Parental awareness of educational responsibilities and students' academic performance in ward secondary schools in Mbeya City, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Parental awareness of educational responsibilities is an important foundation for meaningful parental engagement in students' learning. Parents who understand their responsibilities are more likely to monitor academic progress, provide learning resources, communicate with teachers, motivate learners, and establish supportive learning environments at home. However, limited understanding of these responsibilities may cause parents to perceive their educational role primarily in terms of financial and material provision. This study examined parental awareness of educational responsibilities in supporting students' academic performance in ward secondary schools in Mbeya City, Tanzania. Specifically, it examined parents' awareness of their educational responsibilities and explored the dimensions of parental responsibility perceived as important for supporting students academically. The study was guided by Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parental Involvement. These complementary frameworks informed the understanding of family–school collaboration and how parents' role construction, self-efficacy, and perceived invitations to participate shape their educational involvement. The study adopted a qualitative research approach using a single-case study design, with Mbeya City constituting the case and five selected ward secondary schools serving as study sites. A total of 35 participants were purposively selected, comprising 10 parents or guardians, 10 students, 10 teachers, and five heads of schools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentary review and analysed thematically with the support of NVivo. The findings revealed that parental awareness was moderate but incomplete. Most parents understood their responsibilities mainly in terms of paying school-related contributions and providing uniforms, pens, and other basic requirements. Fewer parents demonstrated an understanding of broader academic responsibilities, including monitoring homework, creating conducive home-learning environments, motivating students, following academic progress, and maintaining regular communication with teachers. Parent–school communication was largely reactive, with many parents approaching schools only after academic or disciplinary problems had emerged. The study concludes that parental awareness in ward secondary schools in Mbeya City remains disproportionately focused on material support rather than holistic academic engagement. It recommends systematic parental awareness programmes, practical parent education on home-based academic support, and strengthened school–parent communication mechanisms.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Academic Responsibilities, Mbeya City, Parental Awareness, Parental Engagement, Secondary Schools, Tanzania.

I. INTRODUCTION

Parental engagement is increasingly recognized as an important component of students' educational development and academic performance. Education is not exclusively the responsibility of schools and teachers; rather, effective learning depends on complementary relationships among students, parents, teachers, schools, and the wider community. Within this partnership, parents occupy a particularly important position because they shape the home learning environment, communicate expectations about education, provide material and emotional support, monitor students' learning, and facilitate communication between learners and schools. Empirical evidence indicates that parental involvement is positively associated with students' achievement, engagement, and motivation, although the strength of the relationship varies according to the form of parental involvement (Barger et al., 2019; Boonk et al., 2018).

In this study, parents' awareness of educational responsibilities refers to the extent to which parents understand and recognise their roles in supporting their children's education. This definition is informed by recent literature that identifies parents' role beliefs and confidence as important factors shaping educational involvement (Ma et al., 2024). These responsibilities extend beyond financial and material provision to encompass home-based learning support, school-based participation, and communication between families and schools (Ma et al., 2024; Otero-Mayer et al., 2026). They include supporting homework and study routines, discussing learning with children, encouraging

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educational aspirations, communicating with teachers about learning progress, and participating in relevant school activities (Ma et al., 2024). Therefore, understanding parental awareness requires attention to how parents perceive their educational roles and recognise opportunities to support learning both at home and through collaboration with schools.

Research supports the importance of different forms of parental involvement in students' academic development. Boonk et al. (2018), in their review of parental involvement and academic achievement, found that several parental involvement indicators were associated with academic achievement, with high parental expectations showing one of the most consistent positive relationships. Importantly, their review demonstrates that parental involvement is multidimensional and that not all forms of involvement produce identical academic outcomes. Similarly, Barger et al. (2019), drawing on 448 independent studies involving 480,830 families, established positive relationships between naturally occurring parental involvement and students' academic adjustment, including achievement, engagement, and motivation. These findings demonstrate that effective parental engagement encompasses more than the provision of material resources; it also includes behavioural, motivational, communicative, and academic-support dimensions.

Parents' understanding of their educational responsibilities is therefore important because their perceptions of their roles can influence the nature and extent of their involvement. Parents who interpret their responsibility narrowly may consider their obligation substantially fulfilled once school-related financial and material requirements have been provided. Such an understanding may result in limited attention to monitoring academic progress, discussing school experiences, communicating with teachers, or motivating students. In contrast, parents who perceive education as a shared responsibility between the home and school are more likely to remain engaged in their children's educational experiences. This distinction is particularly important during adolescence, when parental involvement may shift from direct supervision towards academic socialization, including communicating expectations, discussing educational goals, and linking school performance with future aspirations (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

At the international level, research consistently demonstrates the importance of family-school relationships in promoting students' educational outcomes. Hill and Tyson (2009), through a meta-analysis of 50 studies, found an overall positive relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement among middle-school students. Their findings particularly emphasized academic socialization as an effective form of parental involvement during adolescence. Similarly, Barger et al. (2019) established that parental participation in school activities and discussions with children about school were positively associated with academic adjustment. Collectively, these findings indicate that effective parental engagement requires sustained interaction between the home and school rather than isolated parental actions.

