in overcoming language barriers that can be both physical (impairment or delay) and psychological (lack of confidence in speaking). Makaton is argued to include all learners' communicative and intellectual needs as it provides a simple and very visual support. Despite it being designed for people with impairments and learning difficulties, it has now been used worldwide and includes people of all abilities (Makaton Charity, 2008), which essentially is what inclusion is about. Consequently, Makaton became an ESL tool choice in an international school in the capital city of Kazakhstan.

Now, with Makaton having been implemented at a Kazakhstani school for the first known time, the study aimed to find answers to the following research questions: to what extent do teachers perceive the effectiveness of Makaton in developing basic functional English in their nursery classroom? Are there any challenges to using Makaton as a tool for developing basic functional English? What modifications, if any, would EY teachers make, to improve Makaton as a tool?

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

To answer the research questions, the following main themes were explored in the review of relevant literature: language acquisition theories, gesture and speech, affective filter hypothesis, use of Makaton to support basic English, and attitudes towards Makaton as a tool of communication.

### **2.1 Second language acquisition in preschool**

Skinner's (1957) second language acquisition theory underpinned the study. It is argued that children learn a second language through the chain of reinforcement as behaviorism suggests: learners associate words with meanings. It is especially important to cultivate such reinforcement at an early age as some linguists would suggest: age of three has been proven to be the most sensitive and significant period of childhood when children develop their intelligence, language competence and speech (Davydov, 1996; Elkonin, 1998; Venger, 1982; Vygotsky, 1934). Freund (1990) and Vygotsky believed in guided learning where an environment and people a child is surrounded with are crucial for learning and development. Such a stimulating environment where verbal behaviours are constantly modelled and reinforced is crucial. Skinner supported that an environment shapes, nourishes and maintains verbal behaviors which include interactions between listeners and speakers (Skinner's writings, 1957a, as cited in Maria de Lourdes R. da F. Passos, 2012).

Ambridge and Lieven (2011) shared an example of positive reinforcement of verbal behaviour: a mother rewarding her child with milk when the child utters the word "milk" correctly. In the "Signing with babies" research project conducted by Ford (2010), parents were encouraged to accompany their gestures with smiles, or certain emotions on their faces and voices, which parents did naturally either way. Such an approach is also encouraged in Makaton and other visual language systems where people would accompany gestures with a certain tone

in their voice and mimic a facial expression at the same time, to make it easier for language learners to apply meaning to the words spoken and gestured.

## **2.2 Gesture and speech**

Volterra and Etting (1990/1994) viewed gestures as the main prelinguistic step in language formation. Capirci reports that Gentilucci and Corballis (2006) confirm in their study that gesture and speech evolve together with a gradual transition in children's development of communication skills. As cited in Capirci, Kendon (2004) argued that there is a strong connection between gesture and speech: the more children communicate using gestures, the more developed their spoken language will be, as there is a close connection between speech and gesture in a child's vocabulary development. They also provided evidence that once children's vocabulary increases, gestures start separating from speech. Wilkins (as cited in Anelli Tissel, 2019) believed that gesture is a language bridge between children's mother tongue and the language they learn. This leads to the question that researchers have attempted to find an answer to - to what extent, and can gestures enhance spoken foreign language at early stages of children's development? This will be further explored in relation to Makaton.

## **2.3 Krashen's affective filter hypothesis**

I looked at teaching approaches through the scope of Skinner's and Vygotsky's language acquisition theories. Natural approach to teaching English as a foreign language supports meaningful communication (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The approach is based on unconscious communicative learning where children learn a second language as if they were learning their mother tongue. That way the language is not forced, and at the same time, can be practiced when teaching English and practicing speech using Makaton. Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis is built on the idea of the importance of positive emotional state and attitudes, especially for beginners which is our research target group. Krashen's quantitative research (1982) identified three main predictors of successful second language acquisition

which are motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. The higher your motivation and self-confidence are, the better you do in the classroom. Similarly, the lower the learners' anxiety levels are, the more receptively they acquire the second language.

