

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION CURRICULA IN THE TRNC, NEW ZEALAND AND SEYCHELLES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

CURRÍCULOS DE EDUCAÇÃO PRÉ-ESCOLAR NA RTNC, NOVA ZELÂNDIA E SEYCHELLES: UMA ANÁLISE COMPARATIVA

CURRÍCULOS DE EDUCACIÓN PREESCOLAR EN LA RTNC, NUEVA ZELANDA Y SEYCHELLES: UN ANÁLISIS COMPARATIVO



Dervişe AMCA TOKLU¹
e-mail: dervise.amca@neu.edu.tr



Ayşe ÇELEBİ²
e-mail: 20244893@std.neu.edu.tr



Enise KÜÇÜK³
e-mail: 20244432@std.neu.edu.tr

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¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr. Department of Preschool Education, Atatürk Faculty of Education, Near East University, Near East Boulevard, Nicosia, Cyprus.

² Student, Department of Preschool Education, Atatürk Faculty of Education, Near East University, Near East Boulevard, Nicosia, Cyprus.

³ Student, Department of Preschool Education, Atatürk Faculty of Education, Near East University, Near East Boulevard, Nicosia, Cyprus.

ABSTRACT: The study aims to compare and contrast the preschool education curricula in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), New Zealand, and Seychelles focusing on the curriculum structure, pedagogical philosophies, instructional strategies, assessment practices, family and community involvement, and teacher qualifications in relation to the development of children's social and interpersonal competencies. A qualitative document analysis approach was employed, involving a systematic review of official curriculum documents, legislative regulations, and reports published by international organizations. The findings show that all three countries adopt child-centered and play-based approaches that support children's holistic development; however, the ways in which these approaches are conceptualized and implemented differ according to national, cultural, and educational priorities. Overall, the findings suggest that preschool education in the TRNC could be strengthened by drawing on internationally recognized practices observed in New Zealand and Seychelles, particularly those that emphasize relationship-centered pedagogy, strong family partnerships, and inclusive social learning environments.

KEYWORDS: Comparative curriculum analysis. Early childhood education. *Te Whāriki*. Educational policy.

RESUMO: *O estudo tem como objetivo comparar e contrastar os currículos de educação pré-escolar na República Turca do Norte de Chipre (RTNC), na Nova Zelândia e em Seychelles, com foco na estrutura curricular, nas filosofias pedagógicas, nas estratégias de ensino, nas práticas de avaliação, no envolvimento da família e da comunidade e nas qualificações docentes em relação ao desenvolvimento das competências sociais e interpessoais das crianças. Foi empregada uma abordagem qualitativa de análise documental, envolvendo uma revisão sistemática de documentos curriculares oficiais, regulamentações legislativas e relatórios publicados por organizações internacionais. Os resultados mostram que os três países adotam abordagens centradas na criança e baseadas no brincar, que apoiam o desenvolvimento integral das crianças; no entanto, as formas como essas abordagens são concebidas e implementadas diferem de acordo com prioridades nacionais, culturais e educacionais. De modo geral, os achados sugerem que a educação pré-escolar na RTNC pode ser fortalecida a partir da incorporação de práticas reconhecidas internacionalmente, observadas na Nova Zelândia e em Seychelles, especialmente aquelas que enfatizam pedagogias centradas nas relações, fortes parcerias com as famílias e ambientes inclusivos de aprendizagem social.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Análise curricular comparativa. Educação infantil. Te Whāriki. Política educacional.*

RESUMEN: *El estudio tiene como objetivo comparar y contrastar los currículos de educación preescolar en la República Turca del Norte de Chipre (RTNC), Nueva Zelanda y Seychelles, centrándose en la estructura curricular, las filosofías pedagógicas, las estrategias de enseñanza, las prácticas de evaluación, la participación de la familia y la comunidad y las cualificaciones docentes en relación con el desarrollo de las competencias sociales e interpersonales de los niños. Se empleó un enfoque cualitativo de análisis documental, que implicó una revisión sistemática de documentos curriculares oficiales, regulaciones legislativas e informes publicados por organizaciones internacionales. Los resultados muestran que los tres países adoptan enfoques centrados en el niño y basados en el juego que*

apoyan el desarrollo integral de los niños; sin embargo, las formas en que estos enfoques se conceptualizan e implementan difieren según prioridades nacionales, culturales y educativas. En general, los hallazgos sugieren que la educación preescolar en la RTNC podría fortalecerse mediante la incorporación de prácticas reconocidas internacionalmente, observadas en Nueva Zelanda y Seychelles, en particular aquellas que enfatizan pedagogías centradas en las relaciones, sólidas alianzas con las familias y entornos inclusivos de aprendizaje social.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Análisis curricular comparativo. Educación infantil. Te Whāriki. Política educativa.*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood represents one of the most rapid and formative stages of human development, during which the foundations of children's cognitive abilities, social competencies, emotional regulation, and physical skills are established (Kılıç, 2023). Experiences during this period are critical not only for immediate learning but also for shaping later academic achievement, social adaptation, and overall well-being (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). A robust body of empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that high-quality education provided during the preschool years yields long-lasting benefits, significantly influencing educational, social, and economic outcomes across the lifespan (OECD, 2017).

