



Parents' Perceived Skills in Parenting Styles and Children's Academic Success in Uyole Ward, Mbeya, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study examined parents' perceived skills in applying parenting styles and how these skills relate to children's academic success in Uyole Ward, Mbeya, Tanzania. While parenting research has traditionally classified parents into broad style categories, this study argues that the categorical label alone is insufficient to explain variation in academic outcomes among children raised within the same style category and that the specific skills through which a style is enacted deserve closer examination. A qualitative approach guided by a phenomenological design was employed, using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to collect data from 30 participants comprising 12 parents, 8 teachers and 10 students, selected through purposive sampling. Data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's six-step approach, with findings presented through verbatim participant quotations. Four core parenting skill themes emerged: communication skills, consistency in discipline, guided autonomy and emotional support, each linked to distinct academic outcomes including motivation, self-regulation, critical thinking and resilience. A cross-cutting finding was a persistent gap between parents' awareness of effective parenting principles and their capacity to apply these principles consistently, driven largely by economic pressure, time constraints and limited practical knowledge rather than by lack of concern for their children's education. The study concludes that parenting skill, rather than style alone, is a critical determinant of children's academic success in Uyole and recommends that schools, community organisations and policymakers invest in sustained, practically oriented parenting skill-building programmes, delivered in Kiswahili, addressing both the knowledge and structural dimensions of the awareness-practice gap.

Keywords: *Children's academic success; Parenting skills; Tanzania; Uyole Ward*

1. Introduction

Parenting research has long relied on Baumrind's (1966) typology of authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful styles to explain how parents shape children's developmental and academic outcomes. While this typology remains influential, an emerging body of literature suggests that style categories alone are insufficient to explain the substantial variation in academic outcomes observed among children whose parents share the same broad style label. Two parents who both describe themselves as authoritative, for example, may differ markedly in their communication practices, the consistency with which they enforce household rules, their capacity to support children's independent problem-solving and the manner in which they respond emotionally to academic setbacks. It is this finer-grained layer of parenting skill, rather than the style label itself, that this study sets out to examine.

Globally, research confirms that specific parenting competencies operate as the mechanisms through which parenting style translates into academic outcomes. Ntekane (2018) found that in low-income African household contexts, the frequency and quality of parent-child academic dialogue predicts school engagement more strongly than household income. Ayisi-Boateng et al. (2022) further identify aspirational parental communication as a distinct mechanism through which parenting shapes children's long-term academic trajectories, independent of style classification.

Beyond communication, disciplinary consistency has been identified as a foundational parenting skill. Kuppens and Ceulemans (2019) show that disciplinary consistency underlies the development of children's self-regulatory capacities and Baumrind (1966) established consistent rule-enforcement as a defining feature of effective parenting. Adeyeye (2024) confirms that in Nigerian school settings, parenting characterised by warmth combined with structure is strongly correlated with improved academic achievement. At the same time, Pinquart (2016), in a meta-analysis of 308 empirical studies, cautions that rigid or punitive discipline can be counterproductive when it substitutes for warmth and explanation, indicating that the relational quality of discipline matters as much as its regularity.

A third dimension, guided autonomy, describes parents' capacity to support children's independent academic decision-making without resorting to either excessive control or neglect. Muhwezi-Murari and Kiyangi (2025) found guided autonomy practices significantly associated with academic performance among Ugandan secondary students. Agbaria and Mahamid (2023) note, however, that guided autonomy is among the most difficult parenting skills to

develop without targeted support, as parents often default to over-direction or neglect when faced with children's academic challenges.

Emotional support constitutes a fourth widely documented parenting skill. Brummelman et al. (2022) confirm that praise directed at effort rather than ability reduces children's fear of failure, while Wu and Yi (2023) show that children who perceive high parental emotional support exhibit stronger academic self-concept and lower school-related anxiety across diverse cultural settings, including sub-Saharan Africa. Odongo et al. (2016) add a cultural caveat, noting that emotional support is among the most culturally variable parenting competencies, with many sub-Saharan African communities maintaining norms of emotional restraint that shape how encouragement is expressed.