Cross (2007) and Pim (2010) supported the importance of initial emotional comfort before learning a new language as it can be an anxious process for many learners. Developing a positive and inclusive environment is beneficial for both teachers and young learners, as it can create a sense of belonging and stronger relationships, which at the same time help overcome learning barriers (Cross, 2007). Language teachers and students are well aware of how a language barrier can negatively affect their learning and communication, and even self-esteem. It can also be explained through a well-known concept in psychology and education - Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943): it is a five-levelled model of human needs where psychological needs such as safety and self-esteem come before self-actualisation (accomplishment and creativity). In this system, a language barrier is a psychological aspect of the hierarchy, and is advised to be overcome before the learning/language acquisition can occur (which is a self-fulfilment need). Makaton is argued to be an effective way to overcome psychological barriers as it has proven to be helpful in building relationships with participants of communication, improving eye-contact and raising motivation and willingness to initiate communication (Mistry & Barnes, 2013).

#### **2.4 Use of Makaton to support basic English**

As of this date, there has been no research done on Makaton and its use as a teaching tool to improve English as a second language in Kazakhstan. However, there have been studies done in developed countries such as the USA and the UK (Capirci & Volterra, 1993; Ford, 2010; Madigan, 2005; Makaton Charity, 2008; Mistry & Barnes, 2013). Despite Makaton being originally created to be a communication tool, it was also designed to “encourage and develop language and literacy skills” (Makaton Charity 2008a, p. 61). It has recently been highlighted

as a beneficial aid for those who do not have additional needs, especially in trials with the participation of parents baby signing with their children. For example, Capirci and Volterra (1993) reviewed several studies where they experimented with the use of gestures with both hearing and non-hearing people. Similarly, in her study, Ford (2006) concluded that although signing did not have much noticeable effect on babies' language development, it enhanced other communicative factors such as understanding more words and acquiring a larger vocabulary, increased eye contact and reduced frustration. Madigan (2005) in his study for Warwick University, also reported the benefits of using symbols such as reduced frustration and positive behaviour. Mistry and Barnes (2013) applied the second language acquisition theory and the gesture and speech theory in their experimental study and concluded that using Makaton can encourage children to initiate communication in spoken English. In this study, teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Makaton as a basic language supporting tool in relation to the effectiveness identified in other contexts, and local factors that contribute to this were explored.

## **2.5 Challenges when using Makaton as a tool of communication**

In 2005 (Abbot & Langley, 2005), among the positive feedback that has been listed above, some teachers and their assistants expressed their concerned attitudes towards Makaton such as Makaton not being suitable for older children, and misunderstanding from society and others as it be perceived as a handicap in a negative way. Burman (2001) also identified and analysed the following issues: Makaton was not widely enough used; Makaton can be detrimental to speech; it makes children appear more disabled; some think it only suits non-verbal people. None of the tools are perfect, so in order to evaluate Makaton as critically as possible, some negative experiences were identified in previous studies. Hence, one of the research questions the current study tried to explore was related to the challenges that EY teachers had when implementing the new tool in their classrooms. I will look into whether

these learning outcomes and issues are applicable in the Kazakhstani context; specifically I will provide insight into Makaton as a new tool that facilitates language development amongst young ESL learners.

### **3. Material and Methods**

This research was a case study (as defined by Creswell, 2008), which was an exploration of several nursery teachers' experiences and attitudes towards Makaton as a teaching strategy to encourage basic functional English. It is a phenomenological study given that it rests on the perceptions of teachers. Convenience non-probability sampling is characterised by the convenience of practical criteria such as accessibility of the place and the research participants (Etikan, 2016). The participants were selected using a purposive non-probability sampling method. The name is self-explanatory: the participants i.e. teachers needed to meet a set of criteria necessary for the research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000): classes with the highest number of ESL beginners which is nursery classes, where they only start learning English. Another criterion was them being trained to use Makaton as an ESL teaching tool and using it from the beginning of the academic year. The minimum number of participants for this study was six (Morse, 1994), which is the sufficient number for phenomenological studies. Seven participants consented and they all met the study criteria: working as a Nursery teacher at the school and being trained to use Makaton in the classroom. Those volunteers were observed during their classes where Makaton is used and were afterwards invited for face to face interviews individually, where they shared reflections of the lessons observed.

