

**Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Makaton for the Development of Basic  
Functional English in a Kazakhstani Nursery Classroom**

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jih'.

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MAKATON EFFECTIVENESS IN A  
KAZAKHSTANI NURSERY CLASSROOM

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October 2019

Dear Anna Sin,

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has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev  
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You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant  
recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MAKATON EFFECTIVENESS IN A  
KAZAKHSTANI NURSERY CLASSROOM

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These two years have humbled me and helped me gain a new perspective on education and research, and I feel honoured to continue my journey in inclusive education at my workplace.

*Anna Sin*

June, 2020

**Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Makaton for the Development of Basic  
Functional English in a Kazakhstani Nursery Classroom**

**Abstract**

The present study examined teachers' perspectives of a visual support based language teaching tool 'Makaton' for preschool students in early years (EY) classrooms. The students were learning English as a foreign language, and the research focused on the extent to which they believe this tool facilitates the development of basic functional English for EY learners. This qualitative study collected data from class observations and interviews with teachers in a private EY school in the urban region of Kazakhstan. The results show that all participant teachers believe that using visual support enhances English language learning and assists in building basic vocabulary and communication skills. Teachers also discussed some of the challenges of using this tool in an EY environment. The results are useful for schools and EY pedagogues who are interested in exploring alternative methods to support preschool English learners.

**Keywords:** Makaton, language acquisition, early childhood, EAL

**Мақатонның Қазақстандағы Мектепке Дейінгі Сыныптарда Негізгі Функционалды**

**Ағылшын Тілін Дамыту Тиімділігі Туралы Мұғалімдердің Пікірлері**

**Аңдатпасы**

Осы зерттеу мұғалімдердің мектеп жасына дейінгі сыныптарындағы мектеп жасына дейінгі оқушыларға арналған «Мақатон» тілін оқыту құралдарын визуальды қолдау перспективаларын қарастырды. Студенттер ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде үйренді, және зерттеу бұл құралдың мектепке дейінгі тәрбие студенттері үшін негізгі функционалды ағылшын тілін дамытуға ықпал ететініне сенді. Бұл сапалы зерттеу Қазақстанның қалалық аймағындағы жеке мектебіндегі сыныпты бақылау және мұғалімдермен сұхбаттардан алынған мәліметтерді жинады. Нәтижелер барлық қатысушы мұғалімдер визуалды қолдауды қолдану арқылы ағылшын тілін үйренуді жақсартады және негізгі сөздік және коммуникациялық дағдыларды қалыптастыруға көмектеседі деп санайды. Мұғалімдер мектепке дейінгі тәрбие ортасында бұл құралды қолданудағы кейбір қиындықтарды талқылады. Нәтижелер мектеп жасына дейінгі ағылшын тілін үйренушілерге қолдау көрсетудің балама әдістерін зерттеуге қызығушылық танытатын мектептер мен мектепке дейінгі тәрбие педагогтары үшін пайдалы.

Түйін сөздер: Мақатон, тіл үйрену, ерте балалық шақ, ағылшын тілі шет тілі ретінде

**Представления Учителей об Эффективности Макатона для Развития Базового  
Функционального Английского Языка в Дошкольных Классах в Казахстане**

**Аннотация**

В настоящем исследовании изучались восприятия и опыт учителей в использовании средства обучения языку «Макатон» на основе визуальной поддержки для учащихся дошкольных учреждений. Студенты изучали английский как иностранный язык, и исследование было сосредоточено на том, насколько, по их мнению, этот инструмент облегчает развитие базового функционального английского языка. Это качественное исследование собрало данные из наблюдений уроков и интервью с учителями в частной школе в урбанистическом регионе Казахстана. Результаты показали, что все участвующие учителя считают, что использование визуальной поддержки улучшает изучение английского языка и помогает в развитии базовых словарных и коммуникативных навыков. Преподаватели также обсудили некоторые проблемы использования этого инструмента в дошкольной среде. Результаты полезны для школ и преподавателей дошкольных учреждений, которые заинтересованы в изучении альтернативных методов поддержки дошкольников, изучающих английский язык.

Ключевые слова: Макатон, овладение языком, раннее детство, изучение английского как иностранного

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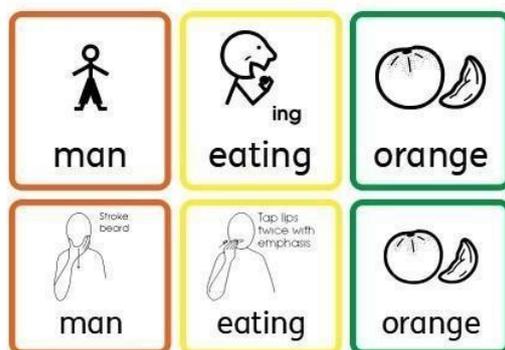
**Chapter One: Introduction**

**1.1. Teaching English as a Foreign Language Worldwide: Problem Significance**

In the age of globalisation, effective communication in the English language has been of great significance in education, business and general socialisation across the world, as it has now become the international language (Carter, 2001). Hence, the drive to learn English has become essential, especially in the context of developing countries, which can be explained by people's need to survive and obtain a higher social status (Mansoor, 2003; Rahman, 2002). Consequently, the effective teaching of English as a foreign language has been a priority in many developed and developing countries worldwide. The importance of this educational issue has been evident and the trend of ESL (English as a second language) implementation as an obligatory course as early as nursery school has increased over the past decade. For instance, in some Asian countries such as Taiwan in 2005, South Korea in 1997, and Indonesia and Vietnam in 1996, ESL was introduced as a course to learners as young as those in Grades 3 and 4 (Jones, 2004; Liu Chen, 2004). It is a common belief in the field of education and psychology that it is of benefit to teach English to younger learners. That is why young children, especially at the preschool age are argued to be more perceptive to sound systems and are more likely to acquire the phonological patterns of a foreign language than adult learners (Lee, 2004). Hence, it is easier to learn a foreign language, in this case, English, at an early age. It can provide a solid foundation for further linguistic development and more successful language acquisition, which has been the drive to teach English to learners as young as three years old (Stakanova & Tolstikhina, 2014).

There have been different approaches in teaching ESL to preschool children such as the use of games (which is the most common method of teaching a subject in early year (EY) education), a natural or communicative approach, differentiation or an intelligence-based method, and structuring a physical classroom environment (Stakanova & Tolstikhina, 2014). Some tools combine a group of these strategies and offer benefits of each of the listed approaches. Makaton is considered a multimodal approach and by its definition, it combines all those teaching approaches: it can be used in a form of play (Mistry & Barnes, 2013); it cultivates a foreign language learning environment where learners are taught a foreign language as if it were their mother tongue; it meets all learners' communicative and intellectual needs due to its visuality and simplicity; and it provides visual support and is easily incorporated in a physical classroom environment. The Makaton language and communication system is a system of gestures and symbols used along with the simple talk, which is based on British Sign Language (BSL) (Makaton Charity, 2008).

*Figure 1. Example of the Makaton System*



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). 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. While Makaton has been widely used around the UK, it has also been adapted in other non-English speaking countries such as Poland, France, Germany, Portugal, Greece, Kuwait and Japan (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). Such adaptation implies using local signs or making culturally understandable ones for each country, which ensures accessibility of Makaton to as many users as possible, and also respects the deaf community (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013).

In Kazakhstan, schools have not made Makaton a systematic and widely used tool. It has recently been implemented in an international school of Nur-Sultan, but studies conducted on the effectiveness of the tool in the Kazakhstani context have not been conducted yet. The issue of ESL teaching in preschool education in Kazakhstan, as well as the implementation of Makaton, will be explored further in this chapter.

## **1.2. Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Kazakhstan: Problem Statement**

Similarly to other countries, Kazakhstan has also shown great interest in the English language. After Kazakhstan gained its independence in 1991 and made Kazakh the state language and Russian the interethnic language in 1995, there was a need for further global development (Syzdykbayeva, 2016). The State Program of Languages Development and Functioning for 2011-2020 (MES, 2011) aims to enhance the public's knowledge of three languages - Kazakh, Russian and English, with English being the language of socio-economic development including in the fields of media and politics, as well as in education (Syzdykbayeva, 2016).

It has been reported that ESL learners of secondary schools and even undergraduate students demonstrate that school learning outcomes are poorly met, so there has been a suggestion to implement a mandatory language programme across the country (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2014). The initial step of English programme implementation was originally suggested by the former President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2012 where he suggested a new trilingual education policy - a policy, as mentioned above, that aims at fluency in three languages - Kazakh, Russian and English. Since then the Ministry of Education has called for the development of legislative procedures such as the Trilingual Education Road Map for 2015 – 2020 (New Quality of Education, 2018). One of the National Curriculum changes was implemented in secondary schools: school subjects such as ICT, biology, chemistry and physics are to be instructed in English. Several issues have arisen such as the lack of qualified staff that would teach those subjects in English, but most importantly, the demand of learners' parents for their children to effectively study English at earlier stages (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2014).

In 2004 in Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Education initiated the Basic Requirement for Primary School English which was first launched in primary schools in cities, and then later, gradually developed in towns and villages. The programme aimed at the development of young learners' language competence including not only good linguistic sense and communication skills but also self-confidence and learning more about the English speaking culture. According to the State Program of Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020, there is a high necessity for creating effective theoretical and practical linguistic support for teaching English in Nursery and Primary schools. Therefore, it was later decided to implement it systemically and not just experimentally. In The Education Development State Program of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020, it is stated that English as a foreign language will now be introduced at the very first stage of the 12-year school system.

### **1.3. Teaching ESL in Early Years Education**

Overall perceptions of what preschool education needs to be should shift from the formal preparation for student life to a more progressive stage in the process of learning. Young children's learning potential needs to be taken into account from birth, and their education should be an ongoing process especially with respect to teaching English to ESL learners (Sagintayeva et al, 2014). According to the Diagnostic Report on the Development of Strategic Directions for Education Reforms in Kazakhstan for 2015-2020, the focus has now been placed onto what children are most capable of such as their special talents. Educators are now more mindful of how to approach their young learners, nourish and sustain their needs and skills for further school education.