The quality of early childhood experiences plays a decisive role in shaping children's developmental trajectories and their capacity to navigate increasingly complex social environments throughout life (Blair & Raver, 2015; Solang et al., 2024). During these formative years, the development of self-regulation skills—such as emotional control, attentional focus, and behavioral regulation—supports meaningful engagement in learning activities and facilitates successful adjustment to formal schooling (Halfon & Hochstein, 2002). Research further indicates that children who participate in early childhood education programs tend to develop stronger social skills, demonstrate more effective emotional regulation, and exhibit lower levels of behavioral difficulties compared to their peers who lack such experiences (Solang et al., 2024).

Preschool education therefore serves a broader developmental function that extends well beyond the acquisition of early academic skills such as literacy and numeracy. By fostering interpersonal competence, emotional regulation, and self-control, early childhood programs support the foundational capacities required for lifelong learning and active social participation (Liu, 2025). Participation in early childhood education (ECE) programs has been consistently associated with higher academic achievement, increased educational attainment, and improved economic opportunities in later life (Solang et al., 2024).

Extensive research has documented the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs in promoting child development across cognitive, social, and emotional domains. For instance, a large-scale meta-analysis synthesizing global evidence found that higher-quality ECEC programs are significantly associated with gains in literacy and mathematics, improvements in social and behavioral competencies, and reductions in social-emotional and behavioral difficulties (Suchodoletz et al., 2023). Review studies further highlight that ECEC yields particularly strong benefits for children from disadvantaged

backgrounds by supporting cognitive and socio-emotional school readiness and contributing to greater educational equity in later stages of schooling (Hahn & Barnett, 2022).

The sustained effectiveness of ECE programs is closely linked to several interrelated quality indicators, including teacher qualifications, curriculum design and implementation, and meaningful family involvement. High-quality programs are especially impactful for disadvantaged children, as they help reduce developmental and achievement gaps while promoting social equity (Solang et al., 2024). These findings underscore the long-term value of early interventions and the importance of providing children with a strong developmental foundation for lifelong success (Liu, 2025).

Given these substantial and enduring benefits, educational policies should prioritize sustained investment in early childhood care and education and emphasize continuous quality improvement (Solang et al., 2024). Ensuring equitable access to high-quality ECE is essential not only for supporting individual development but also for advancing broader social and economic progress (Liu, 2025).

High-quality ECEC plays a particularly important role in supporting children's socio-emotional and cognitive development through the quality of interpersonal and interactive experiences within educational settings. Educators' verbal and non-verbal interactions with children are fundamental to the development of social competence, language skills, cognitive engagement, and early academic success (Baustad & Bjørnstad, 2020; García-Carrión & Villardón-Gallego, 2016).

Interpersonal interaction in early childhood encompasses children's ability to form reciprocal relationships, cooperate with peers, and engage in meaningful emotional exchanges (Park et al., 2022). These competencies develop not only through spontaneous peer interactions but also through intentionally designed learning environments and curriculum frameworks that actively support social participation and relational learning. Internationally, early childhood education systems adopt diverse pedagogical philosophies, ranging from play-based, child-led approaches to more structured models that explicitly teach social skills through guided instruction (Salaj & Masnjak, 2022; Loprinzi et al., 2015).

The extent to which interpersonal interaction is integrated into early childhood education varies considerably across educational contexts. For example, New Zealand's Te Whāriki curriculum exemplifies a highly integrated approach in which social relationships and interaction are central to all areas of learning, whereas more structured and teacher-directed models remain prominent in other national settings (Reese et al., 2023).

Teachers play a central role in fostering interpersonal interaction and social-emotional competence through intentional pedagogical choices and responsive relationships. Effective teaching strategies should be developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and tailored to individual children's needs (McLaughlin et al., 2017). Research indicates that teachers with higher levels of professional qualification and pedagogical competence enable children to achieve stronger outcomes in both academic and socio-emotional domains (Astiwi et al., 2024).

Teacher competencies are particularly influential in supporting interpersonal development. Interpersonal skills such as empathy, communication, and relational sensitivity are strongly associated with children's socio-emotional growth, while academic competencies tend to exert a greater influence on cognitive and academic outcomes (Astiwi et al., 2024). Meta-analytic evidence further suggests that structural features alone—such as class size or staff-child ratios—are weak predictors of developmental outcomes when examined in isolation. In contrast, indicators of process quality, including teacher-child interactions, classroom sensitivity, and pedagogical implementation, demonstrate meaningful positive associations with children's academic, behavioral, and social development (Suchodoletz et al., 2023).

Effective support for interpersonal interaction also extends beyond the classroom to include strong parent-teacher partnerships. High levels of collaboration between families and educators are associated with more effective early childhood intervention services and greater parental satisfaction with educational programs (LaForett & Mendez, 2010). Moreover, learning experiences within the home environment further contribute to children's socio-emotional development, underscoring the importance of family engagement in early learning processes (Li et al., 2023).

The home learning environment represents the child's earliest and most influential developmental context. Structural family characteristics, as well as parental beliefs, attitudes, and involvement, have been shown to exert significant positive effects on children's socio-emotional competence (Li et al., 2023). Beyond early childhood, supportive relationships with parents, teachers, and peers continue to shape children's engagement, well-being, and adjustment as they transition into later stages of schooling (Wang & Eccles, 2012).

In the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), the Preschool Education Curriculum was officially published in 2016 by the Ministry of National Education and Culture, reflecting the state's growing policy commitment to the development of early childhood education (Erbay et al., 2021). The curriculum was revised in 2018 in line with a framework informed by the theory of multiple intelligences, with the aim of supporting children's

cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development in a holistic manner (TRNC Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018).

