

Alternative preschool education in Mongolia: an international comparative policy document analysis

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CITATION

Oyunbileg Enkhchimeg, Batzorig Battsetseg, Ragchaa Jargaltuya. Alternative preschool education in Mongolia: an international comparative policy document analysis. International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research-MIYR, 2026, 6(3), 1~18.

<https://doi.org/10.53468/mifyr.2026.6.3.1>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 23 August 2026

Revised: 28 August 2026

Accepted: 15 September 2026

Available online: 30 September 2026

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International Journal of Social
Science and Humanities Research-
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Abstract: Alternative early childhood education (ECE) programs play a crucial role in enhancing access for children and families who face challenges in utilizing center-based services. However, countries regulate these programs differently based on their unique geographical, demographic, socio-family contexts, and educational systems. The purpose of this study is to examine the policies and regulatory characteristics of alternative ECE in Mongolia by comparing them with corresponding policy documents from New Zealand, Australia, and Ukraine to identify commonalities and differences. Using a qualitative comparative document analysis method, 19 policy and regulatory documents from the four countries were analyzed across eight dimensions: policy objectives, target groups, service delivery models, curriculum and pedagogy, workforce, governance and financing, quality assurance, and family and community engagement. The findings indicate that while the alternative ECE regulations in all four countries share the common goal of increasing access, they differ in terms of policy rationale, target populations, service organization, financing, and forms of family engagement. In Mongolia, alternative education serves as a policy mechanism addressing access issues stemming from geographical challenges and nomadic lifestyles, whereas in the comparison countries, there is a clearer emphasis on family needs, preferences, and service flexibility. Simultaneously, despite differences in service delivery models, a common trend is observed in maintaining core curriculum requirements, professional workforce standards, and quality assurance. The study results suggest that Mongolia needs to balance the access-oriented function of alternative education with quality assurance, professional support, sustainable financing, and active family engagement.

Keywords: Early childhood education; Alternative education; Educational access; Policy regulation; Home-based education; Comparative analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is internationally recognized as a foundational condition for children's early development, learning processes, well-being, and future educational participation[1; 2]. Consequently, policy must aim not only to increase enrollment rates but also to ensure equitable access to quality services for all children. Therefore, while expanding access to educational services, it is equally essential to examine how effectively specific service delivery models align with children's learning characteristics and needs[3].

However, opportunities to access ECE vary depending on geographical location, population distribution, household socioeconomic conditions, and family lifestyles. Particularly in contexts with low population density, geographical isolation, or a dominant nomadic lifestyle, regular center-based services have limited capacity to

reach all children equally[2]. To address these gaps, alternative delivery models such as home-based, family-based, community-based, and mobile modalities have emerged. Nevertheless, these models vary significantly across countries in their legal frameworks, objectives, and structures. Furthermore, flexibility does not automatically guarantee quality; operating environments, teacher qualifications, funding, and quality assurance heavily influence implementation outcomes. Therefore, alternative education must be aligned with access, quality, and family engagement.

In Mongolia, sparse population distribution, vast territory, and nomadic herder lifestyles hinder regular center-based service delivery. In response, alternative ECE was formally regulated by Order A/224 in 2022, defining it as training and activities for children who cannot regularly attend primary kindergarten groups due to residence or disabilities. Ministry of Education statistics for the 2024-2025 academic year show 264,818 children enrolled across 1,407 ECE institutions nationwide, of whom 253,158 are in regular programs and 11,660 (approx. 4.4%) are in alternative programs[4]. While alternative education constitutes a small share of total enrollment, it serves as a critical mechanism for reaching geographically isolated children. Previous research highlights challenges in Mongolia regarding teacher shortages, professional preparation, funding, and sustainability [5], underscoring the need to strengthen institutional support conditions concurrently with access expansion.

1.2. Research Problem and Literature Gap

Previous studies show that alternative ECE services are developing in multiple forms, yet research systematically comparing service organizations across countries using uniform criteria remains scarce[5]. Simultaneously, comparative studies examining policy objectives, target groups, service models, curriculum, workforce, governance, financing, quality assurance, and family engagement within a unified analytical framework are limited. Rather than superficially equating country-specific service nomenclatures, this study compares service regulations that possess different institutional structures yet share similar functional responses to access and need.

1.3. Research Objective

The objective of this study is to analyze and compare the policy and regulatory characteristics of alternative ECE in Mongolia with corresponding ECE policy and regulatory documents from New Zealand, Australia, and Ukraine, thereby identifying their commonalities and differences.

1.4. Research Questions

RQ1: What are the objectives, target groups, and organizational models through which alternative ECE services are regulated in Mongolia and the selected countries?

RQ2: What commonalities and differences do alternative ECE services across the four countries exhibit regarding curriculum and pedagogy, workforce, governance and financing, quality assurance, and family and community engagement?

RQ3: What policy lessons can be drawn from international comparisons to further develop alternative ECE policy and regulation in Mongolia?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The theoretical significance lies in conceptualizing alternative ECE not merely as a substitute for center-based services, but as a policy phenomenon defined by the interrelationships among access, flexibility, quality, professional regulation, and family engagement. The methodological significance lies in comparing policy and regulatory documents across eight analytical dimensions without superficially equating diverse country terminology. The practical significance provides an evidence-based foundation for understanding Mongolia's alternative ECE policy and aligning access expansion with quality, professional support, and funding.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Access, Equity, and Flexible Service Regulation in Early Childhood Education

Accessibility cannot be measured solely by physical presence; actual participation depends on geographical location, population distribution, socioeconomic conditions, and family lifestyles[1; 2]. ECE policy must focus not only on enrollment rates but also on equity and quality. For alternative education programs, flexibility must not compromise core requirements regarding children's learning, development, and safety.