Since the main priority in bettering preschool education was the quantitative expansion of preschool organisations, providing good quality educational services and learning environments has been overlooked. The number of kindergartens increased from 3,313 in 2013 to 6,159 in 2018 with the help of the Balapan Programme and the national authorities (Ministry of National Economy, Committee on Statistics, Children of Kazakhstan, Statistical Yearbook, 2019). After having taken serious measures in achieving ambitious goals in regards to increasing the number of institutions such as kindergartens, the qualitative issue must still be resolved, especially the quality of ESL teaching (Sagintayeva et al, 2014). Studies have reported that a better quality of preschool education approaches to ESL teaching can have a strong positive influence on young learners' further language development and academic performance (Barnett, 2008).

#### **1.4. Educational Plans for TEFL in Kazakhstan: Inclusive Education**

In several years, The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan implemented an important policy on inclusive education - its strategic plan for 2014-2019. There is an emphasis on two important dimensions in inclusive education which are equality and equity. Equity has been reported to be a predictor of good quality education (OECD, 2012). While equality is about ensuring education for *all* students, equity is about adapting to students' needs for them to succeed in achieving learning outcomes. Equity is supposed to provide inclusion and support for students with different backgrounds and abilities. Implementing effective practices to cultivate inclusion is evidently important and should be addressed at all stages of education.

Ensuring equity and quality to improve the outcome of English learning, in particular, should be promoted at earlier stages, especially at preschool age (Lee, 2004). Inclusion needs to be implemented on all stages starting from the kindergarten; and with a recent emphasis on English as a foreign language and the new Basic Requirement for Primary School English, it is now of great significance to meet all learners' needs and place it in the centre of the curriculum to promote inclusivity and enhance the quality of education. 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 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 simple and 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.

### **1.5. Background of the Study**

The topic of this study was based on the project that I coordinated in collaboration with the school where I worked as an intern for a university internship based project. Due to confidentiality, the school from now onwards will be referred to as School N. The Special education needs (SEN) team and the teachers of the classes that I observed and supported shared their main educational concerns. The recurring issue was the language barrier of the students and them not speaking even basic English. The school's language of instruction is English, therefore, to have a productive and fulfilling life, students need to be able to communicate in English. After discussing the issues with the teachers, I found out that the highest number of children who do not speak English is at the Early Years stage, particularly nursery classes. The nursery teachers reported that only international students can effectively communicate with the teachers and each other in the English language. Consequently, those children tend to have very rare interactions with the local students as the latter naturally choose to communicate in Russian which is 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 move to the primary school stage, the gap in foundational language skills often causes a disparity in academic performance (Miller & Garcia, 2008).

During the observations of and conversations with the SEN team, aids supporting speech were mentioned. Basic signing is a tool that some of the nursery teachers use when communicating with their students such as singing songs and giving basic instructions. The SEN

coordinator and the head of the nursery suggested that signing could be an interesting topic to explore. The head of the nursery was familiar with Makaton, in particular, which was earlier proposed as a communication tool to be trained on and implemented in the future, in order to resolve the language barrier issue. I had had some training on Makaton in my previous place of work where we communicated with learners with special needs via Makaton, but I had never used it as a teaching tool to support ESL teaching. I offered my help and decided to make this the central topic of my project. After reviewing some literature as part of the internship based course, it was suggested that Makaton may help the teachers to resolve the issue of the language barrier. Additionally, other benefits were identified in the project literature review such as enhanced understanding, larger vocabulary and reduced frustration (Capirci & Volterra, 1993; Ford, 2010; Madigan, 2005; Makaton Charity, 2008; Mistry & Barnes, 2013). A short Makaton training programme was designed with the help of the Head of the Nursery Department. When delivering Makaton training to the nursery team, we also collected feedback on how they used it during the week and what the reactions of the students were. It was an informal study, so no actual data were collected when conducting the project. However, it has been decided to extend this work into a thesis and explore the topic from the teachers' perspectives.

### **1.6. Purpose of the Study and the Rationale**

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of Makaton as a teaching tool for nursery students in an EY classroom who study English as a foreign language. Makaton was chosen as it was a central topic of my internship project which I decided to extend into a thesis. It focused on the extent to which this tool facilitates the development of basic functional English from EY teachers' perspectives. To my knowledge and the literature review, there is no evidence on where it is being used in Kazakhstan apart from the research site; therefore, Makaton might

be a new concept in this country. It has been used worldwide, but only a few studies were conducted on using Makaton as a tool to support spoken English in preschool education (Ford, 2010; Mistry & Barnes, 2013). There were a variety of learning outcomes such as the development of communicative skills including understanding more words and building a larger vocabulary, increased eye contact, reduced frustration, and positive behaviour (Capirci & Volterra, 1993; Ford, 2010; Madigan, 2005; Makaton Charity, 2008; Mistry & Barnes, 2013). Additionally, those studies identified issues that come with using Makaton in mainstream education such as stigma and age inappropriateness (Abbot & Langley, 2005), and the tool not being common enough (Burman, 2001). They connected the stigma to a social misconception of Makaton when people tend to associate the tool with people with disabilities, which in their opinion, made typically developed people seem more “disabled” when they used Makaton (Abbot & Langley, 2005). The age disparity might be a shared issue in different countries as the sensitivity to learning is higher at a younger age (Davydov, 1996; Elkonin, 1998; Venger, 1982; Vygotsky, 1934). 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. This study will provide valuable information on its relevance and cultural appropriateness in the context of Kazakhstani preschool education.

### **1.6.1. Research questions**

The study aims to find answers to the following research question: to what extent do teachers perceive Makaton as an effective tool for developing the use of basic functional English among ESL learners? In order to answer the main research question, the following sub-questions were identified:

- What is the teachers' understanding of Makaton?
- 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?

The key concepts to address these research questions emerged from the literature and will be reviewed in the literature review chapter, as well as reflected in the methodology chapter.

### **1.7. The Significance of the Study**

The proposed research will be beneficial to the education policymakers at the Ministry of education, and also teachers of ESL and preschool education by informing their practices to support learners' with language development needs. Such an approach can also promote inclusive education since one of the data results showed that it could help meet all the learners' educational needs fairly. Moreover, this research will contribute to the field of educational research as studies on the use of Makaton or gestures as an ESL teaching technique have not yet been conducted in Kazakhstan. Finally, the present study's findings, if replicated and combined with the future research in the area, could inform the school practitioners of the potential role of the Makaton sign and symbol system in the development of ESL learners' spoken English.

### **1.8. Chapter Summary and Thesis Outline**

In this chapter, I stated a problem of effective learning outcomes of teaching English as a foreign language in Kazakhstan, and why it should be taught in early childhood. I also gave a

brief overview of what early childhood education has been reported to be like lately in Kazakhstan overall, and why it is important to enhance inclusive practices in preschool institutions. Then, I provided the definition of Makaton and the background information on how it had been implemented in the research site, and why it had become the centre of my study. The research questions were identified, as well as the purpose of the study. I also listed the significance that the study might contribute to the field of research.

Subsequently, in the literature review chapter, I will review the theoretical framework of the current study and the main concepts that emerged from the literature. Then, I will describe the methodology of my study including its research design, research site, sampling, ethical procedures and data collecting instruments. In the Findings and Discussion chapter, I will describe the data analysis and interpret the findings. Lastly, in the Conclusion chapter, I will summarise my research results, reiterate the significance of the research, review the limitations of the current study and suggest recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Chapter Overview**

The previous chapter discussed the problem of teaching English as a foreign language in preschool and covered the results of the Diagnostic Report on the Development of Strategic Directions for Education reforms in Kazakhstan for 2015-2020 on how early childhood education is perceived by educators in Kazakhstan, as well as why it is important to strive for enhanced inclusivity at schools. In this chapter, I will describe the conceptual framework that underpins my study, and provide an analysis of the findings from literature in the field of teaching English as a second language in early childhood education, as well as studies on Makaton as a pedagogical tool to enhance spoken English. The main themes that emerged from the literature are language acquisition theory and children's verbal behaviour, the natural approach to teaching English as a second language, attitudes towards Makaton as a tool of communication, and effects that Makaton has on the development of children's verbal speech.

### **2.2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

My ontological position in this research when studying concepts of preschool education and second language acquisition was constructivist as I believe that education, in general, can be contextual and certain cases depend on local cultures and personal experiences, and are actively changeable. Constructivists argue that knowledge is built on learners' experiences, social interactions, and culture (Doolittle & Tech, 2015; Gergen, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978), which I support as an educator and researcher. My epistemological stance in this study was interpretivist

as this was a qualitative study and my data interpretation was based on people's opinions. A qualitative approach was chosen for its popularity in the field of educational research, especially in educational evaluation (Creswell, 2008). Two main theories were reviewed and supported the current study. Due to my constructivist beliefs, I explored Vygotsky's theory of learning and language development (1934) and how it has been applied in education. Vygotsky, along with other prominent researchers who studied preschool development (Davydov, 1996; Elkonin, 1998; Venger, 1982; Vygotsky, 1934) argued that age three to five is the most sensitive stage of learning, which is one of the key aspects of my study. Additionally, Skinner's language acquisition theory (1957) underpinned my analysis of effective teaching of English as a foreign language to preschool students.

In this review, I analysed the key concepts and issues related to my research topic and research questions which are the effectiveness of Makaton as a teaching tool for the development of basic functional English in preschool education, similarly to Mistry and Barnes' study where they analysed the effectiveness of Makaton for the enhancement of English talk, and Ford's study on the effects of baby signing on verbal speech (Ford, 2006; Mistry and Barnes', 2013). Makaton, as previously described, is an English language system consisting of basic signs (gestures) and symbols accompanied by simple talk (Makaton Charity, 2008). Therefore, such issues as the relationships between gestures and speech; the effective teaching of English as a second language; attitudes towards Makaton as a tool of communication; and the effects that Makaton has on children's language development were analysed within the framework of the second language acquisition theory which underpinned my study.