The development of the TRNC preschool curriculum must be understood within the broader context of national education policies and the historical evolution of the education system since the establishment of the country in 1983. The National Education Law enacted in 1986 provides the legal foundation for all levels of education, including preschool education (Kol & Tuneli, 2022). Over time, educational frameworks in the TRNC have evolved alongside social and political changes and, while influenced by educational policies in Turkiye, have been adapted to reflect local needs, structures, and priorities (Ufuk & aanaa, 2019).

A defining characteristic of the TRNC preschool education curriculum is its emphasis on key developmental domains such as early literacy, mathematics, and environmental awareness, which are identified as central components of early learning and development (Erbay et al., 2021).

The curriculum primarily targets children aged 4–6, corresponding to the period immediately preceding compulsory primary education. Preschool education in the TRNC is delivered through both public and private institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education. Public preschools are commonly located within primary school settings or operate as independent kindergartens, while private institutions offer alternative or supplementary services shaped by socioeconomic conditions and parental preferences (Erbay et al., 2021).

In recent years, the preschool population in the TRNC has become increasingly multicultural, influenced by the region’s geopolitical position and linguistic diversity. This shift has led to a growing emphasis on bilingual education, particularly involving Turkish and English. The number of institutions offering bilingual preschool programs has steadily increased, reflecting both parental demand and policy orientations aimed at strengthening early language competencies (Aksoy, 2024; Anshin, 2006; Bialystok, 2006).

In contrast, New Zealand’s Te Whāriki curriculum represents an internationally influential model in early childhood education, emerging from a distinctive national context and reflecting a strong commitment to bicultural education. First implemented in 1996, Te Whāriki was developed through extensive consultation with early childhood educators, families, communities, and other key stakeholders, ensuring that multiple perspectives were embedded in the curriculum framework (Lee et al., 2013).

Te Whāriki emphasizes children's active participation in learning while fostering cultural identity and a strong sense of belonging (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). The curriculum is characterized by its flexible, child-centered structure, integrating play-based learning, family involvement, and culturally responsive pedagogical practices (Blaiklock, 2010). By explicitly incorporating the values and perspectives of Māori and Pacific communities, Te Whāriki promotes inclusivity and cultural responsiveness within early childhood education.

One of the most distinctive features of Te Whāriki is its assessment approach, particularly the use of Learning Stories. This narrative-based assessment method documents children's interests, strengths, and emerging competencies within meaningful learning contexts, enabling educators to gain deeper insight into individual development and to plan responsive, relationship-based teaching practices (Blaiklock, 2010). In addition, Te Whāriki explicitly addresses spiritual development as a dimension of children's well-being, conceptualizing spirituality in terms of meaning-making, connection, purpose, and a sense of belonging in the world (Bone et al., 2007).

Overall, Te Whāriki exemplifies a relationship-centered approach to early childhood education, in which interpersonal interaction is positioned not as a supplementary aspect of learning but as a foundational principle. The framework is built around four core principles—empowerment, holistic development, family and community partnership, and relationships—while the learning strand of “Belonging” explicitly prioritizes children's sense of attachment and social participation within learning communities (Lee et al., 2013). Through its relational pedagogy, Te Whāriki aims to create learning environments in which children experience secure, responsive relationships that support exploration, peer interaction, and collaborative meaning-making.

Within this approach, teachers act as facilitators who respect children's autonomy and cultural identities, intentionally model positive social behaviors, and create meaningful opportunities for peer collaboration through responsive and reciprocal interactions (Cooper & Hedges, 2014; Blair & Raver, 2015).

The National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood (NCFEC) in Seychelles was developed within a multilayered historical and policy context that integrates both global and regional influences. Central to the formulation of this framework is the recognition of early childhood education as a foundational component of sustainable human development, a

commitment aligned with international policy agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Wagner, 2010).

The NCFEC adopts a comprehensive and flexible approach to early childhood education for children aged 0–8, reflecting Seychelles’ postcolonial educational development and its emphasis on multilingualism, cultural heritage preservation, and strong community integration within preschool contexts (Mendez et al., 2003). By explicitly addressing this developmental period, the framework articulates broad educational goals that support holistic development, encompassing not only early literacy and numeracy but also emotional maturity, social competence, language acquisition, and motor development.

This orientation aligns with contemporary international perspectives advocating a “whole child” approach, in which academic learning is integrated with social-emotional and physical development rather than prioritized in isolation (Wagner, 2010). Early childhood education in Seychelles is delivered in Creole, English, and French, further reinforcing cultural diversity and fostering a sense of belonging among young learners (Government of Seychelles, 2010; UNESCO IBE, 2017).

A key strength of the NCFEC is its explicit commitment to inclusivity. The framework directly addresses the participation of children from marginalized or vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It recognizes the need for differentiated pedagogical strategies and targeted resource allocation to ensure equitable access, meaningful participation, and inclusive learning experiences for all children (Africa, 2016).

The development of the NCFEC was guided by a participatory and consultative process, which played a crucial role in ensuring its legitimacy, contextual relevance, and practical applicability. The framework emerged through collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including government education authorities, teachers, caregivers, community leaders, policymakers, and education experts. This multi-stakeholder engagement ensured that the curriculum reflects both national priorities and the lived realities of Seychelles’ cultural, social, and educational contexts (Moorosi & Bush, 2011).

