



Cyprus  
University of  
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Faculty of Health  
Sciences

**Doctoral Dissertation**

**SPEECH AND LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS'  
EXPERIENCES IN GRAPHIC SYMBOL COLLECTION  
SELECTION: ICONICITY PERCEPTIONS AND  
PREFERENCES OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM**

**Vasiliki Hadjicharalambous**

**Limassol, April 2026**



CYPRUS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY  
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DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SCIENCES

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## **Approval Form**

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AUTISM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Individuals with autism are commonly supported with augmentative and alternative forms of communication, including graphic symbols. Selecting the optimal graphic symbol collection has been described as a complex task by speech-language pathologists (SLPs) who frequently implement those during assessment and intervention. The current study aimed at gaining in-depth information, through interviews with SLPs, about their experiences during this selection, including the assessment methods that support their decisions and their views on their clients' preferences. Another aim was to examine the iconicity perceptions and the preferences of students with autism towards Pics for PECS, Makaton and Widgit collections, and compare those with typically developed peers, since literature on these factors remains limited. Findings suggested that SLPs consider multiple factors related to themselves, their client, the family of their client, symbol collection characteristics, practical issues, and assessment and intervention. Both groups of students shared common perceptions on iconicity and preferences, but those differed from the expectations of SLP interviewees. Interestingly, the collection that was perceived as the most iconic was not the preferred one. These findings highlight the importance of following evidence-based practices, while also considering the individual perceptions and preferences of students with autism during this selection.

**Keywords:** autism, graphic symbols, iconicity, preferences, speech language pathologists, students