### **2.3. Theories of Socio-Cultural Development of Cognition and Language Skills**

According to Vygotsky's social development theory (1934) and his constructivist stance, children's cognition should be approached in a socio-cultural context. Vygotsky believed that a cultural environment and relationships play a major role in learning and the development of cognitive skills. Therefore, he believed that the cultural context and children's personal experiences affect their ways of thinking. This is where I support him, as many educators would agree that the environment and people a child is surrounded with are crucial for a child's learning and development. Very often a learning environment is so important that educators and parents refer to it as a third teacher (Isell & Exelby, 2001). A social aspect of it is crucial as it can provoke peer interactions and collaborative activities which are important for young learners' cognitive development (Isell & Exelby, 2001). Vygotsky additionally and specifically spoke about the significance of language in the development of children's cognitive skills. In "Thinking and Speech" Vygotsky argued that thoughts are formed in words. According to Vygotsky's concept of speech formation, it begins when a motive triggers a thought which then transforms from an inner word to the meaning of an outer word, and, finally, the word itself (Vygotsky et al, 2016). He concluded that internalised language results in cognitive development and forms at the age of three. This theory is important to accommodate when teaching a foreign language to children, as many psychologists and linguists would argue that at younger ages it is of benefit to start cultivating a new language and developing language competency. In several studies conducted by psychologists and linguists, it has been proven to be the most sensitive and significant period of childhood when children form their personality traits, and develop their intelligence and speech (Davydov, 1996; Elkonin, 1998; Venger, 1982; Vygotsky, 1934). Later, modern neurologists supported the criticality of a young age for linguistic development, as the brain plasticity at a young age is crucial for acquiring a foreign language (Johnson & Newport, 1989; Lenneberg, 1967; Morgan-Short & Ullman, 2012; Newport, 1988; Pinker, 1994, as cited in Hartshorne, Tenenbaum & Pinker, 2018).

Vygotsky suggested that this concept applies to preschool children. He argued that at the age of three to five children's learning and development occurs when children use available cultural tools to build cognitive skills such as memory, perception, attention and thinking (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). That is why it is crucial to ensure children's language learning at this early age specifically. He emphasized the importance of relationships between a parent/mentor and a child as well as interactions with peers, which is widely recognised in preschool institutions already. Therefore, it is of great importance for adults to guide children in their learning by communicating with them and teaching them the target language, so the latter can form their cognitive skills through that language. Freund (1990) who was a supporter of Vygotsky's constructivist approach also believed in guided learning rather than in self-discovery where children can learn on their own. Such a constructivist stance was later supported and adapted by other linguists and psychologists who believed in the principles of behaviourism (Pavlov, 1902; Skinner, 1957; Thorndike, 1898; Watson, 1913, as cited in Staddon, 2014). Skinner's language acquisition theory (1957) will be later discussed here in more detail.

### **2.3.1. Critique of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory**

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory on children's development, however, received criticism, specifically on his belief in the early stages of development. According to Vygotsky, children's cognitive abilities are not equally developed at all stages: age three to five is the most productive in terms of cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1934). This has caused controversy since some psychologists believe that developmental stages may vary: what some children can achieve at a certain age, others cannot necessarily do so. Theory of mind research suggests that children at the age of four and five can be sophisticated thinkers as they can understand their own mental processes as well as those of others (Moll & Meltzoff, 2011).

On the other hand, theories focused on the stages of development do not always consider individual variations of development such as that of delay. At an early stage, children develop a so-called basic functional language where they start expressing their needs, wants and feelings to their parents and peers (Kalpidou, 1997), which has been selected as the main focus of the current study. The functional language was first suggested by Wilkins in the 1970s which was defined as the communication of wants and needs. Wilkins further suggested teaching a foreign language using a language of daily social situations which is essentially a basic functional language (Wilkins, 1972). The development of language in such cases can vary, and some researchers argue that a young age is not a determining parameter for the development in those individual instances. According to Hartshorne, Tenenbaum and Pinker (2018), it is not yet known how to directly measure a learning ability when it comes to learning a language at an early age (as early as three years old) for a long term advantage. Empirical research that compares young learners to mature ones has demonstrated that grown students show higher linguistic performance than children, not worse than some linguists would argue (Huang, 2015; Krashen, Long, & Scarcella, 1979; Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978, as cited in Hartshorne, Tenenbaum & Pinker, 2018).

Vygotsky (1934) argued that typically developing children are more likely to learn basic communication by the age of three. Unlike the latter, those with delayed development demonstrate various communication challenges such as interacting and expressing thoughts in more complex words (e.g., Marfo, 1984; Yoder, Spruytenburg, Edwards, & Davies, 1995). This should be an important consideration, especially in preschool education since it is now more common to thrive for inclusivity in the classroom and making the learning environment equitable according to every learner's needs. Despite the critique, Vygotsky greatly contributed to the popularity of the concept of socialisation and the importance of the cultural context in children's speech and cognitive development.

#### **2.4. Behaviourist Theory of Second Language Acquisition**

In the 1960s, it became popular to apply behaviourism to the psychology of all types of learning, including learning a language and second language acquisition (Meisel, 2013). One of the most prominent theorists of that time was Skinner. Skinner, as a follower of behaviourism, argued that one's language is developed within the environment where a person/child lives. He explained this through his concept of a verbal behaviour. Skinner's definition (Skinner's writings, 1957a) of a verbal behaviour is quoted in Maria de Lourdes R. da F. Passos' analysis of his views of linguistics (2012) where she stated that an environment shapes, nourishes and maintains verbal behaviours which include interactions between the listeners and speakers of a certain social group. It has been argued by Skinner (1957) that children learn a second language through a chain of reinforcement, as behaviourism suggests, that learners associate words with meanings. The chain includes the following components: the stimulus, the foreign language which is presented to learners, the response which is a reaction to that stimulus, and the reinforcement which is a mentor or peers' praise and approval along with the learner's self-satisfaction. Interactions with adults (parents and teachers) and peers help learners associate words with meanings, which is essentially giving value to words and communication. Ambridge and Lieven (2011) shared the example of a mother rewarding her child with milk when the child utters the word "milk" correctly. The mother would smile and reward the child as a form of positive reinforcement, which encourages the learner's language development. In the "Signing with Babies" research project conducted by Ford (2010), parents were encouraged to accompany their gestures with smiles, or certain expressions on their faces and in their voices, which parents did naturally anyway. Such an approach is also encouraged with Makaton and other visual language systems where people accompany gestures with a certain tone of voice while

mimicking a facial expression to make it easier for language learners to apply meaning to the spoken and gestured words.

## **2.5. Gesture and Speech in Early Childhood Development**

Linguists, educators and psychology researchers studied gestures as part of a language and communication system from both evolutionary and neurophysiological perspectives back in the 1970s. According to Capirci and Volterra's (2008) literature review, the knowledge about the gesture language system for infancy did not develop further into common practice; however, it started drawing active attention in the world of neuropsychology. In the 1960s, gesture language systems first developed as a system for communication for people with deafness, then, for hearing people and people with learning difficulties later in the 1970s. Anelli Tissel (2019) suggested that due to the shift in attitudes towards gestures for language, its usage gained popularity among hearing people with no learning difficulties as well. Particularly, it became popular and gained an audience in Scandinavian countries, the USA, and the UK, where gesture systems are more commonly used than other augmentative and alternative communication systems. Kendon (1991) argued that gestures for language and speech for language are not tremendously different, and some researchers have made attempts in testing it in practice. Volterra and Etting (1990, 1994) studied both hearing children and children with hearing impairments, and their transition process from using gestures to language. Researchers viewed gestures as the main prelinguistic step in language formation. Infants use gestures to communicate with their parents and other adults by pointing at objects as a request or demonstration, or a symbolic play such as imitating a phone with hand gestures. This is common knowledge that we all happen to notice by communicating with children or simply observing how infants attempt to communicate with others.

Acredolo and Goodwyn (2000), Beckmann (2006), Capirci (1993), Johanson and Laumonen (2015) and Miller (1991) conducted studies in which they found that children with or without both delayed speech and speech impairments tend to communicate successfully with gestures. Capirci (2008) reported that in their study, Gentilucci and Corballis (2006) confirmed that children's gesture and speech evolve simultaneously with a gradual transition in the development of communication skills. Kendon (as cited in Capirci, 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. Capirci and Volterra's (2008) findings indicated a close connection between speech and gestures in a child's vocabulary development. They also provided evidence that once children's vocabulary increases, gestures start separating from speech. However, they also said that the older children become, the more gestures they use and the more subtle and fluent these become. Despite some separation, gestures do not disappear from speech, as some studies provide evidence to support it (Colletta, 2004; Goldin-Meadow, 2002; Mayberry & Nicoladis, 2000; McNeill, 2005; Pine et al., 2004). Wilkens (as cited in Anelli Tissel, 2019) believed that gesture is a language bridge between children's mother tongue and the second language they learn. This leads to the question that researchers have been attempting to find an answer to - can gestures enhance a spoken foreign language at early stages of children's development, and to what extent can they do so? This will be further explored in relation to Makaton. First, it is important to look at the TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) approaches that are supported by Skinner's and Vygotsky's language acquisition theories.

## **2.6. Teaching English as a Foreign Language: a Natural Approach**

Imitation, reinforcement, and habit formation which are the main principles of the behaviourist theory, have been the most important components of second language teaching approaches, according to Ellis (1990). These learning techniques are commonly practised but are believed to be performed best in a natural approach. Richards and Rodgers (1986) discussed Krashen and Terrell's (1983) take on second language acquisition when they made an analytical comparison of the various approaches used for teaching English as a second language. Krashen and Terrell (1983) believed in a natural approach to teaching a language, where meaningful communication is essential in learning. The approach is based on unconscious communicative learning where children learn a second language as if they were learning their mother tongue. Krashen (1982) argued that such an approach is also beneficial for language beginners which is our target group - preschool children whose native tongue is not English. That way the language is not forced, and at the same time, can be practised when teaching English and practising speech using Makaton. Makaton is similar to this approach as it is not focused on learning and mastering the grammar but on building a lexicon and a target language. Some components of the natural approach to teaching a foreign language by Krashen and Terrell (1995) include theories of successful second language acquisition that resonate with Makaton's design. These learning aspects include the acquisition hypothesis, the input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis.

The acquisition hypothesis implies acquiring a second language as if it were one's mother tongue by communicating in this language (Krashen, 1982). This resonates with Makaton's approach as it is a tool for accessible communication. The input hypothesis, according to Krashen (1982), is based on learners' comprehension in a meaningful context. Makaton provides such a linguistic context as it should be used in a meaningful learning environment with meaningful communication. Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis is built on the idea of the importance of positive emotional states and attitudes. His quantitative research identified

three main predictors of successful second language acquisition which are motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. The higher one's motivation and self-confidence are, the better one does in the classroom. Similarly, the lower the learners' anxiety levels are, the more receptive they are when acquiring the second language. Cross (2007) and Pim (2010) supported the importance of initial emotional comfort before learning a new language as this 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).

