

Comparative Examination of Preschool Education Curricula in Germany, Finland, Norway, South Korea, Türkiye, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of preschool education programs in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Türkiye, Germany, Finland, Norway, and South Korea. The study examines the philosophical foundations, pedagogical approaches, structure and organization of learning areas, developmental domains and learning outcomes, teacher roles, family involvement, use of technology, and assessment approaches within these programs. The research was designed as a qualitative study employing the document analysis method. The data sources consist of the most recent official preschool education curricula of the selected countries, as well as relevant scholarly literature. The data were analyzed using a content analysis framework developed in accordance with the research questions.

Findings indicate that all examined countries prioritize child-centered approaches, play-based learning, and a holistic view of child development in their preschool education programs. However, significant differences were identified in terms of philosophical orientations and structural organization. In Germany, the Froebelian tradition and social pedagogy are prominent, whereas Finland and Norway emphasize child rights, inclusivity, well-being, and democratic participation within a welfare-state framework. Norway is further distinguished by its strong focus on nature-based learning and sustainability. In South Korea, the Nuri Curriculum integrates education and care within a unified structure. In Türkiye and the TRNC, an eclectic, child-centered, and play-based approach is adopted. Regarding the organization of learning areas, Finland and Norway demonstrate transversal and integrated structures, while Türkiye and the TRNC adopt more flexible and mixed models. In terms of assessment practices, all countries favor process-oriented approaches; however, child participation and pedagogical documentation are more prominent in Finland and Norway.

In conclusion, preschool education programs worldwide are evolving toward a child-centered, play-based, and holistic developmental paradigm. Nevertheless, each country adapts this paradigm according to its own historical, cultural, and educational policy contexts. It is suggested that Türkiye and the TRNC, while aligned with international trends, could further enhance their programs by strengthening child participation, family-school collaboration, technology integration, nature-based learning, and participatory assessment practices.

Keywords: Preschool education, early childhood education, curriculum, comparative education

INTRODUCTION

The preschool period is a critical process that encompasses the early years of an individual's life and is characterized by the fastest development. The experiences acquired during early childhood have a profound influence on children's subsequent educational trajectories and overall development. Educational environments that provide rich learning experiences are therefore essential for fostering children's cognitive, language, social-emotional, motor, and self-care skills. Furthermore, preschool education aims to facilitate children's transition to primary school by promoting essential social competencies, including turn-taking, sharing, cooperation, and compliance with social rules (Serdaroğlu & Bekir, 2024).

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is widely recognized as one of the fundamental components of education systems worldwide. Research consistently demonstrates that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired during early childhood exert long-term effects on children's academic achievement, social adjustment, and lifelong learning outcomes. Accordingly, Vural and Kocabaş (2016) emphasize that a substantial proportion of an individual's educational success is associated with experiences gained between the ages of 0 and 6 years. Consequently, the quality and effective implementation of preschool education curricula constitute critical determinants of the overall effectiveness of education systems. Supporting children's cognitive, language, motor, and social-emotional development through a holistic approach within preschool settings not only contributes to their multidimensional development but also promotes the acquisition of social competencies and successful adaptation to society through peer interactions (Akyol, 2017; Karaca, Gündüz, & Aral, 2011).

The educational philosophies underpinning contemporary early childhood education programs are largely derived from the theoretical perspectives of influential scholars who have shaped the development of early childhood pedagogy. The kindergarten approach developed by Friedrich Froebel emphasized children's active participation, learning through play, and interaction with nature (McNair & Powell, 2020). Similarly, Maria Montessori's philosophy of independent learning, Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, and Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning have become the principal theoretical foundations of many contemporary preschool education programs. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives have contributed significantly to the development of child-centered and developmentally appropriate educational practices.

Preschool education programs implemented across different countries reflect societies' conceptions of childhood, cultural values, educational policies, and pedagogical priorities (Erbay, Toklu, Kuset, & Sıddık, 2021). In particular, the Nordic countries have attracted international attention for their child-centered, context-sensitive, and holistic pedagogical approaches that effectively promote children's well-being and learning outcomes (Koch & Jørgensen, 2023).

The philosophical foundations of preschool education in Germany are rooted in the educational principles of Friedrich Froebel, the founder of the kindergarten movement. Froebel placed play, interaction with nature, creativity, and the holistic development of the child at the core of early childhood education. Over time, Germany's preschool education system has evolved from a model primarily focused on childcare into a comprehensive educational framework that promotes children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. This transformation has been reinforced through legislative initiatives, including the Early Childhood Development and Education Act (2008) and the Kindergarten Quality Act (2022). While contemporary German preschool education continues to embrace Froebel's fundamental principles, it also incorporates alternative pedagogical approaches such as Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia. Furthermore, play-based learning, nature education, and forest kindergarten practices have become prominent educational strategies that foster children's holistic development (Sobel, 2023; Ebert, 2015; Honcharuk, 2025; Özçelik & Sapsağlam, 2023).

Contemporary preschool education policies in Germany are founded upon the principles of quality, inclusiveness, accessibility, and the enhancement of teacher qualifications. Educational programs are designed to ensure equitable participation in the learning process for children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as well as for those with special educational needs. Accordingly, priority is given to strengthening teachers' professional competencies through continuous professional development, promoting family involvement, and establishing high-quality learning environments. Recent educational reforms have focused on reducing regional disparities, ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources, expanding inclusive educational practices, and integrating digital technologies into educational settings in developmentally appropriate ways. Nevertheless, the child-centered approach, which emphasizes play-based learning and the holistic development of the child, continues to serve as the cornerstone of Germany's preschool education system and remains the guiding principle for future educational practices (Honcharuk, 2024; Irawan, Uchtiana, Anidar, & Iskander, 2025; Martín-Bylund, 2024; Abdurohman, 2025; Jannah Yuliana & Yuniar, 2026).

The Finnish preschool education system is founded on the EduCare model, which integrates education, care, and upbringing within a holistic framework. This model aims to simultaneously promote children's cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and creative development (Nakato, Onyeibor, Ekanem, & Info, 2025). In Finland, children

are regarded not as passive recipients of knowledge but as active participants in the learning process, while play is recognized as the primary medium for exploration, meaning-making, language development, and social interaction (Kangas, Sundstedt, Kaihovirta, & Harju-Luukkainen, 2024; Niu et al., 2024). The Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care is grounded in child-centered and individualized learning. Through individualized learning plans prepared for every child, educational experiences are tailored to each child's interests, needs, and developmental level. The curriculum also emphasizes the principles of equity, inclusion, and children's rights while providing teachers with the flexibility to adapt pedagogical practices to local contexts and children's individual needs (Melasalmi, Hurme, & Ruokonen, 2022; Ahtiainen, Fonsén, & Kiuru, 2021; Londén, Holm, Mansikka, Saloranta, & Nordström, 2025).