Across these four skill dimensions, a recurring finding in the literature is the existence of a gap between what parents know about effective parenting and what they are able to apply consistently in daily practice. Chigbu et al. (2021) identify awareness-practice gaps in Nigerian parenting contexts, attributing them to structural barriers including time constraints, economic demands and cultural norms. Wittkowski et al. (2017) argue that closing this gap requires sustained, community-based skill-building rather than one-off awareness campaigns, while Fang et al. (2024), in a multilevel meta-analysis of fifty independent studies, caution that parental self-efficacy and school-community relationships also shape the gap and should not be overlooked in favour of structural explanations alone.

In Tanzania, studies such as that conducted in Iringa (Mighay, 2024) have examined parenting styles in relation to academic performance, but this literature has rarely disaggregated parenting style into its constituent skills or examined how parents themselves perceive their own competence in applying these skills. No study to date has focused specifically on parents' perceived skills in the peri-urban context of Uyole Ward, Mbeya, where households of markedly different socio-economic standing coexist within the same community and where family and educational demands are rapidly changing. This study addresses this gap by examining the perceived skills of parents in applying different parenting styles and their relationship to children's academic success in Uyole Ward, guided by the following specific objective: to examine the perceived skills of parents in applying different parenting styles on children's academic success in Uyole Ward, Mbeya.

Theoretically, the study is anchored in Baumrind's (1966) typology of parenting styles and Bandura's (1963) Social Learning Theory. Where Baumrind's framework classifies parenting along the dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness, Bandura's theory explains the psychological mechanism through which specific parenting behaviours, rather than style labels alone, are transmitted to children: through observation, modelling, guided mastery experiences and verbal persuasion, children internalise the academic attitudes, self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulatory habits that their parents demonstrate and reinforce. This dual theoretical foundation guided both the design of the data collection instruments and the interpretation of the findings presented in the following sections.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach guided by a phenomenological design to examine parents' perceived skills in applying parenting styles and their relationship to children's academic success in Uyole Ward, Mbeya. The qualitative approach was selected for its capacity to generate an in-depth, contextually grounded understanding of participants' lived experiences, perceptions and meanings, which quantitative measures of parenting style alone cannot capture (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological design enabled the study to move beyond categorical style labels to capture how parents themselves understood, described and evaluated their own parenting competencies and how teachers and students perceived the practical manifestation of those competencies in children's academic engagement.

2.2. Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Uyole Ward, within Mbeya City Council in Mbeya Region, in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. Uyole Ward was purposively selected for its peri-urban character, where households with varying levels of parental education, occupational status and socio-economic standing coexist within a single community, a feature considered relevant given that the capacity to translate parenting knowledge into consistent practice is known to be shaped by such household-level variables. Despite its active educational institutions and socio-economic diversity, limited empirical research has examined parents' perceived competence in applying parenting practices in this specific area, making Uyole Ward an appropriate and under-researched context for the present study.

2.3. Population and Sample Size

A total of 30 participants were involved in the study, comprising 12 parents or guardians, 8 teachers and 10 students from selected primary schools within Uyole Ward. This distribution captured the perspectives of those most directly involved in the parenting and schooling process while remaining manageable for in-depth, saturation-driven qualitative analysis. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants with direct, first-hand involvement in the parenting and schooling processes under investigation, while simple random sampling was additionally used to select specific schools within the

ward, ensuring representation of both public and private institutions.

2.4. Data Collection

Data collection instruments comprised separate semi-structured interview guides for parents, teachers and students, together with a focus group discussion guide for students, developed specifically to elicit participants' perceptions of parenting skills, including communication practices, disciplinary consistency, support for independence and emotional responsiveness and their perceived academic consequences. Instruments were informally pre-tested to ensure clarity and contextual appropriateness. All parents, teachers and students participated in individual semi-structured interviews, while students additionally took part in focus group discussions of five participants each to encourage interactive discussion. Mobile audio recording and note-taking were used to document interviews and discussions, consistent with established recommendations for accuracy and completeness in qualitative data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.5. Data Analysis

Data were thematically analysed following the six-step method of Braun and Clarke (2021). The researcher first familiarised themselves with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes, then generated initial codes systematically across the dataset. Codes were collated into candidate themes, which were subsequently reviewed and refined against the coded extracts and the full dataset before being named and defined. The final report was produced with findings presented through direct participant quotations, preserving proximity to participants' own descriptions of their parenting skills and experiences.