Nevertheless, parental engagement does not occur uniformly across social and educational contexts. Its nature and effectiveness may be influenced by socioeconomic circumstances, parents' educational backgrounds, employment demands, cultural expectations, family structures, communication opportunities, and school practices. Boonk et al. (2018), for example, demonstrate substantial variation in the relationship between different parental involvement indicators and academic achievement. Consequently, models of parental engagement developed in one social or educational environment cannot necessarily be transferred directly to another without considering contextual conditions.

Within African educational settings, the role of parents is particularly significant because families frequently complement school-based learning through the provision of educational resources, supervision, encouragement, and guidance. However, economic pressures, limited parental education, demanding livelihood activities, and perceptions that formal education is predominantly the responsibility of teachers and schools may constrain meaningful academic engagement. Consequently, a parent may highly value a child's education and provide essential school requirements while remaining relatively disconnected from the child's day-to-day academic progress.

In Tanzania, parental participation remains an important element in supporting secondary education. Parents contribute to students' learning through the provision of educational requirements, supervision of homework, monitoring of academic progress, participation in school activities, communication with teachers and school administrators, and motivation of learners (Mulokozi & Boniface, 2025). Nevertheless, the nature and intensity of such involvement differ considerably among households. While some parents actively monitor their children's academic activities and maintain communication with schools, others concentrate mainly on providing basic financial and material requirements, with relatively limited involvement in homework supervision and school meetings (Mulokozi & Boniface, 2025). Similar evidence from Tanzanian community secondary schools indicates that some parents are insufficiently involved in activities such as checking students' schoolwork, monitoring attendance, assisting with homework, communicating with teachers, and participating in school activities (Nyembeke, 2016). These variations raise an important question concerning whether parents sufficiently understand the broader range of responsibilities required to support students' academic development.

This issue is particularly important in ward secondary schools because many community secondary schools in Tanzania operate as day schools, where students return home after school and consequently spend considerable non-school time within their families and communities. This arrangement makes parental supervision, motivation, guidance, and home-school communication particularly important in supporting students' learning. Evidence from Tanzanian

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community secondary schools indicates that parental involvement in activities such as homework guidance, monitoring students' daily schoolwork and attendance, participation in school activities, and communication with teachers is often limited (Nyembeke, 2016). Similarly, Mulokozi and Boniface (2025) found that although parents provided students' basic needs and motivation, their involvement in homework supervision and attendance at school meetings was relatively limited. Limited parental awareness may therefore restrict parents' engagement in the broader academic responsibilities required to support their children effectively (Nyembeke, 2016). Consequently, strengthening parents' awareness of their academic, motivational, financial, supervisory, and communication responsibilities may promote more comprehensive parental engagement and contribute to improved students' academic performance.

Therefore, understanding parents' awareness of their educational responsibilities is essential for explaining variations in parental engagement and identifying opportunities for improving students' academic performance. Examining parents' understanding of financial support, academic monitoring, motivation, guidance, and school communication provides a broader perspective than treating parental involvement simply as attendance at meetings or provision of school requirements. Such understanding can provide an empirical basis for developing context-appropriate interventions that strengthen family-school partnerships and promote students' academic performance in ward secondary schools.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Unsatisfactory academic performance remains a concern in some secondary schools in Tanzania despite various reforms aimed at improving access, curriculum implementation, teacher availability, infrastructure and school administration. Although several school-based interventions have been introduced, students' academic outcomes are also influenced by conditions and support systems outside school.Parental engagement represents one of the important home-school factors associated with students' learning. Parents can support academic performance by monitoring homework and attendance, providing learning materials, communicating with teachers, motivating students, establishing study routines and responding to academic difficulties. However, these forms of engagement are dependent partly on whether parents recognise them as their responsibilities.

Recent studies in Mbeya City have documented challenges relevant to secondary school learning and academic performance, including inadequate library resources and disparities in STEM participation and achievement between public and private schools (Kabuje & Ntawigaya, 2025; Kibona, 2026).At the same time, previous research conducted in community secondary schools in Mbeya City demonstrates that the extent of parental involvement is significantly associated with students' academic achievement, with students whose parents are more involved having better prospects for improved academic performance (Mwakililo & Mgaya, 2021). However, there remains a need for greater context-specific understanding of how parents conceptualise the range of educational responsibilities expected of them. Evidence from Tanzania suggests that parental engagement is multidimensional and may vary across activities such as homework supervision, provision of basic educational needs, attendance at school meetings, communication with schools, and student motivation (Mulokozi & Boniface, 2025). Similarly, Nyembeke (2016) found limited parental involvement in activities such as homework guidance, monitoring students' schoolwork and attendance, participation in school activities, and communication with teachers. These findings suggest that providing financial and material support alone may not necessarily translate into comprehensive parental engagement in students' academic development.