I used two data collection instruments for this study: observation protocols and face to face interviews. Both tools were designed based on the key concepts drawn from the literature review such as: children's language development through gestures (Capirci & Volterra, 1993;

Ford, 2006); attitudes towards Makaton as a teaching tool to develop language (Abbot & Langley, 2005; Burman, 2001; Ford, 2010; Mistry & Barnes, 2013; Vinales, 2012; Warnock report, 1987); effective second language acquisition (Krawen, 1997). Observation protocols were used to observe the teachers when using Makaton during their classroom activities. This instrument allowed me (Creswell, 2007) to structure the observation process and focus on separate, thematic dimensions. The participants then reflected on what had been observed as the start of the semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed a greater depth of understanding the topic through exploring the participants' experiences and knowledge, as well as their opinions and attitudes (Creswell, 2014). Interviews were a final step of the triangulation process. Triangulation allowed us to gather a variety of points of view (Gorard & Taylor, 2004; Creswell, 2008) which helped my small-scaled study feel more credible by providing different sources of information and confirmation. I followed Creswell's (2008) educational research data analysis process. The data collected from the interviews and observation field notes were analysed manually. The transcribed data were analysed using a coding method (Creswell, 2007; Tesch, 1990) by dividing the text into several broad themes for further description and the researcher's interpretation. The data from the interviews revealed not only attitudes towards Makaton as a teaching tool in a nursery classroom, but also teachers' experiences and personal observations when they used it. Despite the structured nature of both interviews and observation protocols, any data collected beyond the set key concepts was found useful for analysis. The key findings from both the class observations and reflective interviews have been outlined in the table 1 appendix.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion of the Results**

The study findings have been discussed below, in accordance with the research questions. The outlined themes that emerged from the observations and interviews structured the analysis.

#### **4.1 How is Makaton used in an EY classroom?**

The way preschool teachers incorporated Makaton in their classroom was pretty consistent in terms of creating a visual learning environment for children. As observed at the participants' classes, Makaton has been used in early years classes to support learners' functional language and its development. All early childhood teachers incorporate Makaton at the beginning of each day by having social time in various activities such as singing greeting songs and engaging in small talk and going through a daily routine together (timetable and register). For that, in addition to saying words and signing them in gestures, respondents also use additional visual aids such as flashcards with symbols on them, pictures and a whiteboard to show videos. The whole classroom setting is colourful and visual. Early childhood education teachers choose to store Makaton symbols differently: some keep them on the wall near the entrance, some keep them in special folders and boxes and take them out for vocabulary practice and use them as flashcards, others stick them to each physical object or theme related section of the classroom. Each card has a Makaton symbol on it with a word spelt out. To transition children from one activity to another, the language of instruction is also spoken in Makaton such as "tidy up", "eat breakfast", "wash hands", "go to sleep". In reception classes, they use a gesture to sign and learn phonics. They also incorporate Makaton for storytelling to incorporate for basic words, as P2 and P3 shared in their interviews. Those who work with younger children mostly target actions in terms of focused vocabulary in a form of music and play. Skinner's language acquisition theory is mirrored in such an approach to teaching the language to young learners, as well as Vygotsky's constructivist approach in the socio-cultural theory of cognitive and language development with their emphasis on positive reinforcement of verbal behaviour and meaningful communication. Such approach makes it easier for children to apply meaning to the words uttered and gestured at the same time, along with other visual indicators such as expressive emotions.

#### **4.1.1 Makaton for overcoming a language barrier**

Designing a classroom setting in such a visual way can be beneficial. From what I observed, learners feel very comfortable there as they have many optional activities to engage in. So are the scheduled everyday activities where learners use Makaton to develop their basic language. Such a positively presented classroom environment seemed very encouraging and welcoming to me. P2, P3 and P7 shared that some children tend to be shy and/or still find it difficult to speak English, so Makaton helps in creating a more inclusive environment where learners can take time in their progress or express themselves in alternative ways. For instance, P1 shared,

They know that the sign is related to a word and it encourages them. I have children in my class who don't speak an awful lot and sometimes they don't want to say it because they feel shy, and I say 'Well, you can sign it if you want' and they sign it. I think it's just an amazing way of communication for non-English speakers to help them acquire English slowly.