2.6. Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through adherence to the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with participants, methodological triangulation across parents, teachers and students, the use of verbatim quotations and member checking, in which preliminary interpretations were shared with selected participants to confirm alignment with their intended meanings. Transferability was addressed through thick, detailed description of the study context, participants and procedures. Dependability was maintained through a clear audit trail documenting the research design, instruments, coding procedures and analytical decisions, while confirmability was promoted through ongoing researcher reflexivity and peer debriefing with academic supervisors.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

With formal permission obtained from relevant university authorities, Mbeya City Council, school authorities and local education officials, the researcher visited participants in their respective settings to conduct data collection. Participants were engaged only after providing informed consent, with separate consent obtained from parents or guardians for minor participants and all participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in safe, culturally respectful settings to prevent psychological or social harm. Collected data were anonymised through participant codes and all digital and physical records were stored securely to preserve confidentiality throughout the research process.

3. Results

This section presents findings on parents' perceived skills in applying parenting styles and their relationship to children's academic success in Uyole Ward. Data generated primarily through semi-structured interviews with parents, supplemented by teacher and student perspectives, produced four core parenting skill themes: communication skills, consistency in discipline, guided autonomy and emotional support. Table 1 summarises these themes.

Table 1 – Parents' perceived skills in applying parenting styles

Skill Theme	Description and Application	Academic Linkage	Cross-Group Endorsement
Communication skills	Regular, open dialogue about school experiences, academic expectations and future aspirations	Higher motivation, willingness to seek help, sustained academic engagement	All three groups identified communication as the most impactful parenting competence
Consistency in discipline	Reliable, predictable enforcement of agreed-upon rules regardless of context or mood	Stronger self-regulation, stable study routines, reduced academic anxiety	Teachers noted this as visibly distinguishing high-performing students from peers
Guidance with independence	Supporting academic decision-making while allowing age-appropriate autonomous problem-solving	Development of critical thinking, self-efficacy and long-term academic resilience	Students from guided-autonomous homes reported greater academic confidence and pride
Emotional support	Regular encouragement, effort-focused praise and empathy during academic difficulty	Higher resilience, sustained motivation, openness to teacher and peer feedback	Students described this as the most personally significant dimension of parenting

Source: Field Data, 2026.

3.1. Communication Skills

Communication emerged as the most widely cited and valued parenting skill across all three participant groups. Parents who described themselves as skilled communicators reported engaging in regular, structured conversations with their children about school, discussing what had been taught, identifying areas of difficulty and setting shared expectations about academic effort and behaviour.

"I always talk to my child about school and listen to their challenges. I ask about their friends, their teachers, what they found difficult. Sometimes the child does not want to talk, but I keep asking because I know that if I listen, they will come to me when there is a real problem."
(Parent 6, April 2026)

Parent 3 similarly explained that trust built through open communication motivated her child to work harder, noting that her child knew they could come to her with any school problem without judgement. Teacher 1 corroborated this from the classroom perspective, observing that students from communicative homes arrived with goals already discussed with parents and a clearly articulated sense of educational purpose. The analysis further revealed that effective parental communication in Uyole extended beyond academic performance to encompass aspirations, peer relationships and the broader value of education.

In contrast, parents who acknowledged poor communication skills described significant gaps in their awareness of their children's academic standing and emotional wellbeing.

"I do not always know what my child is doing at school. I ask sometimes, but my child gives short answers and I do not push. I suppose I do not always know how to talk to them about these things." (Parent 10, April 2026)

This self-reported gap was reflected in the academic profiles of the children in question, whom teachers described as disengaged, poorly prepared and lacking clear academic goals.