Preschool education practices in Finland are characterized by highly qualified teachers, inquiry-based learning, and play-based pedagogical approaches. Rather than serving as direct transmitters of knowledge, teachers act as facilitators who support children's exploration and learning processes by encouraging observation, documentation, project-based activities, outdoor experiences, and meaningful social interactions (Jang, 2025; Kangas et al., 2024). Consistent with the principles of inclusive education, children from diverse backgrounds and with varying developmental characteristics are actively supported in participating fully in educational settings, while individualized assessment processes are conducted collaboratively with families and multidisciplinary professionals (Dukuzumuremyi, Siklander, Viljamaa, Pihlaja, & Fonsén, 2025; Wang, Lei, Zhou, & Wei, 2025). Owing to its strong commitment to equity, teacher professionalism, and children's well-being, the Finnish model is internationally recognized as an exemplary early childhood education system. Its flexible curriculum structure, substantial public investment, and play-based educational philosophy provide high-quality learning environments that foster children's holistic development and lifelong learning competencies (Nakato et al., 2025; Gu, 2023; Fyffe, Sample, Lewis, Rattenborg, & Bundy, 2022).

Preschool education in Norway is shaped by a range of distinctive educational philosophies that reflect the country's cultural values and educational priorities. One of the most prominent of these is the nature-based and outdoor learning approach rooted in the Nordic tradition of *friluftsliv*, which emphasizes outdoor living and close interaction with nature (Bragdo, Tuszyńska, & Žeber-Dzikowska, 2023). This cultural philosophy has profoundly influenced early childhood education by encouraging children to engage actively with natural environments as an integral part of their learning experiences. Research indicates that nature-based pedagogies are widely implemented in Norwegian preschool settings, where children spend a substantial proportion of their time outdoors. Compared with children attending conventional preschool institutions, those enrolled in nature-based settings demonstrate higher levels of physical activity, engage in play that is less constrained by gender stereotypes, and exhibit lower dependence on manufactured materials during play (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Sustainability and environmental education also constitute fundamental components of Norwegian preschool curricula. Sustainability education is integrated across multiple learning domains, encouraging children to develop direct and meaningful interactions with the natural environment (Melis, Borg, & Falcicchio, 2025). Moreover, Norway recognizes universal access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), available from infancy, as a fundamental right for all children (Dearing, Zachrisson, Mykletun, & Toppelberg, 2018). Research has demonstrated that high-quality early childhood education contributes significantly to children's language development and self-regulation skills (Karlsen et al., 2026). Furthermore, Norwegian preschool education embraces a social pedagogical approach that promotes democratic participation, active engagement in community life, and the development of awareness regarding values such as justice and equality (Jang, 2024). Recent curriculum reforms have also strengthened the principles of cultural diversity and inclusion by incorporating Indigenous perspectives, particularly those of the Sámi people, alongside other diverse cultural viewpoints into educational practice (Krempig & Enoksen, 2024). Collectively, these characteristics position the Norwegian preschool education system as a holistic educational model that prioritizes interaction with nature, sustainability, democratic values, cultural inclusivity, and educational equity.

The philosophy of preschool education in South Korea is largely rooted in Confucian values, emphasizing moral development, social harmony, respect, and responsibility. At the same time, this traditional philosophical foundation has increasingly been integrated with contemporary educational perspectives that recognize children as active and competent learners. Accordingly, South Korean preschool education adopts a holistic developmental approach that simultaneously supports children's cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and moral

development. Within this framework, education and care are regarded as inseparable components of early childhood education, while fostering secure relationships, emotional regulation, and social competence constitutes a primary objective of the educational process (Kurniawati, Hasibuan, & Ningrum, 2026; Anthony, 2025; Kim & Park, 2025).

The revised Nuri Curriculum, introduced in 2019, marked a significant transformation by strengthening child-centered and play-based education in South Korea. The curriculum recognizes play as the primary medium through which children learn and develop, while redefining teachers as facilitators who support learning rather than as direct transmitters of knowledge. This play-based philosophy has also been extended to areas such as STEAM education, music education, character education, and multicultural education. Furthermore, innovative practices, including technology integration, artificial intelligence applications, and inclusive education, have been incorporated while maintaining a strong emphasis on children's well-being and holistic development. Overall, the philosophy of preschool education in South Korea seeks to balance traditional cultural values with contemporary global educational trends by fostering moral development, creativity, play, social responsibility, and inclusivity (Lee, 2026; Roh & Kim, 2023; Jang, 2025; Seo & Eom, 2025; Lee, Ku, & Ko, 2025; Lee, 2025).

Over the past two decades, the philosophy of preschool education in Türkiye has undergone a substantial transformation, shifting from traditional teacher-centered approaches toward child-centered, play-based, and developmentally appropriate educational models. Curriculum reforms introduced by the Ministry of National Education in 2002, 2006, 2013, and most recently through the Türkiye Century Maarif Model Preschool Education Curriculum (TYMM-OOÖP) in 2024 have emphasized active child participation, curriculum flexibility, values education, and the establishment of high-quality learning environments (Kadan, Aral, & Aysu, 2023; Durmuşoğlu, 2017; Yavuz, Hürler, & Tekin, 2025). While the Turkish preschool curriculum continues to place a strong emphasis on national values, including the principles and reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, it has become increasingly aligned with international standards in early childhood education and contemporary understandings of holistic child development (Ulucan & Yenen, 2021). Within this framework, play-based learning is regarded as the primary mechanism for promoting children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, while teachers are positioned as facilitators who guide children's learning processes rather than merely transmitting knowledge (Güley & Keskinliç, 2024; Bay, 2024).

In addition to the national curriculum, alternative educational approaches such as Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia have gained increasing prominence, particularly in private educational institutions. These approaches contribute to children's holistic development while simultaneously strengthening family involvement in the educational process (Tutar & Temel, 2025; İmir & Tuğrul, 2023; Özgen & Atay, 2021). Contemporary preschool education in Türkiye has also incorporated innovative educational practices, including STEAM education, project-based science instruction, nature-based learning, digital literacy, and values education. Furthermore, considerable emphasis is placed on inclusive practices that facilitate the active participation of children with diverse educational needs (Güley & Keskinliç, 2024; Kavak, 2024; Güven & Yumugan, 2025). Nevertheless, the effective implementation of these approaches continues to be hindered by insufficient resources, inadequate physical infrastructure, limitations in teacher education, and persistent educational inequalities affecting children living in rural areas, as well as those from disadvantaged or war-affected backgrounds (Özsirkintı & Akay, 2024; Bartan & Alisinanoğlu, 2024; Yıldırım & Küçük, 2026; Yıldırım & Güçlü, 2025). Therefore, strengthening opportunities for continuous professional development, enhancing family engagement, improving educational resources, and advancing inclusive education policies are considered essential prerequisites for improving both the quality of preschool education and equity in educational opportunities (Yavuz et al., 2025; Özgen & Atay, 2021).