Pedagogically, the NCFEC is grounded in a child-centered philosophy that positions children’s active participation and experiential learning at the core of educational practice. The framework emphasizes play-based learning, exploration, and social interaction as primary mechanisms through which young children construct knowledge, develop agency, and build interpersonal competence. This approach is consistent with educational theories that emphasize

the role of responsive, interactive learning environments in fostering creativity, problem-solving abilities, and social skills more effectively than teacher-directed or rote-based instruction (Moorosi & Bush, 2011).

Family and community involvement constitutes another foundational pillar of the NCFEC. The framework actively encourages parents and caregivers to engage in children's learning processes, acknowledging that early development extends beyond formal educational settings. Practices that support parental involvement in monitoring and supporting developmental progress are strongly promoted. Research indicates that a supportive home learning environment, combined with sustained family engagement, significantly enhances children's developmental trajectories.

Additionally, the framework encourages the use of digital learning platforms to complement face-to-face educational practices and to expand access to learning resources. Community-based support networks are emphasized as mechanisms for professional collaboration, shared problem-solving, and continuous improvement in educational practice (Choi, 2020; Alayande et al., 2022; Wagner, 2010; Beck, 2000).

Adopting a holistic perspective, the NCFEC integrates social-emotional learning (SEL) and psychosocial well-being as essential dimensions of early childhood education. This integration reflects an understanding that cognitive development is closely interconnected with emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, resilience, and mental health.

Moreover, the curriculum aligns social development objectives with broader national education goals, emphasizing inclusive education principles that reflect the demographic characteristics and cultural values of Seychelles as an island nation. Preschool programs explicitly highlight the role of interpersonal interaction in strengthening social cohesion and community participation, situating peer interaction within broader frameworks that link national identity formation with multicultural understanding (Khalfaoui et al., 2020; Africa, 2016).

Although the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), New Zealand, and Seychelles differ significantly in geographical location, cultural composition, and economic context, they share a common challenge: supporting children's interpersonal development within education systems shaped by distinct historical, cultural, and structural conditions (Mendez et al., 2002). The findings of this comparative analysis demonstrate that while all three contexts acknowledge the importance of interpersonal interaction, the degree to which it is

explicitly embedded within curriculum frameworks and pedagogical practices varies considerably.

Educational environments in the TRNC, New Zealand, and Seychelles differ in both their approaches to facilitating interpersonal interaction and the challenges they encounter. In this regard, innovative models such as the hybrid digital empathy learning design proposed by Wu et al. (2020) offer promising directions, particularly for contexts such as the TRNC and Seychelles. These models utilize culturally responsive digital tools to promote empathy and social understanding and may help compensate for limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction in resource-constrained settings, while also leveraging the growing role of digitalization in education.

In contrast, New Zealand continues to face persistent participation inequalities among Māori and Pasifika children, which affect both social engagement and academic outcomes. Research indicates that these groups often demonstrate lower levels of emotional and participatory engagement compared to their Pākehā peers, pointing to structural challenges related to inclusivity and cultural responsiveness within curricula and pedagogical practices (Brown et al., 2018).

Social competence in early childhood—including the quality of peer relationships, cooperation skills, and emotional reciprocity—has been shown to predict classroom adjustment, peer acceptance, and resilience. Importantly, these effects extend beyond the preschool years into later educational and social contexts (Bierman, 2004). Central to this process is children's ability to develop a sense of belonging within peer communities and to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships, which constitutes a core dimension of healthy social-emotional development (Johansson & Rosell, 2021).

Socio-cultural diversity exerts context-specific influences on children's interpersonal development across the TRNC, New Zealand, and Seychelles. In the New Zealand context, empirical evidence suggests that racial discrimination and related stressors significantly affect maternal mental health, with indirect consequences for children's social-emotional development. Studies indicate that Māori, Pasifika, and Asian women who experience ethnically based inequitable treatment—particularly within healthcare systems—are at increased risk of prenatal and postnatal depression, which may further influence early developmental outcomes (White et al., 2020).

Given the considerable variation in curricular content, pedagogical principles, and cultural contexts across countries, comparative analyses of preschool education programs play

a critical role in identifying strengths, addressing limitations, and enhancing educational quality (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014). Examining how different national curricula operationalize support for interpersonal interaction enables the development of evidence-based recommendations related to child-centered pedagogy, cultural inclusivity, family engagement, teacher competencies, and assessment practices.

Within this framework, the present review analyzes how preschool education programs in the TRNC, New Zealand, and Seychelles conceptualize and implement support for interpersonal interaction. It examines how structural and process-related elements—including teacher practices, learning environment organization, policy guidance, and resource accessibility—collectively shape children’s opportunities to develop interpersonal competence and to establish sustainable, positive peer relationships.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of preschool education curricula implemented in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), New Zealand, and Seychelles, with particular attention to how these curricula support and promote children’s interpersonal interaction in early childhood education settings. By examining curriculum philosophies, pedagogical approaches, instructional practices, assessment and evaluation methods, family involvement, and teacher competencies, the study seeks to identify both the strengths of the TRNC preschool education curriculum and the areas that require further development in supporting children’s social and interpersonal competencies.

Through systematic comparison with internationally recognized preschool education frameworks in New Zealand and Seychelles, this study explores education systems that differ geographically, culturally, and economically. In doing so, it aims to illuminate both shared principles of effective interpersonal development in early childhood and context-specific practices shaped by local educational priorities, socio-cultural values, and institutional capacities. Ultimately, the study seeks to generate evidence-based recommendations to enhance the quality of preschool education in the TRNC, with a particular focus on fostering meaningful peer interaction, active social participation, and the development of positive relationships during early childhood.