Previous literature has demonstrated the importance of parental involvement in academic achievement (Barger et al., 2019; Boonk et al., 2018). However, many studies approach parental engagement as a broad construct without sufficiently examining the prior issue of whether parents understand the different responsibilities involved. Furthermore, much available evidence comes from contexts whose socioeconomic circumstances, school-family communication systems and parental educational characteristics may differ from ward secondary schools in Mbeya City.

This creates a need for context-sensitive evidence concerning parents' awareness of their academic responsibilities. Without understanding what parents perceive as their role, interventions intended to increase parental participation may fail to address the underlying knowledge and perception gaps. Therefore, this study examined parental awareness of educational responsibilities in supporting students' academic performance in ward secondary schools in Mbeya City, Tanzania.

1.2 Research Objectives.

i. To examine parents' awareness of their responsibilities in supporting secondary school students' academic performance in ward secondary schools in Mbeya City.
ii. To explore the dimensions of parental educational responsibility that participants perceived as important for supporting students' academic performance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

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2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence conceptualizes student learning as occurring within interconnected family, school and community environments. The theory argues that students receive stronger educational support when these spheres cooperate rather than function independently. Epstein's framework of school, family, and community partnerships identifies six major types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2011). The framework demonstrates that parental involvement in education is multidimensional and extends beyond the provision of financial and material resources. It encompasses establishing supportive home environments for learning, maintaining effective two-way communication between families and schools, supporting homework and other curriculum-related activities at home, participating in school activities and decision-making, and utilizing community resources to strengthen students' learning and development (Epstein, 2011; Epstein et al., 2002). Thus, effective parental responsibility involves complementary academic, motivational, communicative, and participatory roles that connect students' experiences at home, school, and within the wider community.

The theory is particularly relevant to parental awareness because meaningful interaction between the family and school depends on parents understanding that educational responsibility is shared. If parents consider teaching and academic monitoring to be exclusively the responsibility of teachers, the family and school spheres remain weakly connected. Conversely, when parents understand the importance of communication and home-based academic support, the interaction between school and family becomes stronger.

One strength of Epstein's theory is its recognition that educational success results from collaboration among multiple environments surrounding the learner (Epstein, 2011). However, the theory gives less attention to the psychological processes influencing why individual parents decide to participate or not participate. This limitation makes the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model useful as a complementary framework.

2.1.2 Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parental Involvement

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model explains parental involvement largely through parents' role construction, self-efficacy and perceptions of invitations or encouragement to participate. The model proposes that parents are more likely to become involved when they believe that supporting education is part of their responsibility and when they believe that their involvement can positively influence their children.Parental role construction, as conceptualised in the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of the Parental Involvement Process, is particularly relevant to the present study. Role construction refers to parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and consequently influences the range of educational activities they consider important, necessary and appropriate for their involvement(Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Parents who construct their educational role narrowly may limit their involvement to particular responsibilities, such as providing financial and material requirements, whereas those who perceive their role more broadly may engage in a wider range of activities that support their children's learning. Such involvement may include monitoring schoolwork, communicating with teachers, encouraging and motivating students, and participating in school-related academic activities (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Therefore, parental role construction provides an important theoretical basis for understanding why the nature and extent of parental engagement may differ among families.

The model also highlights parental self-efficacy. Even when parents recognise the importance of involvement, some may lack confidence in their ability to assist with academic tasks(Hoover & Sandler, 1997). Parents with limited formal education, for example, may consider themselves incapable of assisting students with secondary-level schoolwork. Such perceptions may reduce involvement even where parents genuinely value education. Another strength of the model is its recognition of school invitations and communication. Parents are more likely to participate when schools communicate clearly about how they can support their children. Consequently, awareness should not be considered solely an individual parental characteristic; schools also have a responsibility to explain educational expectations and create accessible opportunities for parental participation(Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).The integration of Epstein's theory and the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model in this study provides a comprehensive framework. Epstein explains the importance of the family-school relationship, while Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler explain how parents' perceptions of their roles and their confidence influence actual involvement.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Parental Awareness of Educational Responsibilities

Parental awareness refers to parents' understanding and recognition of the different responsibilities they can undertake to support their children's education. These responsibilities may include monitoring school attendance and academic progress, providing an appropriate home learning environment and educational resources, communicating with children and teachers about school matters, encouraging learning, and providing academic and motivational

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support. Such responsibilities demonstrate that effective parental involvement extends beyond financial and material provision to include academic, communicative, motivational, and home-based support. Boonk et al. (2018), in their review of 75 studies on parental involvement and academic achievement, found that parental expectations and aspirations, parent-child communication about school, parental encouragement and support for learning, and certain forms of home-based involvement showed important associations with students' academic achievement.