Preschool education in Northern Cyprus has been shaped by the integration of Mediterranean educational traditions, contemporary developmental theories, and global perspectives on early childhood education. Within this context, the dominant educational philosophy has gradually evolved from teacher-centered approaches toward child-centered, play-based, and constructivist models. These approaches emphasize children's active participation in the learning process (Gür, 2011; Looti & Abd-alzim, 2025). Furthermore, child-centered and play-based pedagogies recognize children as active agents in their own learning, while considering their interests, developmental needs, and lived experiences as the primary determinants of curriculum implementation. Consistent with this philosophy, assessment practices increasingly prioritize observation- and portfolio-based

methods over standardized testing (Wang, 2025; Dârlă, 2020; Byanjweli, Odhiambo, Gakunga, & Kimamo, 2026). In addition, alternative pedagogical approaches such as Montessori and Reggio Emilia have also influenced preschool education by promoting autonomy, creativity, experiential learning, and authentic interaction with the environment (Avetisyan & Konjoyan, 2023; Köchig Lores-Gómez & Usart-Rodríguez, 2025).

Contemporary preschool education philosophies in Northern Cyprus also encompass inclusive education, STEAM integration, social-emotional learning, sustainability education, family engagement, and culturally responsive pedagogical approaches. Inclusive education is regarded as a fundamental educational principle that ensures the equitable and meaningful participation of all children in educational processes regardless of their abilities or backgrounds (Tsibidaki, Kogiami, Flagkou, Vagianou, & Trecha, 2020; Mérida, Mora, Rocío, & Castillo, 2025). Research indicates that the successful implementation of these educational philosophies depends on strengthening teachers' professional development, providing institutional support, and ensuring adequate educational resources (Cadima et al., 2024; Yang, 2025). However, shortcomings in teacher preparation, inconsistencies between curriculum and assessment practices, limited resources, and various implementation challenges continue to hinder the effective realization of these philosophical approaches (Wolde & Ti, 2024; Ismail et al., 2026; Thapa, 2025). Overall, the literature suggests that the future development of preschool education in Northern Cyprus should focus on strengthening teacher education, promoting evidence-based and culturally responsive pedagogical practices, and fostering children's holistic development, critical thinking, creativity, and meaningful engagement in learning (Razaq, 2025; Singh & Venugopal, 2025).

A review of the literature indicates that comparative studies on preschool education curricula have predominantly been limited to comparisons involving two or three countries. However, studies that comprehensively compare the preschool education curricula of Germany, Finland, Norway, South Korea, Türkiye, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) within a single research framework—considering dimensions such as educational philosophy, objectives, teaching and learning processes, developmental domains, family involvement, and assessment approaches—remain scarce. This gap underscores the need for comprehensive comparative research to identify the similarities and differences among these educational systems.

Furthermore, the literature demonstrates that preschool education curricula differ across countries with respect to their conceptions of childhood, educational philosophies, pedagogical approaches, and assessment systems. Examining these differences will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of national priorities and practices in early childhood education.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the preschool education curricula of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Türkiye, Germany, Finland, Norway, and South Korea with respect to selected themes, including educational philosophy, curriculum objectives, teaching and learning processes, developmental domains, family involvement, and assessment approaches. Accordingly, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the fundamental educational philosophies underpinning the preschool education curricula of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Türkiye, Germany, Finland, Norway, and South Korea?
2. What are the similarities and differences among the preschool education curricula of the selected countries regarding their aims and objectives?
3. How are the teaching and learning processes structured within the preschool education curricula of the selected countries?
4. What similarities and differences exist among the targeted developmental domains emphasized in the preschool education curricula of the selected countries?
5. How is family involvement addressed within the preschool education curricula of the selected countries?
6. What assessment approaches and practices are employed within the preschool education curricula of the selected countries?

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to identifying the strengths and areas for improvement of preschool education curricula implemented across different countries, thereby providing valuable insights for curriculum development initiatives and offering a comparative perspective for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. Furthermore, by examining diverse educational traditions and their approaches to early childhood education within a single comparative framework, this study aims to contribute to the international body of literature on early childhood education.

METHOD

This study employed document analysis, one of the qualitative research methods. Qualitative research aims to explore individuals' perceptions, experiences, and social phenomena within their natural settings through data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and document analysis, thereby providing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Document analysis is defined as a systematic procedure for reviewing and analyzing written materials that contain information relevant to the research phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In the present study, preschool education curricula from different countries were comparatively examined through document analysis.

The study sample consisted of accessible and up-to-date official preschool education curriculum documents. Within this scope, the preschool education curricula of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Türkiye, Germany, Finland, Norway, and South Korea were analyzed. The curriculum documents were obtained from the official publications of the respective Ministries of Education and other authorized governmental institutions. In addition, a comprehensive literature search was conducted using the Google Scholar database to identify relevant scientific studies, and the information obtained was used to support and contextualize the curriculum analyses.

A content analysis framework developed by the researcher was employed to analyze the preschool education curricula included in the study. This framework was constructed based on the primary research questions established in accordance with the purpose of the study. The curriculum documents of the six countries were examined using the following research questions:

- How are the philosophical foundations and pedagogical approaches addressed in the preschool education curricula of the selected countries?
- How are the structure and organization of learning domains designed within the preschool education curricula?
- How are developmental domains and learning outcomes conceptualized and organized in the preschool education curricula?
- How are teachers' roles, family involvement, and the use of technology incorporated into the preschool education curricula?
- How are assessment approaches and evaluation methods addressed within the preschool education curricula?

These research questions served as the main themes during the data analysis process.

The data were analyzed using content analysis, which is a systematic method of examining textual data by identifying recurring patterns and organizing similar data into conceptual categories and themes according to predefined analytical procedures (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2025).

The analysis began with the development of themes derived from the research questions. Accordingly, five main themes were established: (1) philosophical foundations and pedagogical approaches; (2) the structure and organization of learning domains; (3) developmental domains and learning outcomes; (4) teachers' roles, family involvement, and technology integration; and (5) assessment approaches and evaluation methods. Subsequently, the curriculum documents were examined in detail, relevant statements were coded, and findings with similar

characteristics were grouped into categories. The analyzed data were then organized into comparative tables and interpreted accordingly.

To enhance the credibility of the study, all curriculum documents were obtained from current and official sources. Furthermore, the data collection and analysis processes were conducted systematically in accordance with the research questions, and all findings were derived directly from the curriculum documents.

To ensure the dependability of the study, all documents were analyzed using the same analytical framework, and a consistent approach was maintained throughout the coding and theme development processes. Moreover, providing a detailed description of the analytical procedures and presenting the findings in comparative tables contributed to the transparency, traceability, and replicability of the research.