3.2. Consistency in Discipline

Consistency in the application of rules and disciplinary expectations was identified as a critical parenting skill by multiple parent participants and was strongly endorsed by teachers as a factor differentiating students with strong academic routines from those without. Parents who reported high disciplinary consistency described clear household rules regarding homework completion, study time and bedtime, applied reliably regardless of external circumstances.

"Rules must be followed every time, not only when I feel like it. If I tell my child that homework must be done before playing, then that rule is the same whether I am tired or not, whether it is a weekend or a weekday. Children need to know what to expect." (Parent 9, April 2026)

Teacher 8 confirmed that this consistency was visible in the classroom, noting that children with routine at home arrived with materials ready, homework completed and a clear sense of order in how they approached school. In contrast, Parent 7 acknowledged the consequences of inconsistent discipline, explaining that enforcing rules only when convenient had taught the child that rules were not always serious. Students from inconsistent home environments reported confusion about expectations and a tendency to prioritise leisure over academic preparation when the opportunity arose.

3.3. Guidance with Independence

A third significant parenting skill identified in the data was the capacity to guide children's academic decision-making while simultaneously allowing age-appropriate independence. Parents who demonstrated this skill described a deliberate balancing act between providing direction and allowing children to develop their own problem-solving capacities.

"I help my child think through problems in school and in life. I do not give them the answer immediately. I ask: what do you think you should do? What are the options? This way, they learn to think. And thinking is what helps in exams, not just memorising what I told them." (Parent 4, April 2026)

Teacher 2 observed that students whose parents guided without over-controlling demonstrated superior critical thinking and a more active learning orientation, describing them as students who ask questions, try things and make connections. Student A described this experience directly, explaining that although being asked questions rather than given answers was sometimes frustrating, the resulting sense of having solved a problem independently produced pride and confidence.

3.4. Emotional Support

Emotional support was identified as the fourth core parenting skill, characterised by regular encouragement, effort-focused praise and empathy during academic difficulty. Parent 6 described emotional support as the foundation of her parenting, explaining that when her child failed a test, she did not shout

but instead sat with the child to identify what had been difficult and worked on it together, framing failure as a lesson rather than an endpoint.

This emotionally supportive response to academic setback was described by teacher participants as producing students who were more resilient and more open to receiving feedback.

“Some children accept corrections easily. They take my feedback, try again and improve. Others usually those who are punished at home for every failure shut down when they make a mistake. The difference is how they are treated at home when they fail.” (Teacher 5, April 2026)

Student E's account illustrated the distinction between fear-driven compliance and love-driven motivation, describing how a mother's expressed belief in her academic capability, even amid a demanding work schedule, generated a determination to succeed that was not rooted in fear but in a desire to honour that confidence. This account illustrates how emotional affirmation generates more durable, intrinsically motivated academic effort than fear-based compliance.

3.5. The Gap Between Parenting Awareness and Parenting Practice

A significant finding cutting across all four skill dimensions was the gap between what parents knew about effective parenting and what they were able to apply consistently in practice. A substantial proportion of parent participants acknowledged challenges that limited the effective application of parenting skills, including economic pressure, time constraints, limited knowledge of child development and the difficulties of single parenthood.

“I know what I should do as a parent. I know I should talk to my child more, check their homework, be there for them. But I work from early morning to late evening. When I come home, I am exhausted. I am ashamed to say that I sometimes do not have the energy to be the parent my child needs.” (Parent 10, April 2026)

Parent 12 added that the absence of a positive parenting model in their own upbringing left them uncertain how to parent differently, despite recognising the potential consequences for their children. Teacher 3 observed that many parents in Uyole possessed genuine goodwill and concern for their children's academic progress but lacked the practical knowledge and skills to translate this concern into consistent, effective parenting practices. This gap between parenting intention and parenting capacity points to the need for structured, community-based parenting support programmes offering practical, accessible and culturally relevant strategies.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study are discussed in relation to existing literature on parenting skills and children's academic outcomes, with particular attention to the Tanzanian peri-urban context of Uyole Ward. Across all four skill dimensions, a consistent finding was that parenting style as a broad categorical label was insufficient to account for variation in academic outcomes within the same style category, underscoring the analytical value of examining parenting skill directly.