A language barrier is a good example of the affective filter hypothesis. Language teachers and students are well aware of how a language barrier can negatively affect their learning and communication, and even self-esteem. This can be explained through a well-known concept in psychology and education - Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a five-levelled model of human needs where psychological needs such as safety and self-esteem precede self-actualisation (accomplishment and creativity) (Maslow, 1943). In this system, a language barrier is a psychological aspect of the hierarchy and is thus advised to be overcome before the learning/language acquisition can occur (which is a self-fulfilment need). The use of Makaton is argued to be an effective way of overcoming psychological barriers as it has proven to be helpful for building relationships with participants via enhanced communication, improving eye-contact and raising the motivation and willingness to initiate communication (Mistry & Barnes, 2013).

## **2.7. Using Makaton as a Pedagogical Tool to Enhance Oral Speech**

As previously mentioned, my main research topic was Makaton's effectiveness as a pedagogical tool and its implementation for developing basic functional English in preschool education. 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). Here, I explore the international experiences and how this issue has been approached in the above-mentioned studies.

The studies that I reviewed for this section defined Makaton as a language system consisting of simplistic gestures - “signs” and symbols employed along with the talk. 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). These studies explored different aspects of Makaton, but for the purpose of this study, I mainly focused on early years (EY) teachers’ perspectives of its effectiveness for the development of basic functional English among preschool ESL learners.

As mentioned earlier, Makaton was designed as a communication tool for people with disabilities such as speech impairments and learning difficulties (Makaton Charity, 2008). Studies have shown great benefits of this language system such as enhanced vocabulary, improved parent-child relationships, more progressive verbal speech development, and even the development of literacy skills (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 2000; Beckman, 2006; Juhanssen, 1987; Launonen, 1996, 2015; Miller, 1991). However, 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. This finding supported the idea of testing Makaton in the internship project, and for the current thesis.

According to Mistry and Barnes (2013), it is natural for children to use gestures and nonverbal communication from an early age. These researchers reviewed various studies conducted on the topic of children's language development and conducted their own on how Makaton can affect children's talk in English. According to Mistry and Barnes (2013) literature findings, the findings in Capirci's study indicated that all participants used two gestures before two verbal expressions (Capirci et al., 1996). This finding supports Capirci's gesture and speech hypothesis that children start using gestures as a nonverbal form of communication before they utter words (Capirci, 1996). 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.

To sum these up, the use of Makaton can be beneficial for building important communication skills such as eye contact, better concentration and listening, as well as improving and building new relationships. Some language skills such as wider vocabulary and better understanding can be improved by using Makaton. These important findings have been taken into consideration, and have supported the idea of using Makaton for language development with some theoretical and experimental evidence. 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 have been explored.

## **2.8. Attitudes Towards Makaton as a Tool for Communication**

There is a mix of attitudes towards Makaton as a communication tool; however, various studies presented evidence that attitudes towards Makaton are mostly positive, especially after it has been implemented in a study program and practised by students who need this language system to study effectively. Sheehy, Kieron, Duffy, and Hester (2009) conducted a comparative study and found evidence that attitudes towards Makaton as a communication tool became more positive and destigmatised since 1986. The post-test interviews and questionnaires conducted by Mistry and Barnes (2013) showed that teachers were impressed with how Makaton can affect interactive experiences of children. According to Vinales (2012), students of Makaton training programs review their learning experience positively and would like to learn more about it and use it professionally. Ford (2006) found that parents build better relationships with their babies with the help of Makaton, and those parents intend to use it consistently to see further benefits. Burman (2001) in his older study identified some additional benefits of Makaton: it is easy to use, it encourages communication and speech, and most importantly, it is an inclusive way to integrate children into wider society. Teachers reported that children of all abilities learnt Makaton as if it was a foreign language, which created a more inclusive environment since they all communicated through it when learning and finally speaking in Makaton. Mistry and Barnes' (2013) highlighted the significance of inclusivity in education, and they supported the idea of Makaton being an inclusive tool as it helps meet *all* learners' needs. They argued that the main educational value of an inclusive learning environment is that it meets every learner's needs including overcoming language barriers for more effective communication (Mistry & Barnes, 2013). The participants also reported that using Makaton is an enjoyable practice and that they would use it in the future and more extensively.

### **2.8.1. Challenges in using Makaton**

There have been, however, some concerns raised when researching opinions and experiences about using Makaton. None of the tools is perfect, therefore, in order to evaluate Makaton as critically as possible, some negative experiences were identified in previous studies to discuss a full picture of the tool. Hence, one of the research questions that are related to the challenges that EY teachers had when implementing the new tool in their classrooms. In Warnock's report (1978) and the 1987 study where teachers of special schools were interviewed about their attitudes towards and practices with Makaton implementation, several themes emerged. Therefore, Burman (2001) identified and analysed the following issues: Makaton was not used widely enough; it can be detrimental to speech; it makes children appear more disabled; and some think it only suits non-verbal people. Abbot and Langley (2005) also reported similar attitudes towards Makaton: some teachers and their assistants expressed their concerns about Makaton such as Makaton not being suitable for older children, and misunderstanding by some members of the surrounding society as it can be perceived as a handicap. It is, however, worth mentioning that the same people still believe Makaton is of benefit despite their acknowledgement of its limitations. My study also explored teachers' challenges as well as any modifications that they would like to see regarding the use of Makaton in the context of their experiences in a school in Kazakhstan. These results will later be discussed, and how these results resonated with the literature findings.

## **2.9. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has explored the theory of second language acquisition and how children form their first verbal behaviour. It also covered the teaching of spoken English in EY education within the framework of the language acquisition theory and how gestures assist children in the development of their cognitive and communication skills. Additionally, the literature review

provided an analysis of educational studies conducted to test the effectiveness of Makaton as a teaching tool to enhance children's spoken English. I also explored and provided study findings on some of the challenges with using Makaton as reported by teachers and their assistants, and their attitudes towards it as a tool for communication. These issues were explored within the Kazakhstani context. The following key concepts emerged when studying language acquisition theories: gestures for language acquisition in early childhood, a natural approach to TEFL, the effectiveness of Makaton as a teaching tool for language acquisition, and the challenges to using Makaton as a tool for communication. The emerged key concepts supported the design of the data collecting instruments explained in the methodology chapter, which is our next chapter. The next chapter will also review the research design, sampling methods, limitations and ethics, and the way the data were analysed.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1. Chapter Overview**

The previous chapter reviewed theories of second language acquisition and the conceptual framework of the current study that includes such categories as the relationship between gesture and speech, the natural approach principles of effective TEFL, the use of Makaton as a teaching tool, and challenges of using it. The main research question that this study aimed to answer was the extent to which EY teachers perceive Makaton being effective to enhance basic functional English in their nursery classrooms. This chapter will provide justification on why the topic has been approached using a qualitative method, describe the site where the study was conducted and how the sample was selected. It will discuss the data collection tools used and all the necessary research procedures.

### **3.2. Research Design**

The literature review demonstrated that studying gestures and language acquisition, as well as the implementation of Makaton as a teaching method, has been approached both quantitatively and qualitatively depending on the researchers' purpose. The mixed-method approach to gathering data seemed beneficial as it allows the researcher to explore a diversity of perspectives on complex subjects and multiple research questions (Shorten & Smith, 2017). However, due to our small sample and the timescale of the study, I chose to collect qualitative data. A qualitative design was chosen as it is particularly popular in the field of education due to its ability to explore issues and phenomena deeper, especially in educational evaluation (Creswell, 2008), in this case, to evaluate the effectiveness of Makaton being used for supporting

basic functional English in a nursery classroom. This is a case study of one international school of Nur-Sultan, similar to the Mistry and Barnes' (2013) study where they sampled one primary school with ESL students. According to Yin (2013), a case study requires a close data examination; therefore, only one school was sampled in the case of Mistry and Barnes (2013), similarly to ours. A case study (as defined by Creswell, 2008), such as in my research, is an exploration of several nursery teachers' experiences and attitudes, specifically 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. Thus, a phenomenological study is characterised by a description of one particular phenomenon, in our case, Makaton, and nursery teachers' perceptions of its effectiveness in the development of basic functional English (Creswell, 2013).

### **3.2.1. Possible limitations and risks: ethical procedures**

Since I conducted my study at the place where I had earlier conducted my internship-based project, I believe, in this case, it is important to address the fact that I was playing the role of an insider. It was important to approach my work as critically as possible and acknowledge a variety of perspectives. It is crucial to be able to justify my choices and views by providing research-based evidence. Therefore, I acknowledge the subjectivity that might have been put into the research practice, and I take responsibility for the insider's biases. I still found different ways to ensure the good management of my biases. Murray and Lawrence (2000) suggest various ways that can help the researcher counteract with their own biases, such as paying particular attention to the participants' views during data collection, data evaluation, and data triangulation, and also keeping a neutral eye. Carefully monitoring the whole research process was the key approach when conducting my study. For this reason, more than one instrument was utilised to pose the research questions: class observations were conducted by the researcher and then those

were reflected on at the beginning of each interview afterwards. To manage the researcher's biases when taking observation field notes and interpreting those data, the researcher asked for observation reflections at the start of each interview. That helped triangulate the data which allowed multiple perspectives on the same topic. There was also a potential risk of conflict with the participants in case they disagreed with the researcher's observations. It was made clear in the interview that I would accept the teacher's perceptions regardless of what I had observed during the class, to eliminate any discomfort and value the points of view of the participants. My disagreements would not affect the study process and data analysis should there be any.

To avoid the biases, the interview was structured in accordance with the scholars' advice on how to avoid it. The interview questions were open-ended questions, so the participant had an opportunity to express how they felt instead of simply agreeing or disagreeing (Barbour & Schostak, 2005). It is also suggested to ask general questions first then to move to more specific ones, as the wrong order of the questions can also cause biases. I also worded the questions as simply and prompt-free as possible, so the participants would not feel led by the question words.