This finding supports the results of Mistry and Barnes' (2013) study which reported that Makaton promotes the growth of an inclusive environment, where all learners' needs are met, specifically their need to overcome the language barrier. Krashen (1982) in his affective filter hypothesis highlighted the importance of overcoming the language barrier as he believed that a positive emotional state is one of the main predictors of successful second language acquisition. Furthermore, creating a positive environment is a key policy that the early childhood education department of the research site is known for. Cross (2007) and Pim (2010) support the importance of initial emotional comfort before learning a new language as it can be an anxious process for many learners. Developing a positive and inclusive environment is beneficial for both teachers and young learners, as it can create a sense of belonging and stronger relationships, which at the same time helps overcome learning barriers (Cross, 2007); therefore, an inclusive environment might be a good foundation for young learners and their verbal development.

#### **4.1.2 Makaton for behaviour management**

Behaviour management is a common theme that emerged as all the participants mentioned that Makaton is a tool that they use to communicate appropriate behaviour. P2, 3 and 4 use Makaton to communicate specifically unwanted behaviours by reinforcing a positive behaviour through encouragement and praise: “good listening”, “good speaking”, “good sitting”, “good looking”. P1 used Makaton to encourage and build friendly relationships among classmates: “We’re all friends here. We help each other. We share. We’re happy together.” This is something I observed at the beginning of their class, and P1 later shared that they do it every morning to both practice social language and also cultivate a positive environment. Ford (2006) and Madigan (2005) concluded that using elements of Makaton, specifically signing with gestures to support speech development encourages a positive behaviour, an increased eye contact, and reduces frustration. When observing the classes, reinforcement of positive behaviour was executed in a playful manner as expected in many other activities in a typical early childhood classroom. In some instances, managing unwanted behaviour was shown but it was done individually for even better clarity and to obtain the full concentration of a child. The reinforcement element is an important component of second language acquisition according to Skinner (1957), as it forms children’s verbal behaviour, especially at preschool age.

Better concentration is a common behaviour teachers wanted to develop, as it is more beneficial for language acquisition as the learning becomes more active and engaged, especially when all-round reinforcement is used - utterance, signing, expression and a symbol/image if necessary. When I was observing the participants’ classes, I noticed that it was challenging to keep all the young learners focused, but according to the teachers, especially P2 and P6, this new approach helped them pick their learners’ interest and also draw their attention when necessary due to its visual form. It was not always the case, as in some instances

children would still get distracted and lose interest quickly but as P7 said, it is learning progress, and even if it might seem challenging to practitioners, it should be still exercised regularly.

#### **4.2 To what extent is Makaton an effective tool for developing the use of basic functional English?**

When I asked the participants about the effect that Makaton has on learners' language acquisition, some participants agreed that with some children it is difficult to judge where they actually picked up the language. For example, P4 described the challenge of judgement and evaluation of learning the language: "It's difficult to know what impact it might have in terms of language, whether it's just the repetition, you know." Many Makaton activities are repetition based, and are practised on a regular basis - this repetition for some teachers is an indication for successful language acquisition, for the others - it is not. A variety of factors for effective language acquisition emerged from the participants' responses, including the age of learners, building young learners' vocabulary using Makaton, the visuality of Makaton as a tool, learners' responsiveness to the tool, and learners' level of understanding.

##### **4.2.1 Age of learners when acquiring the language in early childhood**

Those who teach the youngest students believe that age matters in their case when it comes to acquiring the actual language. P6 shared that she had the experience of working with two different age groups, and in her experience of using Makaton, she noticed that for some reason, three-year-olds acquire the language quicker and seem to be more active in interactions with teachers. Two-year-old learners seemed to be indifferent at both classes of P5 and P6. This can be explained by the age of the group, as they are still developing their skill to stay focused and listen carefully, and stay still when adults try to engage them, so getting distracted is expected. This result corroborates with Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development where he stated that internalised language results in cognitive development and forms at the age of three (Davydov, 1996; Elkonin, 1998; Venger, 1982; Vygotsky, 1934). Despite that, P5 still

has a positive outlook on Makaton's effect on the language and says that while it might seem that children are not paying attention and are busy with playing other games, they are still subconsciously engaged. While it might not be an ideal situation and young learners would be preferably more actively engaged in learning activities, P5's comment could be possible, as according to Skinner, young children's language skills are shaped by their environment. As long as they remain in the environment, "information soaking" gradually happens, and when children grow older, their language capabilities grow. This result corroborates with the studies of Mayberry and Nicoladis (2000), Colletta (2004), McNeill, (2005), Goldin-Meadow (2002) and Pine (2004), who suggested that the use of gestures increases with age and becomes more subtle and fluent. P6 also shared that younger children (age two) tend to gesticulate simple and straightforward Makaton signs, and the older they get, the more they will initiate communication and use more words, therefore, their verbal growth becomes more evident and easier to track for teachers.