The study was based on qualitative document analysis and did not involve direct participation of human subjects or animals or the collection of personal data. Therefore, ethical approval from an institutional review board or ethics committee was not required. The research utilized publicly available official curriculum documents, policy reports, and academic literature obtained from governmental institutions and international organizations. All sources were appropriately cited and used in accordance with academic research ethics and principles of scholarly integrity.

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to this research. The study was conducted independently, and no financial, institutional, or personal relationships influenced the research design, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or reporting of results.

RESULTS

Table 1. Philosophical Foundations and Pedagogical Approaches of Early Childhood Education Curricula in the Selected Countries

Theme	Germany	Finland	Norway	South Korea	Türkiye	TRNC
Educational Philosophy	Social pedagogical approach rooted in the Froebelian tradition	Welfare-state and EduCare model emphasizing children's rights, inclusion, equity, and child-centered learning	Social pedagogical tradition emphasizing children's rights, democracy, and nature-based education	Child-centered approach based on the Nuri Curriculum, promoting holistic development and the integration of education and care	Child-centered, developmental, play-based, inclusive, eclectic, and process-oriented approach	Child-centered and eclectic educational philosophy informed by progressivism and reconstructionism, emphasizing individual differences and local needs
Pedagogical Approach	Play-based learning (free and guided play)	Play-, inquiry-, and exploration-based learning	Play-based, experiential, and nature-based learning emphasizing children's participation	Play-based and experiential learning promoting children's active participation	Play-based, inquiry-oriented, and child-initiated learning	Play-based, child-centered approach fostering inquiry, problem-solving, and exploration
View of the Child	An active learner developing within a	An active participant, meaning-maker,	A rights-holder, democratic participant whose	An active participant who learns through personal	An active and competent learner who constructs	An active, inquisitive child whose individual potential is

	social environment	inquirer, and agent of learning	perspectives are respected and who actively engages in learning	experiences and whose developmental potential is nurtured	knowledge through experience	supported and who actively participates in the learning process
Educational Focus	Holistic development, social interaction, and play	Play, well-being, participation, transversal competencies, and meaningful learning	Holistic development through play, well-being, democratic participation, sustainability, and experiences in nature	Balanced support for children's physical, cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development	Play-based learning, life skills, values education, and holistic development	Holistic development, play-based learning, problem-solving, communication skills, environmental awareness, and social values
Curriculum Structure	Flexible curricula developed at the federal state (Länder) level	National Core Curriculum with local adaptations	Integrated curriculum based on the Framework Plan, allowing local adaptation	Flexible and holistic curriculum implemented nationwide through the Nuri Curriculum	National preschool curriculum with a flexible, spiral, and child-centered structure	National curriculum framework with flexibility to address local needs through a child-centered approach
Learning Model	Experiential and social learning	Holistic learning through play, exploration, interaction, and experience	Holistic learning based on play, exploration, experience, and children's participation	Learning based on play, everyday experiences, and children's interests	Inquiry-based learning, learning through play, and holistic development	Play-based, learner-centered model emphasizing exploration, problem-solving, and collaboration
Developmental Focus	Balanced social, emotional, and cognitive development	Holistic development through play, well-being, and lifelong learning competencies	Holistic support for social-emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and physical development while fostering connections with nature and society	Holistic support for cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language development	Holistic support for cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical development, together with learning approaches and life skills	Holistic support for physical, cognitive, language, social-emotional, and creative development
Distinctive Features	Froebelian educational tradition	Child-centered, system based, on the EduCare model, inclusive education, and transversal competencies	Emphasis on children's rights, democratic participation, outdoor education, and sustainability	Implementation of the Nuri Curriculum, integrating education and care within a unified curriculum	Integration of child-centered education, inclusion, values education, and play-based learning	Flexible curriculum responsive to local needs, emphasizing foundational competencies and holistic child development

Table 1 presents a comprehensive comparative overview of the philosophical foundations and pedagogical

approaches underpinning the early childhood education curricula of the selected countries. The findings indicate that, despite considerable commonalities, each country's curriculum reflects distinctive characteristics shaped by its unique sociocultural context, educational traditions, and policy priorities.

The most prominent similarity across all six countries is the adoption of child-centered education and play-based learning as the fundamental principles of early childhood education. From Germany to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), play is regarded not merely as a recreational activity but as the primary medium through which children learn, explore, and construct knowledge. This finding suggests that constructivist and experiential learning paradigms have become dominant approaches in contemporary early childhood education worldwide.

Nevertheless, notable differences emerge with respect to the philosophical foundations of the curricula. In Germany, the curriculum is strongly influenced by the Froebelian tradition and social pedagogy, emphasizing social interaction, community participation, and holistic child development. In contrast, Finland and Norway reflect the principles of the Nordic welfare state by integrating children's rights, inclusion, well-being, and democratic participation into their educational philosophies. Norway is further distinguished by its strong emphasis on nature-based education, outdoor learning, and sustainability. South Korea adopts a nationally standardized yet child-centered approach through the Nuri Curriculum, which integrates education and care within a unified framework. By comparison, the curricula of Türkiye and the TRNC are characterized by an eclectic educational philosophy, combining multiple pedagogical perspectives within a flexible, developmental, play-based, and context-sensitive framework that accommodates local educational needs.

Regarding pedagogical approaches, all countries emphasize play-based, experiential, and inquiry-oriented learning. However, Finland and Norway place greater emphasis on children's participation, inquiry, and meaningful interaction with natural environments. In contrast, Türkiye and the TRNC give relatively greater prominence to problem-solving, exploration, and the development of fundamental life skills, reflecting their emphasis on preparing children for both academic and everyday life.

The findings also reveal a remarkable convergence in the view of the child adopted across the six curricula. In all countries, children are no longer perceived as passive recipients of knowledge but rather as active, competent, and autonomous learners who construct meaning through interaction with their physical and social environments. This common perspective reflects the global shift away from traditional teacher-centered instruction toward child rights-based and constructivist approaches in early childhood education.

Similarly, the curricula demonstrate substantial consistency regarding their educational priorities and developmental focus. All six programs aim to foster children's cognitive, social-emotional, language, and physical development through a holistic educational approach. Nevertheless, Finland and Norway place comparatively greater emphasis on well-being, lifelong learning competencies, and democratic participation, whereas Türkiye and the TRNC prioritize life skills, values education, and responsiveness to local cultural and societal needs.

Finally, the distinctive characteristics identified in each curriculum clearly illustrate their underlying educational philosophies. Germany continues to preserve the legacy of the Froebelian tradition, while Finland and Norway distinguish themselves through their strong commitment to children's rights, inclusive education, and democratic values. South Korea is characterized by the nationally implemented Nuri Curriculum, which provides a unified framework integrating education and care. In contrast, Türkiye and the TRNC have adopted more flexible and eclectic curriculum models that are responsive to local contexts while maintaining a strong commitment to holistic child development and play-based learning. These findings demonstrate that, although the selected countries share a common child-centered orientation, they operationalize this philosophy through different curricular structures and pedagogical priorities that reflect their respective educational traditions and societal contexts.