Another risk might have been the participants not feeling completely comfortable and secure when being observed, interviewed, or when sharing information. Although the participant signed a consent form to agree to be involved in the study, it was still the researcher's responsibility to ensure a secure environment for the data collection. The topic of the study is not sensitive, but the content of the questions was still selected in order for them to be posed in a non-triggering way. The interview did not include any provocative questions, inappropriate language, or the requirement to reveal any information unrelated to the research topic, so the participants should not feel judged when sharing their genuine answers or feel required to provide a "forced" positive response. The information sheet (see Appendix 1) included this condition and informed the participants' right to withdraw at any stage of the data collection process without the fear of being judged.

Additionally, there might have been a risk of the participants' identity being assumed from the research report. The researcher ensured that there were no recognised personal or specific details, which may reveal their identity. Questions were formulated in such a way that did not make their cases too specific.

### **3.3. Sample**

The research site was conveniently selected given that I had worked there in the past and had access to school N. Convenience non-probability sampling is characterised by the convenience of practical criteria such as the accessibility of the place and the research participants (Etikan, 2016). The participants were selected using a purposive non-probability sampling method known as self-explanatory: the participants i.e. teachers needed to meet a set of criteria necessary for the research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000), the first of which was that they had been teaching classes with the highest number of ESL beginners which is nursery classes, where they only start learning English. Another criterion was being trained to use Makaton as an ESL teaching tool and using it from the beginning of the academic year.

The whole Nursery Department i.e. 12 teachers were invited to a meeting where the purpose of the study and the research plans were explained in terms of interviews and class observations. Details regarding the rights of the participants and how the data would remain confidential were shared. They were then asked to voluntarily consent (or not) to participate in the research. All those who consented were included in the sample (see Appendix 2). 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 to face to face interviews individually, where they shared reflections of the lessons that were observed.

### **3.4. Research Site**

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the research site was the same school where I had conducted my internship based project. What made the school stand out for me is that it offers all stages of school education starting from the age of two (Kindergarten) up to the age of 18 (Key Stage 5). Students have an opportunity to study in English with the guide of the International Curriculum program. The school is also known for its policies supporting inclusive education, which is evident in the work of their SEN Department. The school welcomes students from any cultural or ethnic background with any level of English if they start their learning journey in Kindergarten. According to the Head of the Nursery Department, the majority of students at this school including those in nursery classes are local Kazakhstani citizens while the rest of them are international students.

### **3.5. Data Collection Instruments**

Having reviewed the literature on the implementation of Makaton in preschool education and its individual characteristics (using gestures to teach the language to preschool children), two main instruments were used. Interviews were conducted to explore teachers' attitudes towards Makaton after they had been trained to use it and had been using it to communicate with children to support their speech development (Abbot & Langley, 2005; Burman, 2001; Ford, 2010; Mistry & Barnes, 2013; Vinales, 2012; Warnock report, 1987). Structured observations were also utilised to evaluate the effectiveness of the tool (Mistry & Barnes, 2013). This technique allowed

the researchers to deeply evaluate the impact of Makaton on children's communication as a whole. I believe it is important to look at the research question critically and to be prepared for any possible contradictions; therefore, I chose to approach it from different angles. 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); and successful second language acquisition (Krawen, 1997).

Observation protocols were used to observe the teachers using Makaton during their classroom activities. This instrument allowed us (Creswell, 2007) to structure the observation process and focus on separate, thematic dimensions. The protocol was split into the main categories as suggested by Creswell (2007) to address some of the research questions and included the following key concepts for observations: ways teachers use Makaton as a tool in their classroom (visual aids, songs, etc), challenges teachers encounter when using Makaton, and additional notes of the observer in case I noticed anything interesting beyond the key concepts of the research.

The participants then reflected on what had been observed at the start of the semi-structured interviews. These semi-structured interviews allowed for a greater depth of understanding the topic through the exploration of the participants' experiences and knowledge, as well as their opinions and attitudes (Creswell, 2014). They were asked about their experiences when incorporating Makaton into classroom activities and when communicating with their students. They were then asked about their professional opinions about what they believed to be effective ways to use Makaton as a tool. The interviews were a final step of the triangulation

process. Triangulation allowed us to gather a variety of points of view (Creswell, 2008; Gorard & Taylor, 2004) which helped my small-scale study feel more credible by providing it with different sources of information and confirmation. Triangulation of data provides the possibility to explore a diversity of ideas. It is also an effective way to address credibility and validity in a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), especially when the study might include a subjective element.

### **3.6. Research Procedures: Ethics**

The research followed the Nazarbayev University (NU) IREC's ethical principles and BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 2017). I followed the following procedures: 1) the gatekeeper was approached with the information sheet and consent form; 2) the introductory meeting with the potential participants was arranged; 3) participants were selected and their consent was received; 4) attending classes for teachers' observations; 5) post-observation interviews were conducted; 6) data were validated and analysed.

The first thing that was done was obtaining the gatekeeper's permission; in my case study it was the school principal. The information sheet form (see Appendix 1) was sent to him via email, where I clearly described what was involved in my study including the purpose of my study and what the school participants would be asked to do. The document assured that the researcher would not only comply with the NU ethical principles, but also with the school policy ethical procedures. It stated that the potential participants would be approached with the information sheet as well, and would be informed about the study procedures. The document stated that participation would be anonymous and confidential, and no participants' names or the name of the school, or any data that would reveal the participant's identity or the place would be

disclosed. None of the collected data was shared with anyone except for the NUGSE supervisors of this research. Any data published outside of this thesis would only be published with the consent of the participants. The school principal was provided with my supervisor's contact details in case of any questions or concerns.

The information sheet for the study participants had similar contents with regards to the research purpose, ethics and what needed to be done for the study. Along with providing the information sheet, the researcher invited all the EY teachers to a meeting to introduce them to what the study was about in more detail. The date and the venue were arranged through the Head of EY, as she had their work email addresses and could contact them directly. The researcher spoke very clearly, in a non-intimidating manner, using simplistic language. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and the research would be done with their ongoing consent, and they had the option to withdraw at any time with no need for an explanation (BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 2017). Once the teachers made the decision to participate in the study, they were given a consent form (see Appendix 3), where they signed an agreement stating that they fully understood the background information, the confidential nature of the research (unless they wanted to be identified), and what they were asked to do. The participants were also provided with the researcher's contact details for further information.

Seven teachers volunteered to participate in the study. Their class observations started according to the dates and time agreed with them as soon as the consent forms had been signed and the dates had been negotiated. The observations did not interrupt the class activities, and the researcher was not actively involved in those activities. The field notes were taken quietly and filled in the observation protocols.

When the protocols were completed, the participants were invited to the interviews. Each interview was consensually recorded on a memo recorder on a smartphone. Each interviewee

was reminded of the purpose of the interview and its procedures. No notes were taken during the interview to create an informal, relaxed environment and each interview took up to half an hour. The interviews took place during the teachers' spare time at the school. The data collection took a month and occurred prior to the winter break at the end of December 2019. The collected data were then transcribed into text form and manually analysed. No secondary data but only primary sources were used for this case study.

### **3.6.1. Anonymity and confidentiality**

The gatekeeper and the participants were informed of their anonymity and confidentiality and assured that their identity will not be disclosed in any way. Their names were coded with a P+number representing the anonymous respondent instead of their real names, also, their personal information will not be shared. The data have been stored on password-protected laptops in locked folders. The collected data including the email correspondence will be discarded after the viva voce of the thesis. The participants were informed of their right to legal action should their confidentiality be breached in any way. No videos or pictures were taken with accordance to the school health and safety policies and ethical guidelines for educational research which is to protect the participants' and the school identity.

### **3.7. Data Analysis**

Creswell's (2008) educational research data analysis process was followed, starting with organising the collected qualitative data. As described by Creswell (2008), it was grouped by types into files and folders on my computer. All observation field notes and interviews were

transcribed into a text form and stored in separate Word files. They were each given the code name of the participant.

The data collected from the interviews and observation field notes were transcribed and analysed manually using a coding method (Creswell, 2007; Tesch, 1990) where the text was divided into several broad themes for further description and the researcher's interpretation. The main focus was the key concepts which were thematic categories of the observation and interview data. Those categories were drawn from the literature and addressed the key concepts within the research questions: the effectiveness of Makaton as a tool, activities where Makaton is used, challenges using Makaton in a classroom, and any desired changes to modify the tool. The key concepts were also narrowed down to codes using an In Vivo Coding method, which is the labelling of data sections by their main theme (Creswell, 2007). 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 while using it. Despite the structured nature of both interviews and observation protocols, any data collected beyond the set key concepts might have been useful for analysis.

### **3.8. Chapter Summary**

This chapter briefly described the qualitative design of the study, the sampling methods used to select the participants and the research site, the research procedures that were made, how observations and interviews were conducted, and how the qualitative data were analysed. It also covered all the potential risks and limitations that the study might have, and how those risks were managed by the researcher. The subsequent chapter will provide answers to the research questions, and discuss the data findings collected from the class observations and interviews, from the constructivist point of view of the researcher.

## **Chapter Four: Data Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1. Chapter Overview**

This chapter will review the findings elicited from the conducted class observations and interviews. The collected data have been divided into four main categories which reflect the second language acquisition theoretical framework and the following key concepts: gestures in early childhood language acquisition, natural approach to teaching English as a foreign language, Makaton as a multimodal tool for language acquisition, and challenges of using Makaton. These key concepts emerged from my literature review and helped address the research questions. The data findings represent the experiences and beliefs of early childhood educators when using Makaton as a supporting aid for the acquisition of basic functional English.

### **4.2. Class Observation Reflection and Interview Response Analysis**

To answer the main research question “to what extent do teachers perceive Makaton as an effective tool for developing the use of basic functional English among ESL learners”, the thematic analysis was done with accordance to the conceptual framework of second language acquisition theory. It is argued that children learn a second language through the chain of reinforcement as behaviourism suggests: learners associate words with meanings (Skinner, 1957). The chain includes the following components: the stimulus, a foreign language which is presented to learners; the response which is a reaction to that stimulus, and the reinforcement which is a mentor or peers' praise and approval along with the learner's self-satisfaction.

Interactions with adults (parents and teachers) and peers help learners associate words with meanings which are essentially giving value to words and communication.