2.2. Conceptualizing Alternative ECE and Service Modalities

Alternative ECE services encompass home-based, family-based, community-based, and mobile models[6; 7]. Treating them as a uniform service risks obscuring institutional differences. This study adopts alternative ECE policies and organizational forms—rather than specific pedagogical philosophies—as its primary unit of analysis to compare national policies and target groups. In this study, 'alternative ECE' is operationally defined not merely as an informal or pedagogical variation, but as a formal regulatory and structural policy configuration designed to deliver early childhood education to children and families facing barriers to center-based kindergarten participation due to geography, lifestyle, or specific socio-family circumstances. It is distinguished from standard non-formal or flexible childcare by being officially regulated under national frameworks to meet baseline educational standards, workforce qualifications, and quality expectations while offering flexible delivery modalities (e.g., home-based, mobile, family-centered).

2.3. Geographical Accessibility, Nomadic Lifestyles, and the Need for Alternative Education

In Mongolia, sparse population distribution, vast territory, and nomadic lifestyles hinder regular center-based service delivery, prompting alternative modalities such as mobile teachers and ger kindergartens. World Bank assessments show that while ger kindergartens perform well in interactions, they lag in physical and learning environments, highlighting the need to balance flexibility with common quality standards.

2.4. Review of Research on International Alternative ECE Modalities

New Zealand: Home-based ECE has developed as an integrated component of the national system, offering stable relationships alongside regulatory and funding challenge[6].

Australia: In Home Care targets specific families unable to access standard ECE services due to work, lifestyle, or specialized needs.

Ukraine: Family-based and flexible forms enhance educational participation, connecting with national standards and children's rights[7].

2.5. Research Findings on Alternative Education in Mongolia

Previous studies in Mongolia address policy implementation, service quality, accessibility, herder children, and parental choices [5; 8]. While these studies provide vital empirical foundations regarding operational challenges, systematic comparative research connecting them to international policy frameworks remains scarce.

2.6. Research Gap and Analytical Framework of the Study

To address existing literature gaps, this study examines alternative ECE policies across four countries using a unified analytical framework. Rather than evaluating implementation alone, the study compares policy objectives, target groups, service models, curriculum, workforce, governance, financing, quality assurance, and family engagement across Mongolia, New Zealand, Australia, and Ukraine.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative document analysis. The primary data consist of laws, regulations, policy documents, curricula, standards, licensing requirements, quality assurance frameworks, and financing documents related to alternative early childhood education and services in Mongolia, New Zealand, Australia, and Ukraine.

Document analysis enables the systematic examination of institutional regulations, policy objectives, and implementation requirements embedded in written sources such as laws, regulations, policies, guidelines, curricula, and standards[9]. In this study, document data were coded according to the principles of qualitative content analysis and synthesized into analytical categories corresponding to the research questions[10].

The research design combines within-case analysis and cross-case comparative analysis. Within-case analysis was utilized to determine the policy objectives, service organization, regulatory logic, and institutional contexts of alternative ECE in each country. Subsequently, cross-case analysis compared the policy documents of the four countries across identical analytical dimensions to identify commonalities and differences.

Countries were not ranked against a single universal standard. The objectives, forms, and regulatory significance of alternative ECE services depend on each country's specific geographical, demographic, legal, and educational system contexts. Consequently, the comparison is not oriented toward "better or worse" evaluations, but rather aims to clarify how countries respond to similar access and family needs through varying policy and institutional regulations.

3.2. Case Selection

Mongolia was selected as the primary case for the study, while New Zealand, Australia, and Ukraine were chosen as comparison cases through a purposive sampling strategy based on four main criteria:

1. The presence of a national-level policy framework for service delivery distinct from center-based ECE;
2. Regulation by official laws, national standards, or policy frameworks;
3. Public accessibility of regulatory documents;
4. Comparability with Mongolia's alternative ECE in terms of accessibility, geography, family needs, or service organization.

Although these services differ in nomenclature and institutional frameworks, they share a core policy function: delivering early childhood education to children facing barriers to center-based participation. Rather than serving as arbitrary illustrative examples, New Zealand, Australia, and Ukraine were selected through a theoretical case-selection logic to illuminate distinct analytical dimensions of alternative ECE regulation across contrasting contexts:

1. Mongolia represents a structural, geography- and lifestyle-driven response to extreme population dispersion and nomadism.
2. New Zealand provides an institutionalized model where home-based ECE is fully integrated into national licensing, quality, and curriculum frameworks.
3. Australia exemplifies targeted, eligibility-bound regulation (In Home Care) catering to complex family, geographic, and individual needs.
4. Ukraine reflects recent legislative reform (2024–2025) framing family-based ECE around educational rights and systemic standards during crisis or transition.

3.3. Research Data and Document Corpus

The primary data comprise 19 policy and regulatory documents from the four countries. The document corpus was compiled in alignment with the research questions and the eight-dimensional analytical framework.

Documents were examined at two levels:

Core documents: Documents that directly regulate the objectives, forms, legal basis, organization, and primary implementation requirements of alternative ECE services in each country.