In line with the overall aim of the study, the following research questions have been identified:

- Which age groups are covered by preschool education curricula in the TRNC, New Zealand, and Seychelles, and how do these age ranges, in relation to compulsory education, influence children's opportunities for interpersonal interaction?
- In what ways do the educational approaches (e.g., child-centered, play-based) and pedagogical philosophies adopted in the preschool education curricula of the TRNC, New Zealand, and Seychelles differ from and resemble one another in supporting children's interpersonal interaction?
- In what ways do preschool education curricula in the TRNC, New Zealand, and Seychelles differ from and resemble one another with regard to family involvement and community collaboration as contexts that support children's interpersonal development?
- In what ways do preschool education services in the TRNC, New Zealand, and Seychelles differ from and resemble one another in terms of educational financing and resource structures, and how might these structures influence the provision of socially and interaction-rich learning environments?
- In what ways do the assessment and evaluation processes of preschool education curricula in the TRNC, New Zealand, and Seychelles differ from and resemble one another in monitoring children's social and interpersonal development?
- In what ways do teacher qualifications and professional development opportunities in the TRNC, New Zealand, and Seychelles differ from and resemble one another in preparing educators to support children's interpersonal interaction and social competence?

METHOD

Research design

This analysis synthesizes evidence from empirical studies, official curriculum documents, policy analyses, and comparative education literature to provide a holistic understanding of how each program approaches early childhood education and the support of interpersonal development.

The study was designed as a qualitative descriptive inquiry based on the document analysis method. Document analysis is a qualitative data collection technique that enables the

systematic examination of existing texts in order to understand past and ongoing educational processes and to generate meaningful interpretations (Bowen, 2009).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Within this framework, official legislation, national curriculum documents, and reports published by international organizations related to preschool education programs currently implemented in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), New Zealand, and Seychelles were systematically reviewed.

The primary data sources consisted of preschool curriculum documents issued by the ministries of education in the respective countries, as well as country profiles and strategic policy documents on early childhood education produced by international organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD. Document selection was guided by criteria including official status, relevance to early childhood education, currency, and content richness, in order to strengthen the reliability and validity of the analysis.

The countries included in the study were selected through purposive sampling. The fact that all three contexts are island nations sharing certain geographical characteristics and socio-cultural features was considered a meaningful basis for cross-national comparison and contributed to the analytical validity of the study (Patton, 2002).

DATA ANALYSIS

Methodologically, the comparative approach focuses on the analysis of official curriculum frameworks while recognizing the potential gap between policy intentions and classroom-level implementation (Barth, 2009). The theoretical framework of the study is informed by ecological perspectives, which conceptualize children's interpersonal development as occurring within interconnected systems, including the family, classroom, school, community, and broader socio-cultural environment (Halfon & Hochstein, 2002; Neuman & Celano, 2001).

Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques. Initially, the documents were coded, key concepts and patterns were identified, and emerging themes were organized into analytical categories to allow systematic comparison across countries. Within this process, preschool education programs were examined across thematic dimensions including age groups

served, pedagogical approaches, instructional practices, family involvement, assessment and evaluation processes, teacher competencies, and funding structures.

This methodological approach enabled the study not only to describe existing educational policies but also to critically examine their pedagogical orientations and underlying assumptions. In doing so, the analysis contributes to identifying strengths, limitations, and areas for further development in supporting children’s interpersonal interaction and social-emotional development in early childhood education systems.

FINDINGS

In the TRNC, the preschool curriculum primarily serves children aged 3–6, with particular emphasis on five-year-olds, and supports interpersonal interaction mainly through structured group activities. New Zealand’s Te Whāriki curriculum, covering the 0–6 age range, places relationships and social interaction at the core of all learning areas. By contrast, the Seychelles preschool curriculum targets children aged 0–8 and promotes interpersonal interaction through flexible, developmentally responsive, and community-oriented practices. Although a holistic approach to children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development is a shared goal across all three contexts, the degree to which interpersonal interaction is explicitly prioritized.

Table 1.
Age Groups Covered and Their Influence on Interpersonal Interaction Opportunities

Country	Preschool Age Coverage	Compulsory Education Age	Transition Structure	Peer Interaction Opportunities	Impact on Social Development
TRNC	3-6 years (Kindergarten)	6 years	Single point transition	Structured group activities	Moderate - formal settings limit spontaneous interaction
New Zealand	0-5 years (Early Childhood)	6 years	Flexible transition approach	Diverse mixed-age interactions	High - flexible settings promote extensive peer engagement
Seychelles	3-5 years (Preschool)	5 years	Earlier transition	Community-based varied activities	Variable - depends on resource availability and community support

Note. Authors’ results.

Table 1 highlights clear differences in how the three preschool education systems are structured in relation to transition points from early childhood education to compulsory schooling. In the TRNC, early childhood education is organized as a formal kindergarten

system serving children aged three to six, with a clearly defined transition to compulsory education at age six. This structured model typically organizes children into age-homogeneous groups and relies on adult-directed, pre-planned activities. While such an approach can support classroom order and routine, it may also limit opportunities for spontaneous peer interaction, depending on how flexibly it is implemented.

New Zealand's system demonstrates considerably greater flexibility. Early childhood education serves children from infancy to five years of age in mixed-age settings that intentionally promote interaction among children at different developmental stages. This fluid structure allows children to remain in early childhood environments for extended periods when developmentally appropriate, supporting the formation of sustained peer relationships and richer opportunities for social learning.