Table 2. Comparison of the Structure and Organization of Learning Domains in the Early Childhood Education Curricula of the Selected Countries

Theme	Germany	Finland	Norway	South Korea	Türkiye	TRNC
Curriculum Model	Hybrid	Transversal / Integrated	Transversal / Integrated	Hybrid	Hybrid (organized around developmental domains with holistic and integrated implementation)	Hybrid (learning domains are explicitly defined but implemented through an integrated approach)
Structure of Learning Domains	Learning domains vary across the federal states (multi-framework approach)	Integrated structure based on broad learning domains and transversal competencies	Interdisciplinary and integrated structure organized around seven learning domains	National curriculum integrating developmental domains with children's lived experiences	Structure based on developmental domains and learning outcomes with interdisciplinary integration	Health and Physical Development; Language, Communication and Emergent Literacy; Mathematics and Logical Thinking; Science, Nature and Environmental Awareness; Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Creative and Aesthetic Development
Structural Characteristics	Play-based curriculum grounded in social pedagogy, with variations across federal states	Holistic structure centered on play, exploration, participation, and children's agency	Holistic structure emphasizing play, children's participation, nature experiences, community engagement, and interdisciplinary learning	Play-based, child-centered curriculum grounded in experiential learning and holistic development	Play-based, child-centered, spiral, flexible, inquiry- and exploration-oriented approach supporting holistic development	Learning domains are explicitly defined but implemented in an integrated, play-based, child-centered framework that promotes holistic development

Table 2 provides a comparative overview of how learning domains are structured and organized within the early childhood education curricula of the selected countries. The findings indicate that, although the curricula exhibit substantial similarities at the structural level, they differ in terms of curriculum organization and the degree of integration adopted.

A common trend across all six countries is the movement away from rigid, discipline-based curriculum structures toward holistic, integrated, and experience-based learning frameworks. While Germany, South Korea, Türkiye, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) adopt hybrid curriculum models, Finland and Norway

demonstrate a more explicit emphasis on transversal competency-based and integrated curriculum structures. This distinction suggests that the Nordic countries increasingly conceptualize learning through competencies, authentic experiences, and real-life contexts rather than through isolated subject areas.

Differences are also evident in the organization of learning domains. In Germany, the federal structure of the education system results in considerable variation among the curricula implemented by individual federal states (*Länder*), providing flexibility but also creating a relatively fragmented curriculum structure. By contrast, Finland and Norway achieve a high level of curricular integration through transversal competencies and interdisciplinary learning. South Korea adopts a nationally standardized curriculum that integrates developmental domains with children's everyday experiences, thereby promoting a coherent and holistic educational framework. Although Türkiye similarly emphasizes interdisciplinary integration, its curriculum maintains a comparatively more structured organization based on clearly defined developmental domains and learning outcomes. In the TRNC, learning domains are explicitly specified; however, curriculum implementation remains holistic, play-based, and child-centered through the integration of these domains in classroom practice.

With respect to structural characteristics, all six curricula emphasize play-based, child-centered, and experiential learning as the foundation of educational practice. Nevertheless, Finland and Norway place greater emphasis on children's participation, interaction with nature, and engagement with their local communities, systematically integrating learning with authentic life experiences. In Germany, the decentralized organization of the education system results in greater variation across federal states, producing a more diverse application of the social pedagogical approach. Conversely, South Korea's centralized curriculum provides a more consistent implementation of experiential learning within a unified national framework. Türkiye and the TRNC represent hybrid models in which learning domains are formally distinguished while being integrated during curriculum implementation through play-based and child-centered pedagogical practices. Overall, the findings suggest that contemporary early childhood education curricula increasingly prioritize integrated learning experiences over isolated disciplinary instruction, although countries differ in the organizational strategies through which this integration is achieved.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Developmental Domains and Learning Outcomes in the Early Childhood Education Curricula of the Selected Countries

Theme	Germany	Finland	Norway	South Korea	Türkiye	TRNC
Language Development and Communication	Language, communication, and writing	Communication, interaction, and multiliteracy integrated throughout the learning process	Communication, language, and texts	Communication, language development, listening, and speaking skills	Language development, communication skills, and emergent literacy	Language, communication, and emergent literacy
Mathematical and Cognitive Development	Mathematics	Cognitive learning through inquiry, problem-solving, mathematical thinking, and environmental exploration	Quantities, space, and shapes	Learning experiences that promote problem-solving, logical thinking, and cognitive development	Cognitive development, mathematical thinking, and scientific process skills	Mathematics and logical thinking
Science, Nature, and Environmental Learning	Natural sciences and natural-cultural environments	Learning through natural and built environments	Nature, environment, and technology	Exploring the environment, discovering nature, and learning through everyday experiences	Inquiry, exploration, environmental awareness, and nature-based learning	Science, nature, and environmental awareness

Physical Development and Health	Body, movement, and health	Development through movement, health, self-care, and physical activity	Body, movement, nutrition, and health	Movement, health, safety, and self-care skills	Physical development, movement, health, and self-care skills	Health and physical development
Social-Emotional Development and Values Education	Personal and social development; values and religious education	Participation, well-being, belonging, cultural awareness, and social-emotional competencies	Local community and society; ethics, religion, and philosophy; democracy, human rights, and participation	Social relationships, emotional development, collaboration, and social adjustment	Social-emotional development, life skills, values education, and inclusion	Personal, social, and emotional development
Arts and Creativity	Visual arts	Learning integrated through culture, play, and creative activities	Arts, culture, and creativity	Artistic expression, aesthetic experiences, and the development of creativity	Arts, creativity, aesthetic awareness, and self-expression	Creative and aesthetic development
Curriculum Structure	Multidimensional and values-oriented curriculum	Flexible, child-centered, participatory curriculum based on transversal competencies	Interdisciplinary and integrated curriculum emphasizing children's participation and play-based learning	Holistic, child-centered curriculum grounded in play and everyday life experiences	Child-centered, play-based, flexible, spiral, eclectic curriculum focused on holistic development	Learning-domain-based yet integrated curriculum emphasizing child-centeredness and holistic development

Table 3 presents a comparative analysis of how developmental domains and learning outcomes are structured within the early childhood education curricula of the selected countries. Overall, the findings indicate that these curricula have undergone a substantial transformation toward a more holistic approach, both in terms of curriculum content and structural organization.

A general examination reveals that none of the countries conceptualizes developmental domains as rigidly separated areas. Instead, language, cognitive development, science and environmental learning, physical development, social-emotional development, and arts education are integrated within a holistic developmental framework. Although these core domains are common across all six curricula, their conceptualization and implementation differ according to each country's educational philosophy and pedagogical priorities.