Similarly, Hill and Tyson (2009) found that parental involvement was generally positively associated with academic achievement, particularly when parents communicated educational expectations, discussed learning goals, and helped students understand the value and purpose of education. These findings suggest that understanding educational responsibilities may help shape the forms of involvement parents undertake (Boonk et al., 2018; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Barger et al. (2019) similarly found that parental involvement in children's schooling is related to educational adjustment. Parents' beliefs and understanding concerning educational processes influence how they engage with their children. This suggests that awareness precedes effective participation because parents are unlikely to undertake activities they do not recognise as part of their responsibilities.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) emphasise role construction as an important determinant of parental involvement. Parents who perceive involvement as part of their responsibility are more likely to participate. However, parents may value education while lacking a practical understanding of how to support academic tasks. Evidence also suggests that parental awareness may vary according to social and educational contexts. In some settings, parents primarily associate educational responsibility with providing school fees, uniforms, food, transport and stationery. While these contributions are essential, such an interpretation can leave other forms of support, including homework monitoring, encouragement, communication and academic progress follow-up, inadequately addressed.

2.2.2 Financial and Material Responsibilities

Provision of material resources constitutes an important dimension of parental support. Students require uniforms, stationery, food and other school-related necessities to participate effectively in learning. Therefore, recognising financial provision as a parental responsibility is appropriate.The concern arises where material provision becomes the sole or dominant interpretation of parental responsibility. Boonk et al. (2018) observed that parental engagement extends beyond visible material contributions and includes expectations, communication and support for educational development.Parents who consider their responsibility complete once school requirements have been provided may become detached from the learning process. Consequently, academic difficulties can remain unnoticed until schools formally contact parents or examination results reveal poor performance.

2.2.3 Academic Monitoring and Home Learning Support

Academic support at home can include checking assignments, examining exercise books, allocating study time, creating a conducive study space, discussing lessons, encouraging reading and following examination performance. Boonk et al. (2018) note that specific home-based parental involvement practices can contribute to positive academic outcomes and similarly associate structured parental involvement with academic achievement. Nevertheless, awareness does not necessarily mean parents must personally teach secondary-school subjects. Rather, parents can monitor whether learning is taking place, create appropriate conditions for study, encourage students, ask about assignments and seek assistance from teachers where necessary.Parents therefore require practical knowledge of how they can contribute even when their formal educational level limits their ability to understand specific academic content.

2.2.4 Parent-School Communication

Communication between parents and schools is a central element of parental engagement. Regular communication allows parents to understand students' progress, attendance, discipline, areas of difficulty and emerging educational needs. Epstein (2011) identifies communication as a core dimension of school-family partnership. Effective communication should ideally be continuous rather than occurring only after a student encounters academic or disciplinary problems.

Barger et al. (2019) similarly demonstrate the importance of family-school interaction in supporting students. In increasingly digital environments, communication mechanisms may include telephone calls, SMS, messaging platforms, email, school portals, written reports and scheduled parent-teacher meetings. However, communication practices depend on both parental awareness and school systems. Parents need to recognize communication as part of their role, while schools must provide accessible and consistent opportunities for interaction.

2.3 Research Gap

Existing literature provides considerable evidence linking parental involvement with academic achievement. However, several gaps remain. First, much of the evidence on parental involvement has been generated from developed countries and contexts with stronger school-family communication systems. The educational, socioeconomic and

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institutional circumstances of ward secondary schools in Tanzania may differ substantially.Second, many studies focus broadly on the relationship between parental involvement and students' academic performance without sufficiently isolating parents' awareness of their responsibilities. Yet parental awareness is important because it determines what parents understand they should do before actual participation occurs.

Third, many existing studies use quantitative or meta-analytic approaches. Although such studies are valuable in demonstrating statistical associations, they may provide limited understanding of how parents themselves interpret educational responsibility.Within Tanzania, available studies have examined parental participation in different districts and municipalities, but context-specific qualitative evidence concerning parental awareness in ward secondary schools in Mbeya City remains limited. The present study addresses this gap by drawing qualitative evidence from parents, students, teachers and heads of schools to establish how parental responsibilities are understood and which dimensions of educational support are recognized or overlooked.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design

This study employed a single-case study design. Mbeya City was treated as a single case involving five selected ward secondary schools. The case study design enabled detailed investigation of parental engagement within its real-life educational context. It also allowed the researcher to obtain perspectives from different groups directly involved in secondary-school education. The units of analysis consisted of parents or guardians, students, teachers and heads of schools.