4.1. Communication Skills and Academic Engagement

The finding that communication skills were the most widely valued parenting competence across all participant groups is consistent with Ntekane (2018), who found that in low-income African household contexts, the frequency and quality of parent-child academic dialogue predicts school engagement more strongly than household income, reinforcing communication as a parenting skill accessible across socio-economic groups. Ayisi-Boateng et al. (2022) further identify aspirational parental communication as a distinct and independently significant mechanism through which parenting shapes children's long-term academic trajectories, a pattern reflected in student accounts of family conversations about the value of education as powerful motivators of academic commitment.

Conversely, Chigbu et al. (2021) identified an awareness-practice gap in Nigerian parenting contexts, arguing that many parents who value positive communication face structural barriers including time constraints and economic demands that limit their ability to translate those values into consistent practice, a pattern clearly reflected in the accounts of Parent 10. From the perspective of Bandura's (1963) Social Learning Theory, parents who model and articulate positive academic values provide children with the vicarious learning experiences and verbal persuasion inputs foundational to academic self-efficacy. The findings therefore indicate that strengthening communication skills among Uyole parents represents one of the most tractable entry points for improving children's academic outcomes, provided that structural barriers to consistent communication are also addressed.

4.2. Disciplinary Consistency and Self-Regulation

Consistency in discipline emerged as the second most significant parenting skill dimension, directly associated with stronger student self-regulation and stable study habits. Kuppens and Ceulemans (2019) identify disciplinary consistency as a foundational mechanism through which authoritative parenting develops children's self-regulatory capacities, while Adeyeye (2024) confirms that in Nigerian school settings, parenting characterised by warmth and

structure is strongly correlated with improved academic achievement. Baumrind (1966) established consistent rule-enforcement as a defining feature of effective parenting.

Pinquart (2016), in a meta-analysis of 308 empirical studies, cautions that rigid or punitive disciplinary control can be counterproductive, particularly when it operates through harsh control rather than warmth and explanation, as harsh control was consistently associated with lower academic achievement. This suggests that effective disciplinary consistency in Uyole requires not merely regularity but also the relational quality, including warmth and reasoned communication, through which expectations are communicated. From Baumrind's (1966) theoretical perspective, disciplinary consistency operationalises the demandingness dimension of authoritative parenting in children's daily academic lives, indicating that parenting education programmes in Uyole should prioritise practical skill-building in consistent rule-setting alongside communication capacities, as the two competencies work in combination to produce the self-regulatory habits underpinning academic success.

4.3. Guided Autonomy and Academic Self-Efficacy

Guided autonomy, the practice of supporting children's independent problem-solving rather than providing direct answers, was most clearly illustrated by the practices of the most academically effective parents in Uyole. Parent 4's practice of asking children questions rather than providing answers exemplifies what Bandura (1963) identifies as guided mastery experiences, the most powerful source of self-efficacy development. Muhwezi-Murari and Kiyangi (2025) found guided autonomy practices significantly associated with academic performance among Ugandan secondary students, consistent with Student A's account of feeling proud after solving a problem independently following parental guidance.

Agbaria and Mahamid (2023) note that guided autonomy is among the most difficult parenting skills to develop without targeted support, as many parents default to either over-direction or neglect when faced with children's academic challenges, a pattern particularly relevant in Uyole, where parents with lower educational attainment may lack the confidence to scaffold children's academic independence effectively. From Bandura's (1963) perspective, guided autonomy creates the mastery experiences that are the most powerful and durable source of academic self-efficacy, indicating that parenting programmes in Uyole should invest in demonstrating and practising guided autonomy techniques with parents, as this skill has the potential to produce the most lasting improvements in children's independent learning capacity.