With regard to language development and communication, Germany emphasizes language, communication, and writing skills, whereas Finland conceptualizes this domain through multiliteracy and communication embedded across all learning experiences. Norway links language development to communication within broader linguistic and cultural contexts, while South Korea adopts a more structured approach emphasizing listening and speaking skills. In contrast, Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) address language development and emergent literacy within a play-based yet comparatively more structured curriculum framework.

Regarding mathematical and cognitive development, Finland and Norway are distinguished by their emphasis on inquiry, problem-solving, and experiential learning. Germany maintains a relatively traditional focus on mathematics, whereas South Korea integrates cognitive development with scientific process skills. In both Türkiye and the TRNC, mathematical thinking is fostered through developmentally appropriate, play-based learning experiences.

In the domain of science, nature, and environmental learning, Finland and Norway emphasize integrated, nature-based, and inquiry-oriented approaches that encourage children's active exploration of the natural environment. Germany highlights interactions between natural and cultural environments, while South Korea connects environmental learning with children's everyday experiences. Although the curricula of Türkiye and the TRNC provide a more structured organization of this domain, they likewise promote experiential learning through inquiry and exploration activities.

Physical development and health constitute another area of considerable similarity across the selected countries. All curricula emphasize movement, health, and self-care as essential components of children's development. Nevertheless, Finland and Norway conceptualize this domain within a broader life-skills perspective, whereas Türkiye and the TRNC organize it through more explicitly defined developmental domains.

More pronounced differences emerge in the area of social-emotional development and values education. Germany associates values education with personal, social, and cultural development, while Finland places particular emphasis on children's well-being, participation, and sense of belonging. Norway prioritizes democracy, human rights, and active participation in society, whereas South Korea focuses on social relationships, cooperation, and social adjustment. In comparison, Türkiye and the TRNC emphasize social-emotional development through life skills, values education, and inclusive educational practices.

With respect to arts and creativity, all curricula recognize creativity and aesthetic development as fundamental educational goals. However, Finland and Norway integrate artistic learning with culture and play, whereas Germany maintains a comparatively more traditional orientation toward arts education. In Türkiye and the TRNC, creative development is primarily promoted through play-based activities that encourage children's imagination, self-expression, and aesthetic awareness.

Finally, the analysis of the overall curriculum structure demonstrates strong convergence among the selected countries. All six curricula adopt child-centered, play-based, and holistic approaches to early childhood education. Nevertheless, Finland and Norway are characterized by more flexible, competency-based, and transversal curriculum structures, while Germany maintains a multidimensional curriculum grounded in values education. South Korea distinguishes itself through a centralized curriculum framework supported by experiential learning, whereas Türkiye and the TRNC are characterized by flexible and eclectic curriculum structures that are responsive to local educational needs while maintaining a commitment to holistic child development.

Table 4. Comparative Analysis of Teachers' Roles, Family Involvement, and Technology Integration in the Implementation of Early Childhood Education Curricula in the Selected Countries

Theme	Germany	Finland	Norway	South Korea	Türkiye	TRNC
Teacher's Role	Guide, Caregiver	Guide, Observer, Facilitator	Facilitator, Guide	Facilitator, Guide	Mentor, Guide	Mentor, Guide
School–Family Collaboration	Regular communication	Daily information sharing	Structured collaboration	Parent and family involvement	Parent meetings	Individual meetings
Family participation	Active parental involvement	Indirect participation	Participation within the framework of collaboration	Supportive/assisting role	Recycling activities	Participation in activities
Technology Approach	Pedagogically controlled use	Purposeful and pedagogically oriented use of technology to develop digital competencies	Balanced and ethical digital integration for pedagogical purposes	Technology use evolving in line with digital transformation policies; technology considered as a tool supporting learning	Controlled and emerging digital integration for pedagogical purposes	Use of information and communication technologies (ICT) as tools supporting learning

Table 4 focuses on the implementation dimension of early childhood education curricula, particularly teacher roles, family involvement, and technology use, and clearly demonstrates the pedagogical practice differences among countries.

Overall, the role of the teacher in all countries has shifted from being a transmitter of knowledge toward a role characterized by guidance and facilitation. This reflects the common adoption of constructivist and child-centered approaches in early childhood education. In Germany, teachers continue to maintain their role as caregivers alongside their educational responsibilities, whereas in Finland and Norway, the role of the teacher as an observer and a facilitator of children’s learning processes is more prominent. In South Korea, teachers are primarily defined as facilitators, while in Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), the guiding and mentoring roles are more dominant.

Regarding family involvement, Finland demonstrates a strong and continuous communication model based on daily information sharing, whereas Norway emphasizes a more structured partnership approach between families and educational institutions. In Germany, regular communication and parent meetings serve as the primary mechanisms for family engagement, while South Korea highlights active parental participation. In contrast, family involvement in Türkiye and the TRNC remains largely indirect and supportive, primarily occurring through participation in activities and feedback mechanisms; however, gradual improvements in family engagement practices are observed.

In terms of technology use, Finland and Norway demonstrate balanced and ethical digital integration aligned with pedagogical purposes. South Korea exhibits a more systematic and advanced approach to technology use in accordance with digital transformation policies. Germany adopts a controlled approach that is primarily oriented toward supporting children’s development and care practices, whereas Türkiye and the TRNC are characterized by an emerging integration of technology, with digital tools increasingly positioned as resources that support learning processes.

Table 5: Assessment Approaches and Methods in the Comparative Countries

Theme	Germany	Finland	Norway	South Korea	Türkiye	TRNC
Assessment Components	Child, Teacher	Child (self-assessment), Teacher	Child, Teacher, Child’s perspective	Child, Teacher, Institution	Child, Teacher, Curriculum	Child, Teacher, Program
Main Assessment Methods	Developmental reports, Portfolio	Pedagogical documentation, Portfolio	Pedagogical documentation, Progress monitoring	Observation, Portfolio	Weekly monitoring, Anecdotal records, Developmental reports	Observation, developmental tracking, portfolio, and developmental reports

Table 5 demonstrates that assessment approaches used in early childhood education across the comparative countries have generally shifted away from traditional measurement and evaluation practices toward a process-oriented, developmental, and multi-stakeholder framework. In all countries, children and teachers are included in the assessment process at a fundamental level, while in some countries this structure is expanded through institutional- and curriculum-based assessment dimensions.

In particular, Finland and Norway adopt approaches that prioritize children’s active participation in assessment processes; through methods such as self-assessment, children’s perspectives, and pedagogical documentation, assessment is transformed into a more participatory and democratic practice. Similarly, in Germany, developmental reports and portfolio-based assessment practices are prominent, with the assessment process primarily conducted through systematic observation and documentation.