3.2 Study Area

Five ward secondary schools were involved in this study: Ilomba, Uyole, Ihanga, Stella Farm and Forest Secondary Schools in Mbeya City, Tanzania. These schools and Mbeya City were selected as the study location for several reasons. First, the selected schools are ward secondary schools experiencing challenges in students' academic performance, particularly in the Form Four National Examinations, where a considerable proportion of students attained Divisions IV and 0 compared with those attaining Divisions I–III (NECTA, 2026)

Second, many ward secondary schools in Mbeya City operate as day schools, where students spend considerable time at home under parental care and supervision, making parental engagement particularly important in supporting their learning. Hence the selected secondary school in this study become suitable set which can provide the appropriate data for this study. Thirdly, Mbeya City consists of families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, providing an appropriate setting for examining differences in parents' awareness of their educational responsibilities, participation in students' academic activities, and challenges affecting their engagement. Thus, studying parental engagement in the selected ward secondary schools in Mbeya City enabled the researcher to gather relevant and in-depth information on how parental engagement influences secondary school students' academic performance.

3.3 Target population

The target population comprised Form Four students attending ward secondary schools in Mbeya City, their parents or guardians, teachers, and heads of schools. These groups were relevant because of their direct involvement in students' education and their knowledge or experience of parental responsibilities in supporting academic performance. Parents or guardians provided perspectives on their understanding of educational responsibilities and the support they offered at home. Students provided firsthand accounts of the parental support they received, while teachers contributed professional perspectives on students' academic progress and communication with parents. Heads of schools provided institutional perspectives on school–parent relationships and opportunities for parental participation.

The accessible population comprised these stakeholder groups within the five selected ward secondary schools: Ilomba, Uyole, Ihanga, Stella Farm, and Forest. From this accessible population, 35 participants were purposively selected, comprising 10 Form Four students, 10 parents or guardians, 10 teachers, and five heads of schools. These participants constituted the study sample rather than the entire target population.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Techniques

Mbeya City Council was purposively selected because some ward secondary schools had experienced persistent challenges in Form Four National Examination performance between 2021 and 2023 (NECTA, 2026). This provided an appropriate setting for examining parental engagement in motivating students' academic performance. Within Mbeya City, five public ward secondary schools including Ilomba, Uyole, Ihanga, Stella Farm and Forest were purposively selected based on their academic performance during the three-year period.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experience concerning parental engagement and students' academic performance. This technique is appropriate in qualitative

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studies because it enables researchers to deliberately select information-rich participants who can provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A total of 35 participants were selected from the five schools, comprising 10 Form Four students, 10 parents or guardians, 10 teachers and five heads of schools.

From each school, two students, two parents or guardians, two teachers and one head of school were selected. Students with different academic performance levels were included to provide firsthand experiences of parental support and motivation. Parents or guardians linked to the selected students provided information on their awareness, participation and challenges in supporting their children's education. Teachers were selected because of their knowledge of students' academic progress and interactions with parents, while heads of schools were selected by virtue of their administrative positions and responsibility for school-parent relationships.

The inclusion of students, parents or guardians, teachers and heads of schools provided complementary perspectives on parental engagement and strengthened data triangulation. In qualitative research, emphasis is placed on the relevance and richness of information obtained from participants rather than statistical representation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). Therefore, purposive sampling enabled the study to obtain relevant and in-depth information necessary for understanding parental engagement and students' academic performance in Mbeya City.

3.5 Sample Size

The factors considered in determining the sample size for this study included the qualitative nature of the study, the relevance of participants to the research problem, the need for information-rich cases, and the inclusion of different stakeholders involved in parental engagement and students' academic performance. In qualitative research, sample size is primarily determined by the depth and richness of information required rather than statistical representation of the population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Similarly, Cohen et al. (2018) emphasize that qualitative case studies generally focus on participants who possess relevant knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Based on these considerations, the study employed a sample size of 35 participants drawn from five selected ward secondary schools in Mbeya City. The sample consisted of 10 Form Four students, 10 parents or guardians, 10 teachers, and 5 heads of schools. From each school, two students, two parents or guardians, two teachers and one head of school were purposively selected. This sample size was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain detailed information from multiple stakeholders while maintaining a manageable amount of qualitative data for in-depth analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018)

The participant categories were selected according to their relevance to the study. Students provided firsthand experiences of parental support and motivation; parents or guardians provided information on their awareness, participation and challenges in supporting students' education; teachers provided professional perspectives on students' academic progress and parent-school interactions; while heads of schools provided administrative perspectives on parental engagement and students' academic performance. The inclusion of these different groups also strengthened triangulation by allowing the phenomenon to be examined from multiple perspectives. Therefore, the study used a total sample size of 35 participants, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Size

Participant Category	Ilomba	Uyole	Ihanga	Stella Farm	Forest	Total
Form Four Students	2	2	2	2	2	**10**
Parents/Guardians	2	2	2	2	2	**10**
Teachers	2	2	2	2	2	**10**
Heads of Schools	1	1	1	1	1	**5**
Total Sample Size	**7**	**7**	**7**	**7**	**7**	**35**

The sample size of 35 participants was therefore considered adequate for generating rich, relevant and in-depth information required to understand parental engagement in motivating secondary school students' academic performance in Mbeya City.