4.4. Emotional Support as a Foundational Mechanism

Emotional support was the fourth parenting skill dimension identified, associated with greater academic resilience and a more constructive response to academic failure. Teacher 5's observation that students from homes where effort rather than outcomes was praised were more willing to attempt difficult tasks is consistent with Brummelman et al. (2022), who confirm that praise directed at effort rather than ability significantly reduces children's fear of failure. Wu and Yi (2023) demonstrate that children who perceive high levels of parental emotional support exhibit significantly stronger academic self-concept and lower school-related anxiety across diverse cultural settings, including sub-Saharan Africa.

Odongo et al. (2016) note that emotional support is among the most culturally variable parenting competencies, with many sub-Saharan African communities maintaining norms of emotional restraint that limit open expressions of academic encouragement, suggesting that interventions to strengthen emotional support in Uyole must be sensitive to community norms rather than prescribing forms of encouragement that feel culturally incongruent to parents. From Bandura's (1963) perspective, emotional support operates primarily through the verbal persuasion mechanism of self-efficacy development, indicating that emotional support is not a soft complement to the more technical dimensions of parenting skill, but a foundational mechanism through which all other parenting competencies are mediated and sustained.

4.5. The Awareness-Practice Gap and Its Implications

The awareness-practice gap identified across all four skill dimensions has important implications for intervention design, as programmes that focus exclusively on knowledge transfer are unlikely to produce durable improvements in parenting practice. Chigbu et al. (2021) similarly identified an awareness-practice gap in Nigerian parenting contexts, arguing that effective parenting education must address structural barriers and build practical implementation skills rather than focusing exclusively on knowledge transfer. Wittkowski et al. (2017) add that practical parenting skills development requires sustained community-based support rather than one-off awareness-raising sessions, while Agbaria and Mahamid (2023) confirm that programmes targeting implementation skills rather than attitudinal change produce more durable improvements in parenting practice across diverse cultural settings.

Fang et al. (2024), in a multilevel meta-analysis of fifty independent studies, caution that attributing the awareness-practice gap primarily to structural barriers risks underestimating the role of motivational and relational factors, including parents' confidence in their own effectiveness and the quality of their relationships with their children's schools. This suggests that community-based parenting programmes in Uyole should address not only structural constraints but also parental self-efficacy and school-community partnership. From the combined perspective of Baumrind (1966) and Bandura (1963), the mediating role of parenting skill between parenting style and academic outcomes means that any credible strategy to improve children's academic outcomes in Uyole must invest in building practical parenting competencies alongside promoting positive attitudinal orientations.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine parents' perceived skills in applying different parenting styles and their relationship to children's academic success in Uyole Ward, Mbeya. The findings identified four core parenting skill dimensions, communication, disciplinary consistency, guided autonomy and emotional support, each operating through a distinct mechanism to shape children's motivation, self-regulation, critical thinking and resilience. A central contribution of the study is the demonstration that parenting style as a broad categorical label is insufficient on its own to account for variation in academic outcomes and that the specific skills through which any given style is enacted deserve direct attention in both research and intervention design. The study further concludes that a persistent gap between parenting awareness and parenting practice, driven by economic pressure, time constraints and limited practical knowledge rather than by a lack of concern for children's education, represents a critical barrier to translating parents' good intentions into consistent academic support.

5.1. Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study recommends that schools and community organisations in Uyole Ward develop and implement structured, practically oriented parenting skill-building programmes, delivered in Kiswahili, that address communication, disciplinary consistency, guided autonomy and emotional support as distinct, teachable competencies rather than treating parenting style as a fixed attribute. Such programmes should be designed as sustained, community-based processes rather than one-off awareness sessions and should explicitly address the structural barriers, including time constraints and economic pressure, that limit parents' capacity to apply what they already know. Parents, teachers, local leaders and social welfare officers should be actively involved in the design and delivery of such programmes to strengthen home-school collaboration. Further research should examine the longitudinal development of parenting skills over time and investigate the role of gender, religion and paternal involvement in shaping the acquisition and application of parenting skills in Tanzanian peri-urban communities.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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