Seychelles represents a transitional model, in which preschool education typically serves children aged three to five, followed by an earlier transition to formal schooling at age five. While this model offers some flexibility during the preschool years, the relatively early shift to compulsory education may reduce the time available for children to develop stable peer relationships within play-based learning environments.

Table 2.
Educational Approaches and Pedagogical Philosophies in Fostering Interpersonal Interaction

Pedagogical Dimension	TRNC	New Zealand	Seychelles
Core Learning Philosophy	Structured, teacher-directed, Child-centered	Child-centered, emergent	Hybrid approach (evolving)
Play Integration	Moderate (supplementary)	High (central to curriculum)	Varies by institution
Teacher Role	Authority/instructor	Facilitator/co-learner	Mixed roles (transitioning)
Child Agency in Learning	Limited	High (extensive choices)	Moderate
Curriculum Structure	Formal academic focus	Flexible, thematic	Semi-structured with standards
Social Interaction Facilitation	Indirect (through activities)	Direct (intentional scaffolding)	Contextual
Peer Collaboration Emphasis	Lower priority	Central element	Developing

Note. Authors' results.

The pedagogical frameworks of the three programs reflect distinct philosophical approaches to the development of children’s social competence and interpersonal skills. In the TRNC, the preschool curriculum adopts a child-centered and play-based orientation within a relatively structured framework. Teachers play a central role in planning and directing learning activities, and interpersonal interaction is primarily facilitated through organized group work, cooperative play, and routine classroom practices. However, interpersonal interaction is not articulated as an explicit pedagogical priority; rather, social skills are expected to develop indirectly through teacher-regulated, academically oriented activities.

In contrast, New Zealand’s early childhood education system positions interpersonal interaction as a foundational element of learning. A strongly child-centered, play-based philosophy creates natural contexts for children to negotiate relationships, resolve conflicts, and develop empathy and reciprocity. Teachers function mainly as facilitators who observe, document, and scaffold children’s social learning through responsive interactions.

Seychelles represents a hybrid pedagogical model that balances traditional instructional structures with emerging child-centered principles. While the curriculum intentionally supports social skills such as sharing, turn-taking, and collaborative problem-solving, interpersonal interaction typically occurs within clearly defined activity boundaries. The effectiveness of this approach depends largely on teacher preparation, resource availability, and consistency of implementation across settings.

Table 3.
Family Involvement and Community Collaboration in Supporting Interpersonal Development

Engagement Dimension	TRNC	New Zealand	Seychelles
Parent Meeting Formats	Formal, scheduled	Flexible, varied formats	Variable, developing
Home-School Communication	Occasional/formal	Regular/ongoing/digital	Limited, inconsistent
Community Partnerships	Limited formal structures	Strong institutional partnerships	Community-dependent, variable
Parent Participation in Activities	Minimal/ceremonial	Encouraged/central	Variable participation
Cultural Integration	Moderate acknowledgment	High priority/integration	Present but developing
Assessment Information Sharing	Teacher-led reports	Collaborative/narrative focus	Developing formats

Community Resource Utilization	Limited	Extensive	Variable
Barriers to Involvement	Time, formal structures	Fewer structural barriers	Resources, access, infrastructure

Note. Authors' results.

Family involvement and community collaboration function as critical contextual factors shaping children's interpersonal development in early childhood settings. In the TRNC, family involvement is predominantly formal and structured, relying on scheduled meetings and teacher-directed communication. Although this model provides consistency, it tends to limit sustained educator-family partnerships, with parental participation largely confined to assessment-related interactions rather than ongoing collaboration to support children's social development.

In contrast, New Zealand adopts a partnership-based approach in which families are positioned as co-educators. Early childhood settings actively promote parental participation in daily practices, maintain continuous two-way communication, and incorporate parental insights into assessments of children's social learning both inside and outside the classroom. Evidence indicates that such meaningful family engagement—particularly in social-emotional domains—is associated with stronger peer relationships, enhanced resilience, and more effective conflict-resolution skills among children.

Seychelles demonstrates a growing policy-level commitment to family-community collaboration; however, implementation remains uneven due to resource limitations, geographic dispersion, and variable community infrastructure. Where effective collaboration is achieved, children benefit from consistent social learning messages across home and school contexts, supporting stronger interpersonal competence and continuity in social expectations.

Table 4.
Educational Financing and Funding Structures' Influence on Interaction-Rich Environments

Funding Aspect	TRNC	New Zealand	Seychelles
Primary Funding Source	Mixed (public/private)	Primarily government-funded	Developing government investment
Public vs. Private Mix	Both systems operate	Predominantly public	Emerging public system
Per-Student Investment Level	Moderate	High (OECD standards)	Low-moderate (developing)
Teacher Compensation	Limited/variable	Competitive/professional wages	Limited/developing

Facility Quality	Variable	urban/rural gap	Generally well-maintained	Basic, resource-limited
Play Availability	Material	Limited/unequal	Well-resourced	Significantly limited
Technology Integration		Limited	Well-integrated	Emerging
Access Equity		Significant urban-rural disparity	Relatively equitable	Significant disparity
Impact on Environments	Social	Constrained interactions	Supportive of diverse interactions	Stressed resources

Note. Authors' results.