#### **4.2.2 Responsiveness to interactions in Makaton**

All respondents agreed that Makaton got a mixture of reactions to it in terms of ongoing responsiveness. P2, P5, P6 and P7 also say that sometimes children would not react, which is fine as they do not wish to put pressure on their learners. As explained previously, when talking about the age of ESL learners, they might take longer acquiring the language which is not necessarily a negative thing. For example, is P3 sharing that

I can see that it is a valuable tool. It's another form of communication and I think when children are babies, they pick up on signs more than language and emotions. So I think that for these children, like from two years old, they're going to pick signs up, in my opinion, quicker than they would words and I think it really helps to have children learning English. I really think it helps them learn the basics of it.

Here she argued that young children pick up signs first before they can express it in actual verbal words. Mistry and Barnes (2013) and Capirci and Volterra (1996) supported the idea by

arguing that children use two gestures before they utter words during their early language development.

#### **4.2.3. Improvement of understanding**

Some respondents also think that Makaton helps with understanding what is being said - according to P2, with time children started comprehending instructions straight away without the instructions being repeated, thanks to Makaton. Most children, according to all the participants, do not speak English well, but the tool allows them to gain sufficient responsiveness. P3 has experienced appropriate emotional responses from her students to what she was saying, which to her meant understanding the concept of what was being said. P4 supported the idea of Makaton enhancing understanding, especially for non-English speakers. Sometimes a teacher assistant would help the main teacher translate some words into learners' native language, but P4 believes that it is not necessary, as Makaton is helpful enough to achieve their understanding. P7 also witnesses children picking up the meaning of words much quicker when it is expressed in Makaton - word+sign+facial expression. This finding supported the idea of behaviourism and Skinner's language acquisition theory that children learn a second language through reinforcement by associating words with meaning. According to P7, Makaton signs represent universal concepts, which is helpful in classes where children do not speak English as their first language. It aids their understanding. The participants teach groups with mixed backgrounds and abilities, so enhanced understanding is definitely a significant benefit. The tool can be brought to the place where English, the language of instruction, is not spoken by everyone. For effective language acquisition in this study, early childhood teachers responded that they believe Makaton needs to be practised as a whole - gesturing signs and saying a word along with it and encouraging children to copy it after them. This idea has been widely represented in many ESL learning environments, and it supports language acquisition theory of reinforcement. According to all participants, this tool should be practised consistently

and regularly in order for it to be effective. P7 believes it should even be standardised, so teachers could use it more effectively and children could pick it up a lot quicker.

### **4.3 Challenges to using Makaton**

#### **4.3.1 Inconsistency in Practice**

All participants agreed that they find it challenging to remember to use Makaton more regularly to keep it consistent. P2, P4, P5, P6 find it difficult to remember to incorporate it in unpredictable situations typical to an EY classroom environment, especially when they get very busy with everyday tasks. P7 noted that: *“everybody's really into it at the beginning because it's something new and exciting. But then like anything else: once you're done with it, after a while you tend to go back to your old ways.”* It is understandable, as new things in general are a change in the routine, so naturally people would show higher enthusiasm following this new trend. On the other hand, even new and exciting things can get exhausting to some people, so as P7 shared here, they would want their usual and known comfort.

Another challenge that the participants admitted to face is incorporating all Makaton elements, particularly Makaton symbols. When observing the participants' lessons, the business and occasional chaos of the environment was evident, especially in groups of younger children (aged two), so it affected both the learners' concentration and, therefore, their language acquisition to an extent.