Supporting documents: Documents defining broader regulations concerning curricula, quality standards, licensing, monitoring, financing, and overall ECE service provision to explain the content of core documents. For instance,

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documents such as New Zealand's *Te Whāriki*, Australia's *National Quality Framework*, *National Quality Standard*, and *Early Years Learning Framework Version 2.0* were used to analyze dimensions related to curricula, quality assurance, and family and community engagement.

Academic journal articles were excluded from the primary corpus of 19 documents. Instead, they were utilized to support methodological foundations, compare prior findings, and reinforce discussion of results. Thus, direct evidence from policy documents and academic interpretations were treated distinctly.

3.3.1. Mongolia

Table 1. Policy documents analyzed for Mongolia

No.	Official title of document	Year	Primary purpose / analytical focus
1	Regulation on Organizing Alternative Training in Early Childhood education (MESMongolia, 2022)[11]	2022	Objectives, scope, forms, organization, and core implementation regulations of alternative training
2	Law on Preschool and General education(The State Great Hural of Mongolia, 2023)[12]	2023	ECE system, children's right to education, and legal basis for services
3	Conceptual Framework of Preschool and General education curriculum(MEMongolia, 2024)[13]	2024	Curriculum concepts, educational content, and policy directions for ECE
4	Preschool education curriculum(MEMongolia, 2025)[14]	2025	ECE content, learning objectives, methodology, and child development assessment

Source: Developed by the researcher

These documents enabled the direct legal regulations of alternative education in Mongolia to be analyzed in connection with broader national ECE system and curricular frameworks.

3.3.2. New Zealand

Table 2. Policy documents analyzed for New Zealand

No.	Official title of document	Year	Primary purpose / analytical focus
1	Licensing Criteria for Home-based ECE Services(Ministry of Education, 2026)[15]	2026	Licensing, teaching practice, health, safety, and quality requirements for home-based ECE services
2	Education and Training Act 2020(NZG, n.d.)(16]	2020	Legal foundation for the educational system and ECE services
3	Education (Early Childhood Services)[17] Regulations 2008(NZG, 2008)	2008	Organization, operations, health, safety, and regulatory requirements for ECE services
4	Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum(Ministry of education, 2017)[18]	2017	Curriculum foundations, child learning and development, family and engagement concepts

Source: Developed by the researcher

New Zealand's home-based ECE licensing criteria were updated in April 2026 and define baseline licensing requirements in alignment with the *Education and Training Act 2020* and *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008*.

3.3.3. Australia

Table 3. Policy documents analyzed for Australia

No.	Official title of document	Year	Primary purpose / analytical focus
1	In Home Care National Guidelines(AGDE, 2017)[19]	2017 (2026 update)	Objectives, eligibility conditions, service organization, and implementation guidelines for In Home Care
2	In Home Care(AGDE, 2026)[20]	Current	Target groups, eligibility conditions, and core service organization
3	National Quality Framework / National Quality Standard(ACECQA, Current)[21]	Current	ECE regulation, curriculum, child safety, workforce, governance, and quality assurance
4	Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for	2022	ECE curriculum, child learning, development, well-being, and family engagement

	Australia (Version 2.0)(AGDE, 2022a)[22]				
5	Community Child Care Fund(AGDE, Current)[23]		Current		Financing mechanisms supporting ECE access aligned with child and family needs
6	Preschool Reform Agreement(AGDE, 2022)[24]		2022–2027		Policy regulation for ECE access, quality, and national co-funding

Source: Developed by the researcher

The *In Home Care National Guidelines* define the legal and policy framework for Australia's *In Home Care* program and were updated on January 16, 2026.

3.3.4. Ukraine

Table 4. Policy documents analyzed for Ukraine

No.	Official title of document	Year	Primary purpose / analytical focus
1	Law of Ukraine “On preschool education” No. 3788-IX(VR of Ukraine, 2024)[25]	2024	ECE system, children's and families' rights, educational forms, and legal basis for state regulation
2	Regulations on the family (Home) form of preschool education(MES of Ukraine, 2025b)[26]	2025	Organization, implementation conditions, and participation in family/home-based ECE
3	Basic component of preschool education(MES of Ukraine, 2021)[27]	2021	Core ECE content, child development outcomes, and educational standards
4	Procedure for institutional audit of preschool education institutions, order No. 939(MES of Ukraine, 2025a, Issue 939)[28]	2025	ECE quality assessment, institutional audits, and monitoring regulations
5	State standard of preschool education, resolution No. 1557(Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2025, Issue 1557)[29]	2025	National ECE standards and core requirements for child development and learning quality

Source: Developed by the researcher

Ukraine's Law on Preschool Education No. 3788-IX was enacted on June 6, 2024, and remains in force as of January 2026. Additionally, the regulations for family (home) ECE were approved by Order No. 786 on May 28, 2025, and registered on June 27, 2025.

3.4. Document Selection Criteria

Documents were included in the study based on predefined criteria:

- Direct relevance to the research questions;
- Inclusion of information regarding alternative ECE service regulation, implementation, quality, curriculum, workforce, governance, financing, and family engagement;
- Official publication or authorization by competent authorities in the respective countries;
- Current validity or active enforceability during the study's timeframe; and
- Public accessibility.