Other research questions include the following: 2) How do teachers perceive the use of Makaton in their early education classroom? 3) Are there any challenges to using Makaton as a tool for developing basic functional English? 4) What modifications, if any, would early education teachers make, to improve Makaton as a tool? These questions will be answered through the following key concepts: Skinner's second language acquisition theory, Capirci's relationship between gestures and speech in early childhood development, Krashen's effective second language acquisition in early childhood, Makaton as a multimodal tool for second language acquisition, and challenges of using Makaton.

As planned in the methodology chapter, we reflected on the class observations that I conducted at the beginning of each interview, which allowed me to compare the observations and the respondents' outlooks on their class experiences, which triangulated the data. The observations and interviews analysis are summarised and presented in the table below including the themes that emerged within the main categories.

Table 1. Thematic Data Analysis

Research Topic		Teachers Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Makaton in an EY classroom		
Research Question	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?
Key Concept/Category	Gestures for Language	Makaton as a multimodal tool for	Challenges of using Makaton	Desired changes in the tool

	acquisition in early childhood  Natural approach to TEFL	communication and language acquisition		
Theme	Age of learners when acquiring the new language  Vocabulary building  Visual Support  Responsiveness  Consistency and repetition  Enhancement of understanding	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

### 4.3. Makaton as a Teaching Tool in an early education classroom

#### 4.3.1. Visual approach to classroom activities

As observed at the participants' classes earlier, Makaton is used in early years classes to support learners' functional language and its development. As teachers and the EY coordinator explained, it had been decided to implement Makaton in all preschool classes for consistency, and to help both teachers and learners get used to it. I observed Makaton being used on a daily basis in similar activities, which helped create a special language environment at their school. 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. Vygotsky (1978) and Freund (1990) emphasized the importance of teachers' guidance in children's learning through instructional interactions and communication, which helps language learners form their cognitive skills. Skinner (1957a) and Maria de Lourdes R. da F. Passos' (2012) argued that such a supportive environment provides nourishment and maintenance of children's verbal behaviour. Such interactions with teachers help learners associate words with meanings which is essentially giving value to words and communication. Ambridge & Lieven (2011) and Ford (2010) suggested that supporting gestures with meaningful facial expressions and tone of the voice as a reinforcement which encourages the learner's language development. This means that it 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.

#### **4.3.2. 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. The language barrier is a challenge that both teachers and learners face when it comes to communicating in a language that is not their own. 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 highlights the importance of overcoming the language barrier as he believes 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.

#### **4.3.3. Focus and concentration**

Another theme that emerged when asking the participants about how they use Makaton in their ESL teaching practice is 'Focus and concentration'. Teachers acknowledged that Makaton helps with the children's engagement. P2 and P6 shared that: "The children will remind me if I forget (to sing a "Good Morning" song in Makaton), so I usually don't." Additionally, P6 expressed how their learners demonstrate interest,

They show their interest, they're looking and listening. They're just soaking the information that we are giving here, even if they're not involved in the circle time and they're doing their own things, they're still listening and looking at what we do.

P2 and P6' experiences demonstrate that their learners are interested when Makaton is used by "reminding" them to use them, or like in P6's case "they're listening and looking from afar" even when they say "no" to the activity. It is also interesting that P6 still thinks that the learners are engaged in the process even if they do not show active engagement, she still believes that they "soak up" the information that teachers give them. 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.

This result is similar to the results that Mistry and Barnes (2013) got in their experimental study where they taught English vocabulary to early year students using Makaton, and it helped them keep the students interested and focused. Such concentration 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.

#### **4.3.4. 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. Along with discouraging unwanted behaviour, they also use it to reinforce a positive behaviour. Encouragement and praise are techniques which Makaton enhances, according to all the respondents: “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 such 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. This language reinforcement should be practised regularly from a young age. In this context, teachers practice it from the age of two up to the age of four before children move to primary school when they turn five.

#### **4.4. Effectiveness of Using Makaton**

This section presents the observation and interview findings regarding the main research question - effectiveness of the tool for acquiring basic functional English. It is interesting to note that the respondents share a common understanding of what effective language acquisition means to them in general when it comes to judging young children's verbal behaviour. 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: "No... Not really. The Good morning song is just a general practice we do every day. It's difficult to know what impact it might have in terms of language, whether it's just the repetition, you know." Here, the Good Morning song that P4 referred to is the activity they do every morning to start off the day - teacher greets everyone by singing and signing the song in Makaton, while the learners respond by simultaneously singing and signing the song with the teacher.

Many Makaton song activities like that 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.

#### **4.4.1. 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. From the observation protocol of P5:

learners do not always repeat the sign or the said word after the teacher. Children do not always want to join in and say “no” to suggested activities. Not all opportunities have been used for Makaton. Makaton is seldom used. It is only used when singing a Hello song. It can get quite chaotic when children start playing around. Every time the learners get playfully distracted, it was challenging for the teacher to focus their attention on the necessary activity.

A similar picture appears at P6's class observation. 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 (Vygotsky, 1934). Several other psychologists and linguists support this notion as the age of three is believed to be the most sensitive stage of language and cognitive development (Davydov, 1996; Elkonin, 1998; Venger, 1982).

As P6 shared, a younger age causes other challenges such as their low ability to focus on activities: along with learners' distractions come teachers' numerous attempts to maintain the class focused, which can be very difficult to do. P6 expressed that due to the disruptive environment, Makaton tends to be forgotten. 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:

They show their interest, they're looking and listening... They're just soaking the information that we are giving here, even if they're not involved in the circle time and they're doing their own things, they're still listening and looking at what we do.

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.

Class observations of these particular participants did show that students demonstrated indifference to verbal interactions with teachers and assistants. However, it would not be fair of me as the researcher and observer to evaluate this aspect, as I was attending only one class of each participant, so here I will mostly refer to the interview responses based on their long-term experiences. 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.

#### **4.4.2. Vocabulary builder**

Some respondents, however, had different experiences and noticed an increase in learners' vocabulary. P2, P3 and P7 agree that Makaton is useful for the development of basic English vocabulary necessary for their age. For example, P7 shared,

it gives them the vocabulary because it's quite focused and we have a number of focus words that we're using. Like I said before, the consistency of using the same vocabulary, the same signs, means they just pick it up a lot quicker than if you're using a whole range of different vocabulary for the same thing. So I think it definitely aids their communication in English.

P7 accentuates how focused Makaton makes the vocabulary that they learn in preschool classes, especially with the teachers' genuine attempt to use it as regularly as possible. In reviewing the literature, prior studies such as Ford's (2006) and Mistry and Barnes (2013) have found that Makaton does, indeed, increase the basic vocabulary of young children due to an increased eye contact and reinforcement of their verbal behaviour.

Quite an interesting result was shown in P5's response regarding the language acquisition and picking up new vocabulary:

they're repeating after us and we keep telling them and they use very simple gestures. We're still working on developing their vocabulary and this kind of question is not easy to answer because you know we've got children who are native speakers. And for them it's completely fine because English is their first language, and we've got our local children, they might be kind of shy. And for them, it is very slow. So, you know, it depends on the children, basically. Some of them, they're picking gestures and the language really quickly and the others... they're not so good at it.

This can be explained by the language environment that children have back home, as their mother tongue is more regularly supported at home. As Skinner (1957) argued when talking about verbal behaviour, language is acquired with the help of children's language environment, so evidently children who are native speakers show a higher speed of the English language acquisition. This only emphasises the need for a strong language environment, especially for those learners who do not have access to it outside school.

#### **4.4.3. Visual support**

Participants also often mentioned the visual aspect of Makaton of both symbols and signs, and they believe it to be effective for acquiring the language: "I noticed that children are

copying the gestures”; “that's where I find Makaton at its most useful because it's that visual support to say that”; “it's like a double approach, it's visual and they hear it, and I think it definitely helps them acquire English”. All these respondents' quotes demonstrate their appreciation of how supportive Makaton is as a visual aid - it helps these preschool teachers express the new vocabulary in a visual way, plus it helps the students themselves to learn it visually and express words in multiple ways. The positive effect of the visuality of the instrument can be explained by the way Makaton is designed to be used. It is known for its multimodality, so along with talking and uttering words, a child whom teachers talk to ideally should see and hear the word uttered and signed, and even sense the facial emotions and voice tone when having communication. When the instrument is used as a whole - utterance, sign and emotion, symbol, it is believed and reported to be effective according to previous studies reviewed in the literature such as Mistry and Barnes (2013), Ford (2006) and Burman (2001). When observing the participants' classes I saw how Makaton is used in regular classroom activities. The visuality of the instrument is, indeed, the key and it almost never gets overlooked. Teachers would encourage eye contact, and children's full concentration so they would properly listen and repeat what was being said to ensure learning and understanding.

#### **4.4.4. Responsiveness**

Understandably, responsiveness to teachers' attempts to communicate with little children would vary depending on the interest of children, their personality, and a personalised approach to individual learners. When attending the participants' lessons, I observed the different ways children would respond to their teacher's words. All respondents agreed that Makaton got a mixture of reactions to it in terms of ongoing responsiveness. P4 said,

I would say there is a mixture: some of the students who use it like when we do the good morning song, and some of them do the action, some of them don't any too. And some of them like to do it and some of them, maybe don't show much interest in it, so there is a mixture. And I think that there are some students who are less confident speaking, shall we say, or don't yet have the communication skills, they do find it more useful.

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.

#### **4.4.5. Improvement of understanding**

However, 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:

there are some students who have very little English at this point. And it's a way that I can talk to the children one on one sometimes without the need of an assistant teacher to translate, or to help reinforce what we're saying.

Sometimes a teacher assistant would help the main teacher translate some words into learners' native language, but here, 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 supports the idea of behaviourism and Skinner's language acquisition theory that children learn a second language through reinforcement by associating words with meaning. The chain includes the following components: the stimulus, a foreign language which is presented to learners; the response which is a reaction to that stimulus, and the reinforcement which is a mentor or peers' praise and approval along with the learner's self-satisfaction (Skinner, 1957). Interactions with teachers and peers help learners associate words with meanings which is essentially giving value to words and communication.

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.

#### **4.5. Challenges in Using Makaton in an Early Childhood Education Classroom**

##### **4.5.1. 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 facing is incorporating all Makaton elements, particularly Makaton symbols, which in some respondents' opinions affects the consistency of practice. They explained it with their “forgetfulness” and “business”. It is common to get caught up in things and react to certain situations quickly and practically rather than prioritizing the use of the Makaton system. 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.