These challenges appear to be unexpected in terms of the literature research. While these challenges are expected in the world of preschool education, those were not the challenges that I found when doing research which mainly included the novelty of Makaton (not common enough as a tool), age inappropriateness (not suitable for older, higher ability children), and negative misconception of Makaton, as it was originally created for people with special needs (Abbot & Langley, 2005; Burman, 2001; Warnock, 1978). Knowing these

challenges could help reconsider at what age Makaton should be implemented in education, and how to support preschool teachers in making it a systematic tool.

#### **4.3.2 Complexity for younger learners**

P5 and P6 mentioned that they struggled with the complexity of phrasal gestures (which contain two signs in one) for younger children such as the age of two. P6 also shared the challenge of maintaining attention and repetition for the learners themselves. This is an unanticipated result as contrary to the expectations of Makaton's simplicity, not everyone found it as simple to use. While Burman (2001) and Makaton society reported it to be designed as simple of a tool as possible, P5 and P6 experienced it as tricky to use with younger children (two years old). P7 also experienced similar challenges but shared with me that she does not give up and continues the whole practice as she believes it will eventually pay off. The purpose of Makaton, as every early childhood education teacher agreed, is to make learning and language acquisition as effective as possible, so it is expected to simplify the tool for the learners' and teachers' benefit.

#### **4.3.3 Desired changes in the tool**

The modifications that preschool teachers reported to see about using Makaton were closely related to the challenges that they faced during the tool implementation. Most common changes were higher consistency in using the tool and more wholesome approach.

#### **4.3.4 More consistency in using the tool**

All participants unanimously agreed that they wish Makaton would become a mandatory tool, but used more systematically and consistently. Studies presented in the literature review support the idea of the systemic implementation, even when the tool was incorporated into a program as an experiment. Such a conditioned and monitored approach implied consistency and unity. For example, Mistry and Barnes (2013), Capirci and Voltera (2008), Ford (2006), Burman (2001) experimentally used Makaton on a regular basis and

targeted specific vocabulary for evaluation. Their studies were well-planned and the participants reported consistent engagement which resulted in the participants benefiting from Makaton the most.

#### **4.3.5 Using all elements of Makaton**

Some respondents said that they would not change anything about the tool as they mostly had positive experiences with it. They did, however, share that they would like to see themselves incorporating Makaton more fully, including using the symbols and some more signs to learn more words. Despite some participants not always implementing all the Makaton elements, the literature showed that learners still benefit from some elements of Makaton. Madigan (2005) in his study for Warwick University and Ford (2006) both conducted studies where only some elements of Makaton were used to evaluate the effectiveness of Makaton - symbols and gestures respectively. Both reported some benefits of using only symbols or only signs such as reduced frustration and positive behaviour.

### **5. Conclusion**

The participants shared very unique experiences, as at that moment it was the only school in Kazakhstan that implemented Makaton as a tool for teaching basic English to local preschool students. Due to the novelty of the tool, this study has provided useful insight into how EY teachers perceive the effectiveness and use of the tool in the Kazakhstani context, as well as what English language acquisition means to EY teachers. This study can be further extended into a larger scale experimental research in a higher number of preschool classes, to generalise the results. The obtained knowledge of Makaton background and teachers' overall positive perceptions of the new tool might promote better inclusivity in preschool education, as well as highlight the importance of a natural approach to teaching a foreign language to young learners.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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**Footnotes and Tables**

**Table 1. Thematic Data Analysis**

<b>Research Topic</b>		Teachers Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Makaton in an EY classroom		
<b>Research Question</b>	To what extent is Makaton an effective tool for developing the use of basic functional English?	How is Makaton used in an EY classroom?	Are there any challenges to using Makaton as a tool for developing basic functional English?	What modifications, if any, should be made, to improve Makaton as a tool?
<b>Key Concept/ Category</b>	Gestures for Language acquisition in early childhood  Natural approach to TEFL	Makaton as a multimodal tool for communication and language acquisition	Challenges to using Makaton	Desired changes in the tool
<b>Theme</b>	Age of learners when acquiring the new language  Vocabulary building  Visual Support  Responsiveness  Consistency and	Visual Support Learning vocabulary  Overcoming a Language barrier  Behaviour Management	Inconsistency Busy and chaotic EY environment  Complexity of phrasal gestures  Mixture of reactions	Consistency and system  Minimalistic approach

	repetition Enhancement of understanding			
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