Blogs, news articles, promotional materials, unverified secondary sources, materials intended exclusively for internal institutional use, general ECE documents lacking direct relevance to the research questions, and materials focusing exclusively on alternative pedagogical methodologies were excluded from the primary corpus.

Furthermore, the explicit use of the term "alternative provision" was not mandated as a selection condition, as countries regulate similar service forms under varying nomenclatures. Instead, documents were assessed at the content level to determine whether they regulated service forms designed to supplement center-based services, exhibited organizational differences, or were tailored to specific child and family circumstances.

3.5. Analytical Framework for Comparative Analysis

To compare the documents across identical criteria, an eight-dimensional analytical framework was utilized. This framework was developed in alignment with the research questions, prior research findings, and conceptual understandings of ECE access, quality, curricula, workforce, governance, financing, quality assurance, and family and community engagement[1].

Table 5. Eight analytical dimensions for comparative analysis

Eight analytical dimensions for comparative analysis

No.	Analytical dimension	Analyzed content
1	Policy Objectives	Underlying needs and policy goals driving service establishment
2	Target Groups	Targeted groups of children and families
3	Service Delivery Models	Home-based, mobile, family-based, community-based, and other modalities
4	Curriculum and Pedagogy	Curricula, learning outcomes, methodologies, and assessments
5	Workforce	Qualifications, roles, training, professional support, and supervision
6	Governance and Financing	Regulations, accountability, eligibility conditions, and financing mechanisms
7	Quality Assurance	Licensing, standards, monitoring, and evaluation
8	Family and Community Engagement	Parental participation, family choice, and local community involvement

Source: Developed by the researcher

Applying these dimensions uniformly across all four cases minimized the risk of evaluating one country's documents against different criteria than another's.

3.6. Coding and Data Analysis

Document analysis was conducted in four stages:

Identifying sections of each document relevant to the research questions and analytical dimensions.

Assigning primary codes to narratives concerning policy objectives, target groups, service delivery models, curricula, workforce, regulation, financing, quality, and family engagement.

Consolidating codes with identical meanings and interrelationships to generate categories.

Positioning the resulting categories within the eight analytical dimensions to develop within-case syntheses and a four-case cross-comparative matrix.

Throughout the analysis, direct statements from policy documents, researcher interpretations, and cross-national comparative conclusions were treated distinctly. For instance, instances where policy documents characterized a specific service as "high quality" were not treated as direct evidence that the service operates with high quality in practice; rather, they were coded as policy objectives or regulatory requirements within those documents.

Where feasible, multiple official documents regulating the same issue were cross-verified, considering their objectives, issuing bodies, dates, legal status, and policy contexts. This was intended to reduce the risk of interpreting documents out of context.

3.7. Reliability of the Study

To ensure analytical reliability, identical analytical frameworks and primary coding logic were applied across all four cases. This reduced the risk of evaluating information deemed important in one country's documents under different criteria in another.

Additionally, the issuing body, date, legal status, and policy objectives of each document were verified, and information from multiple official documents addressing identical issues was cross-checked where available.

The coding framework was pilot-tested prior to primary analysis, and codes with ambiguous or overlapping meanings were refined. Pilot-testing and refining preliminary coding frameworks support the reliability of qualitative content analysis[10].

3.8. Research Ethics and Methodological Limitations

The study did not collect primary data from human participants; it relied exclusively on publicly available legal, policy, and official documents. Consequently, core ethical requirements focused on accurate source citations, objective interpretation of document meanings, and the avoidance of unfounded comparisons.

While document analysis reveals official policy objectives, legal regulations, and institutional requirements in each country, it does not directly measure how these regulations are implemented in practice. Therefore, the findings of this study should not be interpreted as direct evidence of actual service quality, child learning outcomes, or child development.

Furthermore, because countries differ in service nomenclature, legal classification, and institutional structures, complete equivalence across all indicators was not feasible. Consequently, comparisons focused on identifying how policy regulations respond to identical analytical problems rather than superficially equating service names.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the 19 policy and regulatory documents across eight analytical dimensions identified the commonalities and differences in alternative ECE policies and services among the four countries. The findings are synthesized below across the dimensions of policy objectives and target groups, service delivery models and organization, curriculum and pedagogy, workforce, governance and financing, quality assurance, and family and community engagement.

4.1. Policy Objectives and Target Groups

The policy document analysis indicates that alternative ECE training and services across all four countries share a common focus on increasing educational access for children and families who face difficulties participating regularly in center-based services. However, the underlying policy rationales and criteria for defining target groups vary across countries.

In Mongolia, the objective of alternative training is to provide ECE to children who cannot regularly participate in main kindergarten group training due to reasons related to their place of residence, living conditions, or disabilities (Doc1, Art.1). Consequently, target groups include children living in geographically isolated and sparsely populated environments, as well as children with disabilities.

In New Zealand, home-based ECE is regulated to provide educational opportunities close to children's home environments, aligning service organization directly with the needs of children and families. Unlike Mongolia's alternative training, this service is not restricted to specific geographical groups; rather, it operates as a specialized modality of home-based ECE organization.

In Australia, In Home Care targets specific families who face difficulties accessing standard ECE services under appropriate conditions. Service needs are defined not only by geographical circumstances but also by family work and life arrangements, alongside specific children's needs.