Educational financing plays a decisive role in shaping the quality of early childhood learning environments and, consequently, children's opportunities for meaningful interpersonal interaction. In the TRNC, a mixed public-private financing structure results in marked disparities across preschool settings. Public institutions typically operate with limited budgets that constrain investments in learning materials, outdoor play areas, and favorable adult-child ratios—conditions necessary for sustained peer interaction. Although private institutions often provide more resource-rich environments, their restricted accessibility raises equity concerns and limits consistent support for social development across socioeconomic groups.

New Zealand demonstrates the impact of strong public investment in early childhood education. Government funding supports well-resourced environments characterized by small group sizes, highly qualified educators, diverse play materials, and integrated outdoor learning spaces. These conditions facilitate frequent, high-quality peer interactions and intentional adult scaffolding of social learning. A stable and predictable funding model also enables long-term planning, staff continuity, and more equitable quality across regions, reinforcing consistent support for children's interpersonal development.

In contrast, Seychelles faces substantial financial constraints that restrict the scope and quality of preschool provision, particularly in outer island communities. Low per-child investment limits access to varied learning materials, reduces opportunities for outdoor and collaborative play, and results in less favorable adult-child ratios. These structural limitations directly reduce children's exposure to diverse social interactions and the quality of adult facilitation necessary for developing interpersonal competence.

Table 5.*Assessment and Evaluation Processes for Monitoring Social and Interpersonal Development*

Assessment Component	TRNC	New Zealand	Seychelles
Observation-Based Methods	Limited use	Extensive/primary method	Developing practice
Standardized Testing	Moderate emphasis	Minimal/formative focus	Moderate emphasis
Portfolio Assessment	Limited practice	High emphasis (learning stories)	Emerging practice
Social Development Focus	Secondary priority	Central focus	Developing focus
Teacher-Led Assessment	Primary method	Collaborative process	Primary method
Parent Involvement in Assessment	Minimal	Central/ongoing	Growing involvement
Assessment Frequency	Periodic (term/year)	Continuous/ongoing	Periodic
Assessment Documentation	Report cards	Narrative learning stories	Varied formats
Emotional Competence Monitoring	Limited	Extensive focus	Developing framework
Peer Interaction Evaluation	Informal	Systematic observation	Informal

Note. Authors' results.

Assessment and evaluation practices play a critical role in shaping the extent to which educators systematically attend to children's interpersonal development and social competence. In the TRNC, assessment practices primarily emphasize academic achievement through periodic tests and developmental reports, while social-emotional development is addressed as a secondary component. Although informal observations of children's behavior occur, systematic documentation and analysis of interpersonal interaction remain limited. This assessment orientation may implicitly signal to educators and families that academic outcomes are prioritized over the intentional development of social competence.

By contrast, New Zealand's early childhood assessment framework explicitly foregrounds social-emotional development through continuous, formative assessment practices, most notably the use of *learning stories*. These narrative-based assessments document children's social interactions, emotional expression, and relationship building over time. Educators systematically observe peer engagement, record evidence of emerging social competencies, and incorporate parental perspectives into the assessment process. This approach produces rich, longitudinal records of interpersonal development and supports intentional

pedagogical planning that scaffolds collaboration, conflict resolution, empathy, and sustained peer relationships.

Assessment practices in Seychelles reflect a transitional emphasis on social and emotional development, with growing reliance on observation-based evaluation. Teachers increasingly monitor children’s peer interactions, cooperative behaviors, and emotional regulation; however, these practices are not yet fully institutionalized as continuous or primary assessment mechanisms. Documentation remains variable and largely informal, depending on individual teacher capacity and contextual resources. Despite these limitations, current assessment practices allow educators to identify emerging social competencies and design learning experiences that promote cooperation, empathy, and positive peer relationships.

Table 6.
Teacher Qualifications and Professional Development in Supporting Interpersonal Interaction

Professional Development Area	TRNC	New Zealand		Seychelles
Entry-Level Qualification	Bachelor’s Diploma	Bachelor's (minimum)	Degree	Certificate or Diploma
Required Early Childhood Specialization	Limited requirements	Mandatory ECE training		Developing requirements
Minimum Education Level	Secondary completion	Tertiary qualification required		Variable
Specialized Social-Emotional Training	Limited	Integrated in programs		Emerging
Ongoing Professional Development	Occasional workshops or in-service training	Regular/continuous opportunities		Limited/irregular
Professional Development Frequency	Annual (minimum)	Ongoing career	throughout	Irregular basis
Specialized Training Available	Limited options	Multiple specializations		Few options
International Training Access	Rare	Available/encouraged		Limited
Career Progression Pathways	Limited advancement	Clear progression options		Developing pathways
Focus on Child-Centered Pedagogy	Limited emphasis	Central to training		Growing emphasis
Peer Interaction Facilitation Training	Minimal	Substantial component		Emerging
Emotional Literacy Development	Limited emphasis	Central emphasis		Developing

Note. Authors’ results.

Teacher qualifications and professional development are central to educators' capacity to intentionally support children's interpersonal development and social competence. In the TRNC, preschool educators are generally required to hold a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education; however, opportunities for ongoing professional development are limited and largely consist of sporadic workshops or short in-service training. These opportunities rarely prioritize child-centered pedagogy, observation-based assessment, or strategies for facilitating peer interaction. As a result, educators may lack specialized preparation in developmental psychology, systematic observation, and the scaffolding of social-emotional learning.