3.6 Data Collection

Data for this study were gathered mainly through semi-structured interviews and documentary review. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary data from students, parents or guardians, teachers and heads of schools. This method was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to obtain detailed information on participants' experiences, perceptions and practices concerning parental engagement and students' academic performance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Documentary review was used to collect secondary data and supplement the interview findings. The documents reviewed included students' academic records, school reports, attendance records, minutes of parent-school meetings and other relevant school documents. The use of the two methods enhanced data triangulation and provided a comprehensive understanding of parental engagement and students' academic performance.

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3.7 Data Analysis

In this study, data were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo software, while Microsoft Excel was used to present tables. Thematic analysis was considered appropriate because it provides a systematic and flexible approach for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis involved familiarization with the data, systematic coding, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, refining and defining themes, and producing the final interpretation. NVivo facilitated the systematic organization, coding, retrieval and comparison of interview and documentary data across students, parents or guardians, teachers and heads of schools. The resulting themes were organized according to the study objectives and subsequently interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework and relevant literature.

3.8 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The use of multiple participant groups and more than one data source enhanced triangulation. Ethical considerations included obtaining relevant research clearance, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their right to participate voluntarily.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Characteristics of Participants

The study involved 35 participants. In this study, 20 respondents representing 57.1% were male while 15 respondents representing 42.9% were female. Representation from parents, students, teachers and heads of schools enabled the study to compare perspectives concerning what parents understood to be their educational responsibilities.The findings concerning parental awareness were organised into three principal themes: monitoring and provision of school requirements, academic support responsibilities and communication with schools which are addressed in the proceeding sections.

Table 2

Participant gender distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	20	57.1%
Female	15	42.9%
Total	**35**	**100.0%**

The study findings are presented according to the study's two objectives: examining parents' awareness of their responsibilities in supporting secondary-school students' academic performance, and exploring the dimensions of parental responsibility perceived as important for supporting students academically. Three interconnected themes emerged: provision of school requirements and monitoring, academic support at home, and communication with schools.

Parental awareness of educational responsibilities constituted the independent variable in the study's conceptual framework, while students' academic performance constituted the dependent variable. Because the study employed a qualitative case study design, these concepts were examined through participants' accounts rather than through statistical testing. Accordingly, the findings explain how participants understood parental responsibilities and the perceived implications of these responsibilities for learning; they do not establish a causal effect on examination performance.

4.1.1 Awareness of Material Provision and Monitoring Responsibilities

Regarding the first objective, participants' accounts suggested that parents recognized financial and material provision more readily than their continuing responsibilities for academic monitoring. In relation to the second objective, payment of school-related contributions and provision of uniforms, stationery, and other basic requirements emerged as prominent dimensions of parental responsibility.One parent explained:

> *"My responsibility is to pay the food contribution, provide pens and provide uniforms. That is what I can do. I understand these are important requirements, and I make sure my child has them on time. Sometimes I cooperate with the school, so my child is prepared well to attend and learn."* (Interview; Parent 7 from school D 22/09/2025)

This account illustrates awareness of the practical requirements that enable students to attend school and participate in learning. However, the emphasis on what the parent could provide, with little reference to academic follow-up, suggests a predominantly material interpretation of educational responsibility. The quotation alone does not establish that the parent neglected other responsibilities, but it reflects the priorities expressed during the interview.A teacher offered a contrasting perspective:

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> "*Some parents think their work ends after paying the contributions and providing some school requirements. They do not follow the child's academic progress, and many are rarely responsible for giving all school requirements to their child on time unless you force them."*(Interview; Teacher 5 from school A 11/09/2025)

The teacher's account highlights two concerns: a perceived tendency to regard material provision as sufficient, and inconsistencies in providing requirements promptly. Taken together, the accounts indicate that recognition of a responsibility does not necessarily ensure its consistent fulfillment. They also distinguish providing the conditions for school participation from maintaining attention to students' learning progress.

These findings are consistent with Boonk et al. (2018), whose review identified educational expectations, communication about school, and encouragement of learning as dimensions of parental involvement associated with academic achievement. The present findings extend this discussion by illustrating how some participants interpreted parental responsibility more narrowly, prioritizing material provision over sustained academic engagement.Epstein's (2011) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence provides a complementary explanation. Material provision supports students' participation in schooling, but cooperation between families and schools also requires communication and coordinated learning support. Thus, the findings suggest that awareness of material obligations was more evident than awareness of the broader responsibilities connecting learning at home and at school. Their implications for academic performance concern the conditions supporting learning, rather than demonstrated differences in examination results.