In Ukraine, family-based and home-based educational forms are linked to children's right to education, family engagement, and the choice of educational forms. Thus, alternative modalities serve not only to compensate for the inability to access center-based services but also as organizational forms connected to family engagement and choice. Consequently, while increasing access is a common objective across all four countries, the underlying policy rationales defining target groups differ: Mongolia emphasizes geographical, lifestyle, and disability-related needs; Australia emphasizes family circumstances; New Zealand focuses on family environments; and Ukraine aligns more closely with educational form choices and children's rights.

4.2. Service Delivery Models and Organization

Document analysis reveals that the four countries do not implement alternative ECE services through a single uniform organizational model.

In Mongolia, alternative training aims to deliver ECE through organizational structures distinct from main kindergarten group training, incorporating provisions to adapt service locations and organization to children's living conditions. Therefore, the modality strongly reflects adaptation to children's lifestyle environments.

In New Zealand, the primary operating environment is tied to the child's home or family setting. Although home-based services differ from center-based kindergarten organization, they are coordinated with national curricula, licensing requirements, and quality regulations.

Australia's *In Home Care* organizes education and care services within the child's home environment, with service needs tied to specific family circumstances. Thus, locational flexibility and targeted regulatory provisions operate simultaneously.

In Ukraine, family-based and home-based educational forms are regulated within the national ECE system, while being connected to educational standards and common child development requirements.

Accordingly, the service delivery models can be delineated as follows:

- Mongolia - alternative training adapted to geographical and living conditions;
- New Zealand - regulated home-based ECE;
- Australia - home-based care targeted at families with specific needs;
- Ukraine - family- and home-based educational forms.

However, these cannot be directly equated as identical services; nomenclatures, legal statuses, service objectives, and institutional structures vary. Hence, the primary unit of comparison was the policy function of the service rather than its designation.

4.3. Curriculum and Pedagogy

Across the policy documents of all four countries, despite differences in service delivery models, a common trend is observed in linking the core objectives of children's learning and development to national ECE curricula and standards. In Mongolia, alternative training is implemented within the framework of the national ECE curriculum, requiring the organization of learning activities suited to children's age and developmental characteristics.

New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* links children's learning to relationships, environments, families, and communities. Consequently, the home-based service environment operates not separately from the national curriculum, but as a context for implementing the curriculum's philosophy within children's daily environments.

Australia's *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Version 2.0)* views children's sense of identity, being, and learning in connection with relationships among children, families, and communities. Thus, services organized in home environments function as modalities to implement the national framework in alternative settings rather than existing as separate entities.

In Ukraine, national ECE standards establish common requirements for child development outcomes and educational content, aligning family and home based modalities with these standards.

Thus, the documents demonstrate that while service organization changes, the fundamental objectives of children's learning, curricular frameworks, and standard requirements are consistently maintained.

4.4. Workforce and Professional Support

Workforce regulations clearly illustrate institutional differences among the alternative services in the four countries.

In Mongolia, alternative training is regulated to be implemented by ECE teachers and relevant professional personnel. Prior implementation studies have noted difficulties associated with teacher shortages, professional preparation, geographical isolation, and working conditions[5].

In New Zealand, home-based service regulations explicitly detail service providers, workforces, professional support, and licensing requirements. Even though the service environment shifts to the home, professional regulatory requirements are maintained.

In Australia, workforce roles and requirements for *In Home Care* are regulated in alignment with service target groups and family circumstances.

In Ukraine, workforce regulations are harmonized with national ECE standards and legal frameworks for educational service delivery.

Consequently, the commonality across all four countries is the retention of professional workforce roles and responsibilities despite changes in the service environment. However, workforce structures, forms of professional support, and accountability regulations vary across countries.

4.5. Governance and Financing

Distinct institutional differences among countries are apparent in governance and financing regulations.

In Mongolia, alternative training forms part of the public ECE system, operating within relevant laws, regulations, budgets, and local organizational frameworks.

In New Zealand, home-based services fall under licensing and national regulations, featuring institutional mechanisms specifically governing this modality.

In Australia, In Home Care targets families meeting specific criteria, linking service needs, provider responsibilities, and financing mechanisms within a national policy framework.

In Ukraine, ECE service regulations are harmonized with national legislation, educational standards, and local implementation mechanisms.

Thus, institutional factors such as regulatory bodies, service accountability, funding sources, and eligibility conditions are embedded in determining the sustainability of alternative services.

4.6. Quality Assurance

A common regulatory direction regarding alternative service quality is observable across the policy documents of all four countries, establishing specific requirements for children's health, safety, curricula, workforce, and service organization.

In New Zealand, home-based services are subject to licensing criteria. In Australia, In Home Care aligns with national quality regulations and guidelines. In Ukraine, national ECE standards and institutional audit regulations link service quality to national benchmarks.

In Mongolia, alternative training regulations define requirements for training organization, teacher activities, child enrollment, and implementation procedures.

However, the presence of quality requirements in documents does not guarantee that those requirements are fully satisfied in practical implementation. Consequently, the findings under this dimension reflect countries' quality policy regulations rather than direct measurements of actual service quality.

4.7. Family and Community Engagement

Regarding family and community engagement, alternative service organization is more closely tied to children's family environments, needs, and choices than center-based services.

New Zealand's home-based services utilize learning opportunities within children's daily family environments. Australia's In Home Care links service needs to specific family circumstances. Ukraine's family and home modalities are directly connected to parental and family participation. Mongolia's alternative training relates to the necessity of delivering educational services adapted to children's living and household conditions.