New Zealand demonstrates a more comprehensive and coherent approach to educator preparation. Early childhood educators are required to hold a bachelor's degree with program content explicitly focused on child development, play-based learning, and social-emotional competence. Professional preparation includes extensive training in observing and interpreting children's peer interactions and using assessment data to inform intentional pedagogical decisions. In addition, a well-established professional development system supports continuous learning throughout educators' careers, offering targeted training in areas such as inclusive practice, cultural responsiveness, and social-emotional development. This sustained investment in educator expertise is closely associated with higher-quality peer interactions and stronger social outcomes for children.

In Seychelles, teacher qualification pathways remain in transition, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of early childhood specialization. Current qualifications range from certificates to diplomas, with limited mandatory focus on early childhood pedagogy or social-emotional development. Professional development opportunities are uneven and often constrained by resource limitations, resulting in considerable variability in educators' knowledge and instructional capacity across settings.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis shows that although preschool education curricula in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), New Zealand, and Seychelles all recognize the importance of social development in early childhood, they differ considerably in how intentionally and consistently they support children's interpersonal interaction. Across the three contexts, interpersonal learning is valued, yet the extent to which it is clearly prioritized and

systematically embedded within curriculum structures, teaching practices, assessment approaches, family engagement, and teacher preparation varies markedly.

In the TRNC, support for interpersonal interaction is largely embedded within structured, teacher-directed activities and daily classroom routines. Rather than being explicitly defined as a central learning goal, social skills are expected to develop indirectly through organized group work and guided play. When compared with New Zealand's relationship-centered approach—where belonging, interaction, and relationships form the foundation of the curriculum—the TRNC framework remains more academically oriented, positioning interpersonal development as supportive rather than central to learning. Seychelles reflects a transitional model, combining more traditional instructional structures with increasing attention to play-based and child-centered practices. However, the consistency and effectiveness of this approach are shaped by contextual factors such as teacher preparation and resource availability.

Clear differences also emerge in assessment practices. In the TRNC, assessment continues to focus primarily on academic progress, with limited systematic documentation of children's social-emotional development. This emphasis may unintentionally signal to educators and families that interpersonal competencies are of secondary importance. In contrast, New Zealand's use of narrative, observation-based assessment provides rich insight into children's social interactions, emotional growth, and peer relationships, enabling educators to plan learning experiences that intentionally support social development. In Seychelles, there is growing recognition of the importance of assessing social-emotional learning, yet assessment practices remain inconsistent and are not fully embedded as continuous or standardized processes.

Family involvement and educational financing further shape children's opportunities to develop interpersonal skills. In the TRNC, family engagement tends to follow formal, school-led models that promote consistency but limit deeper collaboration. At the same time, disparities between public and private preschool provision create unequal access to high-quality, interaction-rich learning environments. New Zealand's strong public investment in early childhood education stands in contrast, enabling smaller group sizes, stable staffing, and well-resourced settings that naturally foster peer interaction. Seychelles, particularly in outer island communities, faces financial and infrastructural constraints that restrict access to materials, outdoor learning opportunities, and favorable adult-child ratios.

Teacher qualifications and professional development play a decisive role across all three systems. Although preschool educators in the TRNC generally meet formal qualification

requirements, limited and irregular professional development opportunities reduce teachers' capacity to intentionally support social-emotional learning and to use observation-based practices effectively. New Zealand demonstrates how sustained investment in both initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning strengthens educators' ability to facilitate high-quality interpersonal experiences. Seychelles continues to move toward greater professionalization, but variability in teacher preparation and access to training remains a challenge.

Taken together, these findings suggest that enhancing children's interpersonal development in the TRNC requires a more explicit and intentional focus on social-emotional learning across all dimensions of preschool education. Strengthening assessment practices, fostering more collaborative family-school partnerships, addressing resource inequities, and investing in sustained professional development grounded in relational pedagogy would significantly improve practice. By thoughtfully adapting relational, inclusive, and assessment-informed approaches evident in New Zealand to the local socio-cultural and institutional context, preschool education in the TRNC can better support children's social participation, peer relationships, and long-term developmental well-being.

1. Recommendations

Drawing on the study's comparative findings, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen support for children's interpersonal interaction in preschool education, particularly in the TRNC:

- Family involvement policies should formally recognize families as collaborative partners in learning and assessment;
- Professional development should prioritize social-emotional pedagogy, observation-based assessment, and peer-interaction strategies through ongoing, practice-focused training;
- A compulsory and sustainable national in-service training policy should support relationship-centered and social-emotional teaching approaches;
- Social-emotional assessment should be implemented as a continuous, observation-based process using tools such as anecdotal records and developmental portfolios to inform instruction;

- Teachers should clearly communicate social-emotional observations to families and meaningfully integrate family perspectives into instructional planning;
- Classroom practices and environments should emphasize child-centered, play-based learning that promotes peer interaction;
- Structural conditions—including reduced class sizes, increased support staff, and protected planning time—should be strengthened to enable effective implementation;
- Educators should intentionally apply interaction-focused strategies and engage in reflective professional learning communities to sustain professional growth.

Based on the findings, several directions for future research are recommended:

- Longitudinal and comparative studies should examine the long-term impact of explicitly integrated interpersonal and social-emotional learning approaches;
- Future research should explore how relationship-centered and social-emotional frameworks can be adapted and sustained in resource-constrained contexts such as the TRNC and Seychelles;
- Policy-oriented studies should assess the feasibility and sustainability of social-emotional support systems within existing educational structures;
- Further research should identify effective professional development and in-service training models that strengthen educators' social-emotional pedagogy and assessment competencies;
- Studies should examine how different family engagement models influence children's social-emotional development and the quality of assessment practices.

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