4.1.2 Awareness of Home-Based Academic Support Responsibilities

The second theme addressed parents' understanding of practical responsibilities for supporting learning at home. It contributed to the first objective by revealing gaps in awareness and to the second by identifying study routines, assignment monitoring, encouragement, and conducive study conditions as relevant dimensions of educational responsibility.One student stated:

> *"My parent does not check my homework. I study on my own most of the time. I set a schedule for when I should start and finish my assignments, and I try to review what I learned in class."*(Interview; Student 6 from school A 11/09/2025)

This account demonstrates student initiative in organizing assignments and revision. It also indicates limited parental involvement in checking homework. However, the absence of homework checking should not automatically be interpreted as an absence of all parental support or as evidence of poor academic performance. Parents may support learning through encouragement, discussion, or provision of study conditions without directly inspecting every assignment.A head of school highlighted another aspect of home-based support: One head of School responded:

> *"Some parents care well for their children in terms of health and other accommodations, but they do not know that giving time and a quiet place for study helps students perform better."*(Interview; Head of school 3 from school D 22/09/2025)

The account distinguishes general care from awareness of specific learning needs. From the head of school's perspective, parents could demonstrate concern for their children while overlooking the importance of protected study time and suitable learning conditions. Other accounts described parents who established study schedules, encouraged students, and followed schoolwork, indicating variation among families.Boonk et al. (2018) identified encouragement of learning and parent–child communication about school as practices associated with academic achievement. Similarly, Ma et al. (2024) reported stronger associations with achievement when parents maintained high educational expectations, communicated about school activities, and supported reading habits. These findings support a broader understanding of academic support, while avoiding the assumption that every form of homework assistance necessarily improves achievement.

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) model helps interpret the distinction between recognising a responsibility and feeling capable of fulfilling it. Parental role construction concerns what parents believe they should do, whereas self-efficacy concerns their confidence in making a useful contribution. The accounts are compatible with limited recognition of some home-learning responsibilities, although they do not independently establish parents' levels of self-efficacy.The practical implication is that parents need not teach secondary-school subjects to support learning. They can discuss progress, encourage independent study, help protect study time, and contact teachers when difficulties arise. Such activities may strengthen learning conditions, but their contribution to students' actual academic performance would require evidence beyond the interview accounts presented here.

4.1.3 Awareness of Communication Responsibilities

The third theme concerned parents' understanding of routine communication with teachers and school authorities. It addressed the first objective through participants' descriptions of communication practices and the second by identifying academic follow-up and participation in school meetings as dimensions of parental responsibility.One parent explained:

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> *"I only go to school when there is a problem. This is because I have limited time to make follow-ups according to the nature of my work. What I know is that teachers are more responsible for guiding students with different behaviors because of the knowledge they have."*(Interview; Parent 10 from school E 28/09/2025)

This account indicates both a practical constraint and a perception of educational responsibility. Work demands limited the parent's availability, while confidence in teachers' professional expertise appeared to reinforce reliance on the school. Consequently, infrequent contact cannot be attributed solely to limited awareness; opportunities, time, and perceived divisions of responsibility also require consideration.A teacher stated:

> *"Most parents do not come to ask about progress unless there is a serious concern. Even if they are asked to attend academic meetings, they don't come; they send representatives who have no advice."*(Interview; Teacher 9 from school E 28/09/2025)

The teacher perceived parental contact as predominantly problem-driven. The reference to representatives expresses the teacher's assessment of their contribution and should not be treated as evidence that all representatives were ineffective. Nevertheless, the two accounts together suggest that routine opportunities to exchange information about academic progress were not consistently used. Other accounts described parents who consulted teachers proactively, showing that this pattern was not universal.Epstein (2011) identifies communication as an essential element of school–family partnerships. The findings are consistent with this framework because limited routine contact may restrict opportunities to coordinate support. Barger et al. (2019) also found positive associations between parental involvement and children's academic adjustment, although their meta-analysis does not establish that communication alone causes better examination performance.

The findings therefore indicate a shared responsibility. Parents need clear information about the value of regular academic follow-up, while schools need communication arrangements that accommodate families' circumstances. The perceived connection with academic performance lies in the possibility of identifying learning difficulties and coordinating responses earlier, rather than waiting until problems become serious.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined parents' awareness of their educational responsibilities and explored the dimensions of responsibility perceived as important for supporting students' academic performance in ward secondary schools in Mbeya City, Tanzania. The findings indicate that parental awareness was uneven and incomplete: financial and material obligations were more readily recognized than responsibilities involving academic monitoring, home-based learning support, motivation and regular communication with schools. Although providing school requirements constitutes an essential contribution, participants' accounts suggest that some parents regarded this provision as the principal fulfillment of their educational role.