Consequently, across all four countries, families act not merely as service recipients, but as participants linked in varying degrees to service organization. However, the level of family engagement, responsibilities, and standing in decision-making differ across countries.

4.8. Cross-National Comparative Synthesis

Synthesizing the findings across the eight analytical dimensions reveals that while alternative ECE policies and regulations across the four countries share a common orientation toward expanding access, the conditions defining access issues, service organizations, and institutional solutions differ.

Table 6. Comparative results of alternative ECE policies and regulations across the four countries

Analytical dimension	Mongolia	New Zealand	Australia	Ukraine
Policy Objectives	Deliver ECE to children unable to regularly attend center-based services	Deliver ECE within family environments	Deliver services to families with specific needs	Ensure educational rights and family choices
Target Groups	Isolated, scattered populations; children with disabilities	Children and families requiring home-based services	Families under specific conditions	Children selecting family and alternative education forms
Service Delivery Models	Alternative training	Home-based ECE	In Home Care	Family- and home-based forms
Curriculum	National ECE curriculum	Te Whāriki	EYLF Version 2.0	National standards
Workforce	ECE teachers and relevant personnel	Regulated professional workforce	Workforce aligned with service conditions	National professional requirements
Governance & Financing	Public ECE system	Licensing and national regulation	Targeted and financing national regulation	National and local regulation
Quality Assurance	Laws, regulations, and curricula	Licensing criteria	National regulations and guidelines	Standards and audits
Family Engagement	Adaptation to household conditions	Learning within family environments	Alignment with family needs	Family choice and participation

Source: Developed by the researcher

The comparison indicates that while access is a common policy rationale across the four countries, the mechanisms to secure it vary. While Mongolia exhibits clear needs tied to geographical access, population dispersion, and children's living conditions, New Zealand emphasizes professional ECE regulations delivered in family environments, Australia focuses on targeted services for specific families, and Ukraine highlights regulations connected to educational form choices and family participation.

Conversely, dimensions concerning curricula, workforce, and quality assurance display a common trend: maintaining core educational requirements for children despite alternative service delivery models. However, the institutional mechanisms, financing structures, and forms of professional support for implementing these requirements vary across countries.

Thus, the analysis of the 19 documents establishes four primary findings:

First, while the common orientation of alternative ECE policies across the four countries is to increase access for children and families facing difficulties utilizing center-based services, the conditions defining this need differ.

Second, countries do not utilize a single organizational model; while alternative training holds a distinct position tied to geographical and living conditions in Mongolia, distinct institutional home- and family-based forms exist in New Zealand, Australia, and Ukraine.

Third, despite differences in service delivery models, a common orientation is maintained to preserve core requirements regarding national curricula, workforces, child safety, and quality assurance.

Fourth, alternative service organization is defined within a framework of institutional regulations aligned with governance, financing, professional support, quality assurance, and family engagement.

These findings serve as the foundation for interpreting the commonalities and differences in policy regulations across the four countries in connection with prior research in the subsequent chapter.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Divergent Orientations of Alternative Education Policies

The findings of this study indicate that while the alternative ECE regulations in Mongolia, New Zealand, Australia, and Ukraine share a common function in responding to the needs of children and families who face difficulties utilizing regular center-based services, their underlying policy logics and institutional organizations differ.

In Mongolia, the primary objective of alternative training is to deliver ECE to children who cannot regularly participate in main center-based training. This is directly linked to Mongolia's vast territory, sparse population distribution, and the nomadic lifestyle of herder households. Consequently, it is appropriate to interpret alternative training in Mongolia as a policy mechanism designed to bridge access gaps.

This finding aligns with [5], who demonstrated that the implementation of alternative ECE in Mongolia is intertwined with geographical conditions, teacher shortages, financing, resources, and program sustainability. This shows that the need for alternative training in Mongolia arises not merely from family preferences, but from structural conditions affecting service accessibility.

Conversely, home-based ECE in New Zealand has evolved beyond a temporary substitute for lacking center-based services into an officially recognized and regulated modality within the national ECE system. Davitt et al, [6] noted advantages of home-based ECE such as home-like environments, relationship stability, small group sizes, and learning opportunities tailored to individual children, while also uncovering challenges associated with financing, documentation, regulatory requirements, and the professional valuation of the service.

Australia's In Home Care possesses a policy logic centered more heavily on targeted needs. That is, it is regulated to provide services through alternative organizational arrangements when mainstream ECE services are inappropriate or inaccessible due to specific family circumstances.

In contrast, Ukraine's regulations position family choice and engagement within a more prominent framework. This demonstrates that alternative modalities can be treated not only as mechanisms to compensate for access deficits, but as choices in educational service organization.

Thus, the four-country comparison reveals that alternative education cannot be encapsulated by a single monolithic objective. Instead, a spectrum of policy orientations exists, ranging from bridging access gaps to addressing needs and preferences.

An important distinction emerges here: while "alternative" in Mongolia primarily serves as a response to geographical access limitations of center-based services, in certain comparative countries it has become institutionalized as a recognized type of service within the ECE system.

5.2. Flexibility Is Not a Basis for Diluting Quality Requirements

A second critical finding of this study is that flexibility and standardization should not be viewed as mutually exclusive concepts.

While a key advantage of alternative education is the ability to adapt services to children's and family circumstances, shifting the service environment can complicate teachers' working conditions, supervision, instructional planning, child safety management, and professional support structures. The OECD [1] identifies teacher knowledge, professional development, leadership, monitoring, and quality child-teacher interactions as critical components of systemic quality.