In South Korea, a more structured monitoring system that incorporates the institutional level into the assessment process is evident, with children’s development being monitored comprehensively through observation and portfolio assessment. In Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), assessment practices are

primarily conducted through teacher-centered observation, developmental monitoring, and reporting processes, supported by tools such as portfolios and anecdotal records. However, children's participation in assessment processes remains relatively limited in these contexts compared to the other countries.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study comparatively examines the early childhood education curricula of Germany, Finland, Norway, South Korea, Türkiye, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) across the dimensions of philosophical foundations, pedagogical approaches, the structure of learning areas, developmental domains and learning outcomes, teacher roles, family involvement, technology use, and assessment approaches. The findings reveal that although the early childhood education curricula of the six countries share significant commonalities at the global level, each system possesses distinctive characteristics shaped by its own sociocultural, historical, and educational policy contexts.

An examination of the findings indicates that child-centered approaches and play-based learning constitute the core of early childhood education in all countries. This finding confirms that constructivist and experiential learning perspectives have become dominant paradigms in early childhood education worldwide (Oktay, 2004; Poyraz & Dere, 2001). However, significant differences exist among countries regarding their philosophical foundations. In Germany, the Froebelian tradition and the social pedagogical approach remain prominent, emphasizing social interaction and community-based development (Tietze, 1993; Arslan, 2003). The concept of "Kindergarten," introduced by Froebel in 1837, continues to represent a living educational tradition in Germany and reflects an understanding of play as the fundamental medium of learning (Yalçın, 2019). In Finland and Norway, children's rights, inclusion, well-being, and democratic participation have been integrated into educational systems in line with welfare state principles (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2018; Udir.no, 2024). Norway further distinguishes itself through its emphasis on nature-based learning and sustainability. In South Korea, the Nuri Curriculum represents a centralized and standardized yet child-centered structure that integrates education and care. In Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, an eclectic approach is dominant, combining various pedagogical perspectives within a developmental and play-based framework while maintaining flexibility and sensitivity to local needs (MoNE, 2024a; MoNE, 2024b).

Regarding pedagogical approaches, play-based, experiential, and inquiry-oriented learning constitute a common framework across all countries. However, child participation, exploration, and interaction with nature are emphasized more strongly in Finland and Norway. In contrast, Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus place greater emphasis on problem-solving, exploration, and the development of fundamental life skills. This suggests that Türkiye and the TRNC adopt a comparatively more structured and skill-oriented approach within early childhood education (Çetin & Çetin, 2021; Serdaroğlu & Bekir, 2024).

When the dimension of the "child's perspective" is examined, it is evident that children in all countries are no longer positioned as passive recipients of knowledge but rather as active participants, meaning-makers, and subjects of the learning process. This reflects a global shift away from traditional teacher-centered approaches toward a child rights-based pedagogical transformation (Toran, 2015; Ummanel, 2017). However, the positioning of children as "rights holders" and "democratic participants" in Finland and Norway demonstrates that these countries have translated children's rights discourse into pedagogical practices more comprehensively (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2018).

In terms of educational focus and developmental domains, all programs aim to support children's cognitive, socio-emotional, linguistic, and physical development through a holistic approach. Nevertheless, concepts such as "well-being," "lifelong learning," and "democratic participation" are more dominant in Finland and Norway, whereas life skills, values education, and responsiveness to local needs are more prominent in Türkiye and the TRNC. This differentiation indicates that while Northern European countries conceptualize early childhood education within a broader framework of lifelong learning and active citizenship, Türkiye and the TRNC demonstrate a more pragmatic approach focused on foundational skills (Hamarat, 2019; Gelen, 2017).

Finally, the distinctive characteristics of each country clearly reflect their educational philosophies. Germany maintains the Froebelian tradition, while Finland and Norway differentiate themselves through child rights-based

and inclusive education policies. South Korea stands out with its centralized Nuri Curriculum structure, whereas Türkiye and the TRNC have developed more flexible, eclectic, and context-sensitive systems (Dumankaya, 2024; Sarisoy, 2025).

When the structure and organization of learning areas are examined, a fundamental trend observed across all countries is that learning areas are not rigidly separated into distinct disciplinary categories; rather, they have evolved toward holistic, integrated, and experience-based structures. While Germany, South Korea, Türkiye, and the TRNC demonstrate a mixed-model structure, Finland and Norway exhibit more explicit transversal and competency-based integrated curriculum structures. This indicates that particularly in Northern European countries, learning is organized around competencies, experiences, and real-life contexts rather than isolated subject areas (Gürses, 2022; Sarisoy, 2025).

Differences can also be observed in the organization of learning domains. In Germany, the state-based educational structure results in variations among learning areas, creating a flexible yet somewhat fragmented system. Finland and Norway achieve strong integration through transversal competencies and interdisciplinary learning approaches. South Korea implements a centralized and holistic curriculum structure that combines developmental domains with everyday life experiences. In Türkiye, although interdisciplinary integration is emphasized, a more structured curriculum organization remains evident. In the TRNC, learning areas are defined separately; however, implementation reflects a holistic, play-based, and child-centered approach (MoNE, 2024b; Yüksel et al., 2024).

In terms of structural characteristics, learning in all countries is characterized as play-based, child-centered, and experiential. In Finland and Norway, children's participation, experiences with nature, and social interactions are structured more systematically, allowing learning to be integrated with real-life contexts. In Germany, the social pedagogical structure demonstrates a more fragmented appearance due to differences among federal states, whereas South Korea supports experiential learning within a centralized educational system. Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) represent a mixed structure in which learning areas are both separately defined and simultaneously integrated into practice (Sarisoy, 2025; Taş et al., 2024).

When developmental domains and learning outcomes are examined, it is evident that developmental areas in all countries are not strictly separated from one another in a traditional sense; rather, they are integrated within a holistic development approach. Fundamental areas such as language, cognitive development, science and nature, physical development, socio-emotional development, and arts are included across all countries. However, the way these domains are addressed varies according to each country's pedagogical priorities (Aral et al., 2000; Kandır & Kurt, 2010).

Regarding language development and communication, Germany places greater emphasis on language and communication skills, particularly written language development, whereas Finland approaches this domain through multiliteracy and communication embedded within the overall learning process. Norway associates communication with language development and cultural belonging, while South Korea adopts a structured approach focusing on listening and speaking skills. In Türkiye and the TRNC, early literacy and language development are addressed through play-based practices within a relatively more structured framework (MoNE, 2024c; Yüksel et al., 2024).

In the domain of mathematical and cognitive development, Finland and Norway stand out through their problem-solving and inquiry-based experiential learning approaches. While Germany maintains a more traditional focus on mathematical concepts, South Korea integrates cognitive development with scientific process skills. In Türkiye and the TRNC, mathematical thinking is supported through play-based and developmentally appropriate approaches (Gürses, 2022; Kardeş, 2020).