While I sympathised with these shared challenges as I am a teacher myself, so these difficulties such as business and managing to keep things consistent are known to me. However, 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 general misconception of Makaton, as it was originally created for people with special needs (Abbot & Langley, 2005; Burman, 2001; Warnock, 1978).

#### **4.5.2. 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 (Makaton Charity, 2008) 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). P6 still uses the signs that contain more than one word but does not find it successful in terms of understanding the words and acquiring the necessary language, whereas P5 removed those signs from everyday practice altogether (as observed during one of their classes as well) with the main focus being on visual vocabulary (Makaton symbols) and action words in songs. 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.

#### **4.6. Desired Changes**

##### **4.6.1. More consistency in using the tool**

When I asked the participants whether they would like to see any modifications to how Makaton is used at the EY education department, the desired changes (if any) were mostly related to the challenges that they faced when 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. Their research outcomes demonstrated that Makaton enhances vocabulary and builds important communication skills such as an initiation of conversation, eye contact, and even promotes positive behaviour such as being polite and caring for others. The responses of teachers are based on the experiences of three months to nearly a year long, and similar results emerged. Additionally, the researchers of those mentioned studies recommended extending the timescale of the study. Ford (2006) suggested that the timescale of her experiment (six weeks) should be extended as it could show additional results such as other effects of Makaton on young learners' language development.

##### **4.6.2. Using all elements of Makaton**

Some respondents said that they would not change anything about the tool as they mostly had 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. P1 shared,

I would not necessarily change it as a tool per se, as it's an amazing and fantastic thing. But I think it should be mandatory in every classroom. ... I think I should use symbols more... Because I don't often refer to the pictures, the signs... Maybe that's another thing I should change.

This means that P1 would like to see what other benefits Makaton can provide if all its elements (symbols and signs) are used even more regularly. 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.

#### **4.7. Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a description of the data findings relating to the themes from the conceptual framework and the second language acquisition theory and quoted the researcher's observations and participants' interview answers that address the research questions. All categories were grouped in a table with codes under each category. A variety of opinions and experiences were explored and reviewed. First of all, most participants shared the belief in the evident benefits of the new tool such as its visuality and ability to provide a more inclusive approach to language learners, as well as its effectiveness for building the basic target vocabulary and communication skills. Some participants, however, found it challenging to

evaluate its effectiveness, or keep the practice consistent in a busy environment. Making the tool a consistent practice and incorporating both Makaton signs and symbols are the most desired changes that the participants want to see in the future. The final chapter will summarise the study findings, consider the current study limitations and provide some suggestions for further research, and finally, will highlight the study significance.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **5.1. Summary of the Study**

The present study examined teachers' perspectives of the visual support based language teaching tool 'Makaton' for preschool students in early year classrooms. The students were learning English as a foreign language and the research focused on the extent to which they believe this tool facilitates the development of basic functional English for EY learners. This qualitative study collected data from class observations and interviews with teachers in a private EY school in the urban region of Kazakhstan.

To summarise the study findings, certain elements of Makaton have a positive effect on young learners' basic English, according to early childhood education teachers' experiences. The results showed that those elements include visuality of the tool through symbols and signs, the way it targets a variety of learners' senses such as hearing the word and seeing the sign, motoric copying of the sign and uttering the word, and its simplicity in usage. This relates to the studies by Volterra and Etting (1990, 1994) who viewed gestures as the main prelinguistic step in language formation.

The results also indicate that using visual support enhances English language learning and assists in building basic vocabulary and communication skills. The findings of the current study resonated with Capirci and Volterra's findings (2008) who indicated a close connection between speech and gesture in a child's vocabulary development. Additionally, the participants expressed that Makaton reinforces basic English language as well as following positive behaviour which relates to Skinner's language acquisition theory and his concept of the language being a chain of reinforcement. Skinner (1957) also argued that children's language and their

verbal behaviour are acquired and developed in social groups that they belong to. Lastly, the teachers shared that Makaton serves as a tool to remove a psychological learning barrier which they deem effective for second language acquisition. This finding corroborates with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis which is built on the idea of the importance of a positive emotional state and attitudes.

Teachers also discussed some of the challenges of using this tool in an EY environment. Interestingly, their challenges differed from the ones that emerged in the literature. While the teachers expressed practice inconsistency and complexity to be the most challenging obstacles about using Makaton, the literature findings demonstrated that the novelty of Makaton, age inappropriateness and general misconception of Makaton (it was originally created for people with special needs) were the main challenges (Abbot & Langley, 2005; Burman, 2001; Warnock, 1978).

## **5.2. Significance of the Study**

The findings of the current research are important and novel, as they will allow understanding of how Makaton can be used in the context of Kazakhstani preschool education. Some findings were unexpected such as Makaton not being a minimalist or simplistic enough tool, so it made it evident that EY teachers' experiences differ. That can contribute to potential future research on this topic. The results of the proposed study will also inform educators and policymakers who are interested in alternative and innovative visual and multimodal methods of teaching English as a foreign language. Additionally, the findings can be beneficial for young ESL learners as they can potentially contribute to the field of research on the development of spoken English in preschool education in Kazakhstan. Finally, as Mistry and Barnes (2013) argued, implementing Makaton in the ESL program can promote inclusive ideas as the tool helps

meet all ESL learners' needs such as communicative (speech impairments) and psychological (language barrier) ones.

### **5.3. Limitations of the Study**

As was stated in the methodology chapter, the study had some limitations due to its nature and the chosen topic of research, which might have affected the research outcomes. The nature of the study was explorative, and collecting non-numeric qualitative data often reduces objectivity and makes it difficult to avoid bias completely. That limited the study as the research included mine and the participants' biases that needed to be managed during the data collection, particularly since the participants were known to me. In my methodology chapter, I described how I managed these possible biases by following Murray's and Lawrence's (2000) suggestions such as paying particular attention to the participants' views during data collection, data evaluation, data triangulation, and also keeping an objective, neutral eye. Despite the careful research process monitoring and incorporating two instruments for data collection, further work can be done to strengthen the instruments against biases. First of all, more class observations could be done on a more regular basis to gather more data on how the tool had been implemented, and also to track the students' reactions in a variety of situations. Learners' and teachers' interactions can also be observed outside the classroom for additional data related to Makaton's effectiveness for the development of basic functional English. In order to do this, carefully following IREC procedures would be recommended, as observation of students can be an ethical issue that would need extended time for its resolution.

### **5.4. Recommendations for Further Research**

Considering the other limitations of the study such as a small size of the sample and its location, I think it is reasonable to recommend extended research on this topic and a broadened scope of the study. The study was conducted in a single school in Nur-Sultan, so the results cannot be generalised to the entire preschool population. Teachers' experiences might differ outside the urban area, as well as they might differ if the researcher is not an insider of the study. The timescale was also limited as it was a part of a graduate school course, so extending the study would also mean extending the duration of the research. Since the tool was recently implemented, only over a year ago, it is recommended to explore the teachers' experiences with using the tool for longer to seek additional results, as well as observe the classes where the tool has been implemented for a longer period of time.

Furthermore, it is recommended to include the learners themselves as part of the research, and not only focus on teachers. Since this was a phenomenological study, the focus was mainly on the teachers and their perceptions rather than observing students and how they reacted to their interactions with teachers. Similarly to studies by Capirci and Volterra (2008), and Mistry and Barnes (2013), further research can be done to evaluate if the teachers' perceptions of the tool are accurate, as they observed and monitored children and the way they acquired language when adults used Makaton to teach them the target language. Having young ESL learners as study subjects might be beneficial for the triangulation of extended research, in addition to conducting interviews and expertise of professional linguists and researchers. The expertise could be useful for the creation of an evaluating tool that could measure the effectiveness of Makaton more accurately. When observing and analysing students' performance as participants of the study, additional expertise will be needed to conduct that study as Mistry and Barnes (2013) collaborated with professional linguists, and Capirci and Volterra (2008) themselves are researchers in linguistics.

Additionally, the study participants shared that they would like to see the tool implemented in a more systematic way, which means having Makaton standardised as the main tool to deliver lessons and support students' spoken English. As some researchers argued, Makaton has its benefits such as overcoming a language barrier, stronger adult-child relationships, higher concentration, increased vocabulary and even improved behaviour (Ford, 2006; Juhanssen, 1987; Launonen, 1996; Madigan, 2005; Mistry & Barnes, 2013). Some of these findings resonated with the results of the current study, especially supporting children to tackle their language anxiety and to build their basic vocabulary, as well as to reinforce positive behaviour. In the future, preschool teachers and curriculum designers might find some elements of Makaton helpful in providing new tools to support young learners' spoken English.

### **5.5. Final Comment**

I believe the study was successful, as it achieved its purpose to explore and share teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Makaton for preschool students' English in Kazakhstan. Some research questions might not have been fully answered as some respondents shared that they found it difficult to evaluate Makaton effectiveness for language acquisition, but they still addressed what effect Makaton has on such aspects of communication as the understanding of what has been said and following verbal instructions. Those were 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.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Information Sheet for the Principal

Dear Mr X,

Thank you for taking your time in reading this letter.

My name is Anna Sin, and I am a graduate student at Nazarbayev University. I am currently planning research on the “Teachers’ Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Makaton in a nursery classroom”. The purpose of my research is to evaluate the effectiveness of Makaton as a teaching tool for Nursery students in an EY classroom who study English as a foreign language. It will focus on the extent to which this tool facilitates the development of basic functional English from EYFS teachers’ perspectives. This study will contribute to research in teaching English as a second language in preschool education. It will also inform practitioners on how to support learners’ with language development needs.

I would like to obtain your permission to gain access to your school, so I could conduct this study. Your contribution is important to us, but your participation is voluntary, so we can stop this at any time if you wish. Participation is confidential, so your name or any other personal details of the school or participants will not be seen by anyone apart from myself and my supervisors. The information will be used in my thesis and presentations and published only with your consent. I promise to comply not only with our ethical guidelines of educational research but also with your school policies. You may exercise your right to take legal action against me in case confidentiality or any other ethical principles have been breached by me.