Our comparison clearly illustrates this through New Zealand's home-based ECE, which is governed by specialized licensing criteria. In other words, delivering services in home environments has not served as grounds for exemption from quality requirements; rather, it has prompted the creation of a regulatory mechanism tailored to that modality.

Similarly, Australia's In Home Care operates under specific conditions, criteria, and regulatory frameworks, while family- and home-based education forms in Ukraine are connected to national standards and quality regulations.

This carries significant implications for Mongolia. If expanding the scope of alternative training focuses exclusively on "increasing opportunities to reach children," the risk of quality disparities emerging across service delivery modes

increases. Instead, while preserving flexible organization, baseline requirements must be maintained regarding shared educational objectives, child safety, teacher professional qualifications, and monitoring.

Consequently, the study's findings suggest that simultaneously satisfying flexible service delivery and common quality expectations can serve as a vital principle for alternative ECE regulation.

5.3. Quality Assurance Must Align with Service Modalities

The four-country comparison indicates that applying quality assurance through identical criteria across all service modalities may be inadequate.

Criteria for evaluating center-based kindergarten quality rely to varying extents on fixed premises, group organization, and physical environmental conditions. Conversely, for home-based, mobile, and family-based services, some of these indicators take on different meanings.

For instance, in home-based services, evaluating children's learning environments, teacher planning, professional monitoring, child safety, and family engagement may be more critical. For mobile services, attention must be directed toward conditions involving changing locations, availability of learning materials, professional support for teachers, and service continuity.

New Zealand's specialized licensing criteria, Australia's *In Home Care* regulations, and Ukraine's standards and audit systems demonstrate that establishing regulations tailored to specific service modalities is feasible.

Thus, for Mongolia, the policy-level distinction should not be "different modality = different, weaker standards," but rather "different modality = evaluation and regulatory mechanisms tailored to that modality."

This is crucial for preventing disparities in service quality among children while simultaneously expanding access.

5.4. Workforce and Professional Support

Workforce issues represent a critical challenge for alternative training in Mongolia, as highlighted by prior research findings and this comparative analysis.

[5] identified teacher shortages, professional preparation, training, and resource constraints as factors influencing alternative ECE implementation in Mongolia. This indicates that expanding service accessibility requires more than merely increasing the number of teachers; it necessitates preparing teachers to operate within the specific characteristics of alternative modalities.

In center-based services, teachers work daily within collegial teams and interact directly with leadership and peers. Conversely, teachers in mobile, home-based, and other flexible modalities often operate in more isolated conditions. Consequently, professional advice, coordination, continuous professional development, documentation, and supervision become substantially more critical.

New Zealand's example reveals an institutional structure connecting the roles of teachers, educational personnel, and coordinators. This demonstrates that professional support should not be left entirely to individual teacher accountability.

Therefore, for Mongolia, enhancing the quality of alternative training must be addressed not merely by asking "How many teachers will work?", but by pairing it with the question "What professional support will teachers receive?"

5.5. Financing as a Mechanism for Quality, Not Just Access

Financing emerged as a significant finding in this comparison.

Mongolian implementation research indicates that financial difficulties are linked to resources, service duration, sustainability, and quality[5]. This shows that alternative training financing must be viewed as a mechanism for generating quality access rather than merely covering administrative expenses.

Alternative training may entail a cost structure distinct from center-based services. For instance, mobile services can generate additional needs involving travel distances, transportation, learning materials, small-group organization, and professional teacher support.

Australia's targeted financing regulations demonstrate that service needs, enrollment criteria, and financing can be successfully linked. This provides a rationale for Mongolia to consider aligning financing regulations with service delivery modalities and actual needs rather than basing funding solely on enrolled child counts.

However, this does not imply that Australia's financing mechanism should be directly transplanted into Mongolia. Rather, it is a general lesson derived from the comparison: funding structures must align with the actual costs, access requirements, and quality demands of services.

5.6. Family Engagement: From Recipients to Partners

Regarding family and parental engagement, while variations emerged across countries, a common orientation was observable: viewing families not merely as educational service recipients, but as participants vital to establishing conditions for children's learning and development.

Particularly in home- and family-based services, children's daily environments, family knowledge, language, culture, and lifestyles are intimately connected to the educational process.

However, enhancing family engagement does not mean transferring professional educational responsibilities to parents. While parents and families can provide vital information regarding children's daily lives, needs, and cultural characteristics, responsibilities for instructional planning, child development assessment, safety, and professional quality must remain with trained professionals.

Consequently, the findings suggest that rather than choosing between extreme poles of "teacher-centric" or "family-centric" models, a collaborative partnership model combining professional accountability with genuine family engagement is more appropriate.

This carries particular importance for Mongolian herder households. A rigid organizational structure that ignores children's daily lives, family engagement, and nomadic lifestyles risks constraining the advantages of flexibility inherent in alternative training.

5.7. Policy Continuum of Alternative Education: From Access to Needs and Choices

Synthesizing the preceding findings, alternative ECE policies are difficult to explain through a single standardized model. Instead, national policy orientations can be viewed as an analytical continuum extending from access-oriented regulations to needs- and choice-oriented regulations.