The study identified interconnected material, academic, motivational and communicative dimensions of parental responsibility. These encompass providing school requirements, establishing supportive study conditions, following academic progress, encouraging learners and maintaining constructive contact with teachers. However, communication between parents and schools was often reactive, occurring after academic or disciplinary difficulties had emerged. The findings also demonstrate the importance of distinguishing awareness from practice. Limited participation did not necessarily indicate parental indifference or lack of understanding; work commitments and other practical constraints also shaped parents' opportunities to engage.

Considered together, Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model provide a useful interpretation of these findings. Parents' beliefs about their educational roles help explain which responsibilities they recognise, while the relationship between families and schools shapes opportunities to translate that understanding into meaningful participation. The study therefore contributes a context-specific understanding of parental awareness as an important foundation for engagement, whose practical expression also depends on accessible communication and opportunities for collaboration. Its qualitative evidence illuminates participants' perceptions and experiences; it does not establish that limited awareness caused poor academic performance or that greater awareness alone would improve examination results.

The central conclusion is that strengthening parental engagement requires both a broader understanding of educational responsibility and practical support for fulfilling it. Schools and education authorities should build on parents' existing contributions through accessible parental education, manageable guidance on home-based learning support and sustained, reciprocal communication. Such efforts should recognise differences in parents' education, resources and availability, while affirming that meaningful support does not require parents to teach specialised subjects. A shared understanding of complementary responsibilities among parents, teachers and students can provide a stronger basis for coordinated learning support in ward secondary schools.

5.2 Recommendations

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The findings indicate that parents' awareness of educational responsibilities was more evident in financial and material provision than in home-based academic support and routine communication with schools. Accordingly, the recommendations focus on broadening parents' understanding of their educational roles, enabling practical participation, and strengthening school-family collaboration.

Ward secondary schools, in collaboration with education authorities, should establish sustained parental awareness and education programmes. These programmes should clarify that educational responsibility extends beyond providing uniforms, stationery, food contributions, and other school requirements. Orientation meetings, seminars, and practical workshops should explain how parents can follow attendance and academic progress, discuss schoolwork with their children, encourage consistent study routines, and provide suitable conditions for learning at home. Rather than relying on general appeals for greater involvement, the programmes should demonstrate specific activities that parents can undertake within their circumstances.

Parent education should accommodate differences in formal education, literacy, work commitments, and household resources. Schools should emphasize that supporting secondary-school learning does not require parents to teach specialized subjects. Parents can make useful contributions by asking about assignments, checking whether schoolwork has been completed, protecting study time, encouraging attendance, and seeking guidance from teachers when difficulties arise. Guidance should be communicated in accessible language and should recognise existing parental efforts while addressing gaps in awareness and practice.

To complement home-based support, schools should establish regular, accessible, and reciprocal communication with parents. Depending on families' access and preferences, schools may combine telephone calls, SMS notifications, written progress reports, and appropriately managed WhatsApp communication with scheduled parent-teacher consultations. Communication should address attendance, learning progress, behavior, and emerging support needs throughout the academic year. Routine exchanges would provide opportunities for collaborative responses before difficulties become serious. Schools should also offer reasonable flexibility in consultation arrangements to accommodate parents whose employment or other responsibilities limit attendance at meetings.

These initiatives should be supported by a clear understanding of shared educational responsibilities. Teachers should retain responsibility for professional instruction, assessment, and guidance, while parents provide complementary encouragement, supervision, learning conditions, and academic follow-up. Students should also be encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their learning. Clarifying these roles would help parents understand how to contribute without assuming that they must replace teachers or undertake tasks beyond their capabilities.

Schools should develop simple, parent-friendly tools to support academic monitoring. Brief attendance summaries, assignment records, progress reports, and home-study checklists could help parents identify areas requiring attention and provide a basis for discussions with students and teachers. Such tools should be easy to interpret, available in suitable languages, and manageable for both families and school staff. Their purpose should be to support constructive engagement rather than impose additional administrative burdens.

For continuity, school administrations should incorporate family engagement into school improvement plans. These plans should specify responsibilities for coordinating parent education, communicating academic progress, arranging consultations, and supporting families who face barriers to participation. Periodic reviews should consider whether communication reaches parents, whether guidance is understood and used, and whether families and teachers find the arrangements helpful. Monitoring these processes would enable schools to refine their approaches in response to practical experience.

Further research should examine parental awareness across larger and more diverse samples using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches. Comparative studies could investigate differences between rural and urban settings, public and private secondary schools, and families with varying educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Future studies should also distinguish awareness from actual involvement and examine how each relates to measurable indicators of academic achievement. Longitudinal studies and evaluations of parental education initiatives would help establish whether changes in awareness are followed by changes in engagement and students' learning outcomes, while accounting for other influences on academic performance.

Declaration of Interest

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