My study will include class observations and face to face interviews with Nursery teachers. Class observations and interviews will not interrupt the learning process in any way. The participants will be invited to the meeting where they will be explained the purpose of the study and what needs to be done, and on a voluntary basis, five consented teachers will be randomly selected and occupied for the interviews in their free of work time.

For further information, please contact my supervisor, Pr. Sulochini Pather, at [sulochini.pather@nu.edu.kz](mailto:sulochini.pather@nu.edu.kz); Tel: +7 (7172) 70 9324; Skype: sulochini.pather

## **Appendix 2: Information Sheet for the Participant**

Dear teacher,

Thank you for taking your time in reading this letter.

My name is Anna Sin, and I am a graduate student at Nazarbayev University. I am currently planning research on the “Teachers’ Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Makaton in a nursery classroom”. The purpose of my research is to evaluate the effectiveness of Makaton as a teaching tool for Nursery students in an EY classroom who study English as a foreign language. It will focus on the extent to which this tool facilitates the development of basic functional English from EYFS teachers’ perspectives. This study will contribute to research in teaching English as a second language in preschool education. It will also inform practitioners on how to support learners’ with language development needs.

Your contribution is important to us, but your participation is voluntary, so we can stop this at any time if you wish. Participation is confidential, so your name or any other personal details of the school or participants will not be seen by anyone apart from myself and my supervisors. The information will be used in my thesis and presentations and published only with your consent. I promise to comply not only with our ethical guidelines of educational research but also with your school policies. You may exercise your right to take legal action against me in case confidentiality or any other ethical principles have been breached by me.

My study will include class observations and face to face interviews with Nursery teachers. Class observations and interviews will not interrupt the learning process in any way. I will only need one class to observe once. I will only interact with you at the scheduled interview after the observations.

For further information, please contact me at [anna.sin@nu.edu.kz](mailto:anna.sin@nu.edu.kz), +77029742799

### Appendix 3: Written Informed Consent Form

Dear Teacher,

You are kindly invited to participate in a research study on Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Makaton in a Nursery Classroom.

**Procedures.** My study will include class observations and face to face interviews with Nursery teachers. Class observations and interviews will not interrupt the learning process in any way. The participants will be invited for interviews in their free of work time.

**Benefits.** I believe the proposed research will be beneficial to the education policymakers at the Ministry of education, and also teachers of ESL and pre-school education to inform their practices, in order to support learners' with language development needs. This will also promote inclusive education since the purpose of Makaton in this context will be helping fairly meet all the learners' educational needs. Moreover, this research will contribute to the field of educational research as studies on the use of Makaton or gesture as an ESL teaching technique have not been conducted in Kazakhstan.

**Compensation.** No tangible compensation will be given. A copy of the research results will be available at the conclusion of the study at the Nazarbayev University depository.

**Confidentiality & Privacy.** Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the fullest extent possible. All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The data will be stored on a password-protected laptop in locked folders. The collected data including the email correspondence will be discarded after the thesis defence. You have the right to perform a legal action against the researcher in the event of anonymity and confidentiality have been breached. No videos or pictures will be taken in accordance with the school health and safety policies and ethical guidelines for educational research to protect the participants' and the school identity.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study.** Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if the agreement to participate is given, it can be withdrawn at any time without prejudice.

**Points of Contact.** It is understood that should any questions or comments arise regarding this project, or a research-related injury is received, Anna Sin, +77029742799, [anna.sin@nu.edu.kz](mailto:anna.sin@nu.edu.kz) should be contacted. Any other questions or concerns may be addressed to the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee, [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz).

Statement of Consent.

I, \_\_\_\_\_,

Give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

The researchers clearly explained to me the background information and objectives of the study and what my participation in this study involves.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I can at any time and without giving any reasons withdraw my consent, and this will not have any negative consequences for myself.

I understand that the information collected during this study will be treated confidentially.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher:

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 4: Observation Protocol**

Example of P1

<p>Participant 1 One lesson (40 minutes)</p>	<p>Date: 05/11/2019 Researcher's Comments: 05/11/2019</p>
<p>Activities that the teacher uses to incorporate Makaton</p> <p>Carpet time - Teacher invites learners to gather for a good morning song.</p> <p>Greetings: Hello, how are you (emotions).</p> <p>Class Relationships: "we're all friends here"</p> <p>Weather and days of the week: Teacher sings a "Snow" song with learners. Days of the week in Makaton.</p> <p>Phonics practice: the sounds they have learnt using gestures.</p> <p>Writing practice: a short simple sentence on individual whiteboards.</p> <p>Attention reminders: thumbs up if T is being heard, "good listening, good sitting, good looking".</p>	<p>Teacher invites everyone (learners and assistants) to sit down on a carpet. Teacher does it vocally, not using Makaton yet - the verbal instruction was enough to grab every child's attention and follow the instructions. When everyone's seated, T asks how learners are doing by asking (in Makaton) "how are you?", "are you good?", "are you happy", "are you sad", "are you angry". T gives an example by providing an answer herself and says "I am good" and "I'm happy" in Makaton.</p> <p>Learners follow with different answers that T provided and say "I'm sad", "I'm happy". One child says "I'm funny" and playfully makes faces and "funny" body language.</p> <p>Then T tells everyone that they are "friends" and says it in different variations several times. Then T helps children practice the days of the week using Makaton: spells the first letter of each day and links the "day" sign. T says the word out loud along with the sign and using flashcards.</p>

<p>Activity transition: teacher invites learners to wash hands and have breakfast in the canteen.</p>	<p>T praises every time she gets the learners' attention by saying "good listening", "good looking", "good sitting", and "good speaking" (if that occurs). Some learners repeat what she says, especially "good sitting" and "mouth zipped".</p> <p>Then T asks the learners what the weather is like by asking leading questions "is it raining?", "is it sunny?", "is it snowing?" using flashcards. When some children quickly react and say "it's snowing", T starts singing the "snow" song using Makaton again. This song has much fewer signs, so all learners manage to follow both the lyrics and the signs. T gives them another praise in Makaton.</p> <p>T then follow the song with the phonics activity using flashcards and gestures. T goes through each flashcard and a sound on it (skips the ones they haven't learnt yet), and gestures every sound, and waits when every learner does it (pronounces it and gestures it).</p> <p>After another visual praise, T hands out children's personal folders with whiteboards and markers in them for the writing activity.</p> <p>T slowly guides the learners to write a short sentence letter by letter. The sentence includes the word of the day and the sound of the week. Children watch, follow the T and write it down. Some children struggle</p>
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	<p>and not see what the T is writing on her board, but she encourages those children to challenge themselves and listen to what she's saying and follow her speech instead. When they have finished, T checks everyone's attention by asking them to raise a thumb up and does it herself for guidance. When all children do it, T praises the children once again to conclude the lesson with "good listening", "good looking", "good sitting", "good speaking", and "good writing".</p> <p>She then invites everyone to "wash hands" and line up for "breakfast".</p>
<p>Classroom Setting</p> <p>Visual aids - special Makaton symbol flashcards on the walls and boards, also stored in themed boxes.</p>	<p>When Practicing Days of the Week, they use flashcards on the board: T takes each off and revises it individually with the whole group.</p> <p>T does the same thing when talking about the weather, and practising phonics.</p> <p>Other things observed: calendar with the days of the week, months and even weather forecast.</p> <p>Overall, the classroom is visual in every respect, but not necessarily for Makaton purposes.</p> <p>There is a set of basic Makaton symbols on the board that was not used during the lesson.</p>
<p>Challenges When Using Makaton</p>	<p>Teacher uses Makaton when signing the Good Morning Song with the children -</p>

<p>Learners do not keep up with all the signed words.</p> <p>Learners do not always repeat the sign or the said word after the teacher or initiate the communication.</p>	<p>most of them sign successfully, and some of them follow the lyrics as well. Not all children can keep up with the pace very well, as there are quite a few signs to do and accompany the lyrics.</p>
<p>Additional Observations</p> <p>Makaton is used along with the teacher's talk and symbols/pictures printed on flashcards, in group activities only, when carpet time begins.</p>	<p>Before the class starts, the teacher is welcoming the children one by one, as soon as they individually arrive at school and enter the classroom. The teacher says "good morning" to each of them (no signing used), and some students respond with a "morning". The teacher encourages all arriving children to say "good morning", but if some children smile in silence, the teacher does not pressure children to talk. Right before the class officially begins (if some arrive early, they are offered an activity), children are occupied with either playing with toys, reading a book, or practising spelling their names.</p> <p>Teacher uses other techniques to draw the children's attention: rings the bell when the playtime (before the class starts) is over and says that it is time to tidy up (no signing yet).</p>

### Appendix 5: Interview Protocol

Location:

Date and time:

Participant Code:

Hello, \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you very much for taking your free time for this interview. If you remember, I've invited you to talk about what you think of Makaton. I would love to hear your opinion about it. I'm not here to hear only positive things, I would genuinely love to hear your honest view on it and your experience.

Your contribution is important, but your participation is voluntary, so we can stop this at any time if you wish. Participation is confidential, so your name or any other personal details will not be seen by anyone apart from myself and my supervisors.

Before coming here, you have been given a consent form. Here are two copies of it which you can sign. You can keep one for yourself. Do you have any questions? I'll be recording this interview if you don't mind? This is only for transcription, no one will hear it but me. If there are no questions, may I start the interview?

Interview Questions:

1. Alright. Would you like to tell me about yourself and what you do, please?
2. Thank you. Now, last time we met, I was observing one of your classes. What do you think you did there? (Reflection on observations)
3. When did you start using Makaton in your classroom?
4. How are you using it - formally (lesson plan), or as a tool for communication? (reflection on observations)
5. Please, describe in what situations your students spoke basic English using Makaton in the past month?
6. Could you, please, describe how your students react to Makaton?
  - In what situations or activities were your students the most responsive to Makaton (RQ: effectiveness of Makaton)?
7. How do you think your students have been making progress in speaking basic English after Makaton has been implemented (effectiveness)?
8. What is your opinion about Makaton as an English teaching technique? (RQ: teachers' attitudes towards Makaton as a teaching technique)
9. What do you think is challenging about using Makaton in the classroom? (RQ: teachers' attitudes towards Makaton as a teaching technique, challenges)

10. Would you change Makaton as a tool in any way? Do you think it's culturally appropriate in this school context? (RQ: desired modifications if any)