Table 7. Analytical continuum of alternative ECE policy orientations

Dimension	Access oriented	Needs and choice oriented
Primary objective	Reaching children unable to reach center based services	Accommodating diverse needs, conditions, and family choices
Flexibility	Means of reaching children	Core service characteristic
Family role	Educational partner	Partner and active participant
Professional model	Teacher centric	Teacher coordinator family collaboration
Quality assurance	Aligned with core systems	Modality appropriate regulations
Financing logic	Enrollment and access	Needs, service modality, and sustainability

Source: Developed by the researcher

This continuum does not represent a developmental hierarchy ranking countries. A single country can encompass multiple orientations simultaneously, varying by service objective and target group.

For Mongolia, the strong access orientation is justified by the country's geography, population dispersion, and the nomadic lifestyle of herder households. However, the comparative cases demonstrate opportunities to institutionalize dimensions such as professional support, quality assurance, needs-based criteria, family engagement, and sustainable financing while preserving this foundation of access.

5.8. Policy Implications for Mongolia

Grounded in the comparative findings, several policy implications emerge for Mongolia:

First, alternative training should be positioned institutionally as a necessary service modality under specific conditions rather than as a temporary stopgap within the ECE system. Mongolia's geography, population dispersion, and nomadic lifestyle render the need for such services structural.

Second, quality assurance should be organized flexibly in alignment with service modalities. Rather than mechanically applying center-based kindergarten criteria across mobile, family-based, and other alternative modalities, modality appropriate criteria should be developed that preserve core requirements regarding children's learning, development, safety, teacher qualifications, planning, monitoring, and professional support.

Third, professional support for teachers must be addressed as a dedicated policy issue. Because alternative training working conditions can differ from those in center-based services, specific support mechanisms for professional development, counseling, coordination, supervision, and collaborative learning must be instituted.

Fourth, financing regulations must be harmonized with the actual operational conditions of services. Additional needs such as mobility, geographical isolation, small group sizes, learning materials, and teacher professional support must be accounted for within financing frameworks.

Fifth, family engagement should be incorporated as an integral structural component of service delivery. However, enhancing family engagement must not shift professional teaching and child safety responsibilities onto parents.

These points should not be interpreted as recommendations to directly transplant comparative country models. Rather, they represent potential strategies to strengthen the institutional mechanisms of quality, professional support, financing, and family engagement while preserving the access orientation of Mongolia's existing alternative training.

5.9. Theoretical and Methodological Significance of the Study

The theoretical significance of this study lies in conceptualizing alternative ECE not as a singular service model, but as a policy phenomenon defined by the interrelationships among access, flexibility, quality, professional engagement, financing, and family participation.

The findings demonstrate that distinct institutional services exist beneath the single nomenclature of "alternative." Consequently, cross-national comparisons are more effectively conducted by comparing policy functions and regulatory mechanisms across identical analytical dimensions rather than superficially equating service nomenclatures. Methodologically, the eight-dimensional analytical framework enabled alternative ECE forms with differing nomenclatures and organizational structures to be examined within a unified comparative scope. This framework can be applied to other countries or service modalities, provided that national legal and institutional contexts are not disregarded.

5.10. Limitations of the Study

Interpreting the findings of this study requires considering several limitations:

First, document analysis reveals official policy objectives, regulations, and institutional structures in each country, but cannot fully measure how policies operate in actual practice. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as direct evidence of actual service quality or child development outcomes.

Second, because the four country cases were selected via purposive sampling, they cannot be considered representative of all global alternative ECE services.

Third, due to differing legal and administrative systems and terminology across countries, services appearing nominally similar may possess distinct institutional meanings. Therefore, comparative findings should not be interpreted as direct prescriptions to transfer one country's model into another.

Future research should examine the practical implementation of alternative training across different regional contexts in Mongolia in connection with interviews, observations, administrative data, teacher experiences, family perspectives, and child participation and development indicators.

6. CONCLUSION

Synthesizing the findings of this study, Mongolia's alternative ECE training functions primarily as a policy mechanism responding to challenges of access to early childhood education. The international comparison further demonstrates how this access-oriented function can be retained while strengthening the institutional alignment of quality assurance, professional teacher support, sustainable financing, and family engagement.

For Mongolia, the findings suggest that attention should be given to strengthening quality assurance mechanisms appropriate to different service modalities, professional support for teachers, financing aligned with actual service needs, and mechanisms for family engagement while maintaining the access-oriented function of alternative ECE training. These issues should not be addressed through the direct transfer of international models, but rather considered in relation to Mongolia's geographical conditions, population distribution, nomadic lifestyles, and existing legal and regulatory framework.

The primary contribution of this study lies in comparing alternative ECE modalities that are institutionally distinct yet responsive to similar access, child, and family needs within a unified analytical framework. The eight-dimensional analytical framework enabled policy objectives, organization, workforce, financing, quality assurance, and family engagement to be examined in parallel despite differences in service delivery models.

Nevertheless, because this study relies on policy document analysis, it did not directly measure the actual implementation of alternative ECE training, service quality, or child development outcomes. Consequently, future research should empirically examine the implementation of alternative ECE training across different regional contexts in Mongolia in connection with the participation of teachers, parents, and local educational organizations, as well as children's learning experiences.

AI Use Disclosure

The authors used AI-assisted tools to edit the language and improve the quality and clarity of the academic English in the manuscript. All AI-assisted revisions were reviewed and verified by the authors, who remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and academic integrity of the manuscript.

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