In the area of science, nature, and environmental education, Norway and Finland implement integrated models based on nature-oriented and inquiry-based learning, whereas Germany emphasizes interaction with both natural and cultural environments. South Korea connects environmental awareness with everyday life experiences, while Türkiye and the TRNC address this domain through more structured approaches supported by experiential activities (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2018; Udir.no, 2024).

The domains of physical development and health demonstrate common characteristics across all countries, focusing on movement, health awareness, and self-care skills. Finland and Norway expand this area within the broader framework of life skills, whereas Türkiye and the TRNC proceed through more explicitly defined developmental domains. Significant differences are also observed among countries regarding socio-emotional development and values education. Germany associates values education with social and cultural structures, while Finland places well-being and participation at the center of this domain. Norway emphasizes democracy and human rights, whereas South Korea focuses on social harmony and cooperation. In Türkiye and the TRNC, socio-emotional development is addressed within the framework of life skills and inclusiveness (Çetin & Çetin, 2021; Sezgin, 2018).

In the field of arts and creativity, creativity and aesthetic development emerge as common objectives across all countries. While Finland and Norway integrate this domain with culture and play, Germany maintains a more traditional approach to arts education, whereas Türkiye and the TRNC support creative development through play-based activities (Kandır & Kurt, 2010; Pekdoğan, 2012).

Regarding curriculum structure, a common characteristic across all countries is the adoption of child-centered, play-based, and holistic approaches that prioritize children's overall development. However, Finland and Norway provide stronger transversal, competency-based, and flexible structures, whereas Germany demonstrates a multidimensional and value-oriented system. South Korea stands out with its centralized and experiential curriculum structure, while Türkiye and the TRNC draw attention with their eclectic, flexible, and locally responsive approaches (MoNE, 2024a; MoNE, 2024b).

The findings regarding curriculum implementation reveal clear differences in pedagogical practices among countries. In general, the teacher role in all countries has shifted away from being a transmitter of knowledge toward becoming a guide and facilitator. This indicates a common alignment with constructivist and child-centered approaches (Şavşet & Çelebi Öncü, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978).

In Germany, teachers continue to maintain a caregiving role in addition to their educational responsibilities, whereas in Finland and Norway, an observing and learning-organizing role is more prominent. In South Korea, teachers are defined primarily as facilitators, while in Türkiye and the TRNC, the guiding and supporting role of teachers is more dominant. This differentiation demonstrates that teachers in Türkiye and the TRNC assume a more structured guidance role, whereas teachers in Finland and Norway occupy a more observational position that allows children greater autonomy in constructing their own learning experiences (Sarısoy, 2025; Taş et al., 2024).

Regarding family involvement, Finland demonstrates a strong and continuous communication model based on daily information sharing, while Norway emphasizes a more structured collaboration approach. In Germany, regular communication and parent meetings are used as primary tools, whereas active parental participation is particularly evident in South Korea. In Türkiye and the TRNC, family involvement is generally indirect and supportive, primarily limited to participation in activities and feedback mechanisms, although it continues to develop. This indicates that family engagement in Türkiye and the TRNC occurs within a more formal and limited framework, whereas Finland and Norway have developed more integrated and everyday-based partnership models (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; MoNE, 2024b).

In terms of technology use, Finland and Norway demonstrate an ethical, balanced, and pedagogically oriented integration of digital technologies. South Korea exhibits a more systematic and advanced approach in line with national digital transformation policies. Germany adopts a more controlled and care-oriented approach, while technology use in Türkiye and the TRNC is still developing and is increasingly positioned as a tool supporting learning processes (Jaruszewicz & Rosen, 2009; Rosen, 2006). This indicates that Türkiye and the TRNC are still in the early stages of technology integration, whereas Finland, Norway, and South Korea have achieved more systematic and pedagogically grounded digital integration.

When assessment approaches are examined, it is observed that assessment practices in early childhood education across the compared countries have generally moved away from traditional measurement-based approaches toward process-oriented, developmental, and multi-stakeholder assessment frameworks. In all countries, children

and teachers are included in the assessment process at a basic level, while some countries have expanded this structure through institutional and curriculum-based evaluation dimensions (Sapsağlam, 2013; Sönmez, 2008).

In particular, Finland and Norway adopt assessment approaches that prioritize children's active participation. Through methods such as self-assessment, children's perspectives, and pedagogical documentation, these countries transform assessment processes into more participatory and democratic practices (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2018). In Germany, developmental reports and portfolio-based assessments are prominent, with assessment processes primarily based on systematic observation and documentation. South Korea demonstrates a more structured monitoring system in which institutional-level evaluation is also incorporated, and children's development is monitored multidimensionally through observation and portfolio practices. In Türkiye and the TRNC, assessment practices are mainly conducted through teacher-centered observation, developmental monitoring, and reporting processes. Although these processes are supported by tools such as portfolios and anecdotal records, the integration of children's participation into assessment procedures remains relatively limited (MoNE, 2024b; Yüksel et al., 2024).

This comparative analysis demonstrates that the early childhood education programs of Türkiye and the TRNC are aligned with global trends while maintaining their own distinctive characteristics. Both countries adopt child-centered, play-based, holistic, and eclectic approaches. Türkiye's updated Preschool Education Program within the 2024 Maarif Model and the locally developed national curriculum framework of the TRNC reflect this educational orientation (MoNE, 2024a; MoNE, 2024b; Serdaroğlu & Bekir, 2024).

Among the strengths of Türkiye and the TRNC are their ability to maintain a holistic approach despite defining developmental domains separately, their flexible curriculum structures responsive to local needs, their emphasis on values education, and their focus on problem-solving and fundamental life skills. However, several areas remain open to further development. In particular, the integration of children's participation into assessment processes, the transformation of family involvement into a more continuous and process-oriented structure, the systematic use of technology for pedagogical purposes, and the stronger incorporation of transversal competency-based approaches into curricula require further attention (Çetin & Çetin, 2021; Dumankaya, 2024; Sarısoy, 2025).

Drawing upon the examples of Finland and Norway, positioning children as active participants, rights holders, and democratic individuals; adopting participatory assessment methods such as pedagogical documentation and self-assessment; strengthening nature-based learning and sustainability perspectives; and developing family-school partnership models based on daily communication may provide significant contributions for Türkiye and the TRNC (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2018; Udir.no, 2024).

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that early childhood education curricula worldwide are evolving toward a paradigm centered on child-centeredness, play-based learning, and holistic development. However, each country interprets this paradigm uniquely within its own historical, cultural, and political context. Although Türkiye and the TRNC have developed flexible and context-sensitive programs aligned with global trends, they may further strengthen their curricula by benefiting from the experiences of Northern European countries, particularly in the areas of child participation, participatory assessment, systematic technology integration, and continuous family collaboration. Future research should enrich this comparative framework through empirical observations of implementation practices and teacher perspectives, particularly by evaluating the effectiveness of the newly developed programs in Türkiye and the TRNC.

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