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Examining the Sustainability of Donor-Funded Education Programmes on Learning Outcomes: A Case Study of Selected Public Schools in Chongwe District

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Abstract

This study examined the influence and sustainability of donor-funded education programmes on teaching and learning outcomes in selected public schools in Chongwe District, Zambia. The study was aimed to (i) examine the sustainability of donor-funded education programmes in public schools (ii) evaluate their influence on student learning outcomes and (iii) investigate factors affecting their sustainability after donor withdrawal. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach involving quantitative and qualitative data collection from 50 respondents comprising teachers, learners, parents, head teachers, standards officers, deputy head teachers and District Education Board Secretary officials. Quantitative data were analysed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS), while qualitative information was analysed thematically. The findings revealed that donor-funded programmes had made important contributions to education, although their sustainability remained moderate and uneven. Regarding the first objective, only 40% of respondents indicated that donor-funded activities were sustained to a great or very great extent, while 30% reported moderate sustainability, 26% low sustainability and 4% no sustainability. Although 62% agreed that school management supported continuation, only 42% perceived that government had integrated donor initiatives into its systems, while 34% reported community support for continuation. Regarding the second objective, 64% of respondents rated the overall influence of donor-funded programmes on learner performance as high or very high. Learner participation recorded the highest improvement at 74%, followed by literacy at 68%, teacher effectiveness at 62%, attendance and examination results at 56% each, and numeracy at 52%. Furthermore, 80% agreed or strongly agreed that donor programmes improved teaching quality. Concerning the third objective, limited monitoring and accountability was the leading sustainability challenge at 22%, followed by inadequate government funding and limited learning materials and equipment at 18% each, insufficient teacher training and follow-up at 16%, poor infrastructure maintenance at 14%, and weak community participation at 12%. Lastly, the study concludes that donor-funded education programmes have positively influenced teaching and learning outcomes, but their long-term benefits are constrained by inadequate institutionalisation, financing, monitoring, maintenance and local ownership. The study recommends stronger government financing, institutional integration, continuous teacher development, effective monitoring and enhanced community participation to sustain programme benefits beyond donor withdrawal.

Keywords: Donor-Funded Education Programmes, Sustainability, Learning Outcomes, Teaching Quality, Chongwe District

1. Introduction

At global level, UNESCO, (2023) [22] reports that aid to education is estimated at approximately US$16 billion annually. Out of this, a significant proportion directed toward improving foundational learning and teacher effectiveness. These investments have contributed to notable gains in school enrolment and gender parity in many regions. Despite these efforts, global education challenges persist.

In line with this, empirical data shows that approximately 244 million children remain out of school, and nearly 70% of children in low-income countries experience learning poverty. This means that they cannot read and understand a simple text by age 10, reports World Bank, (2022) [29].

In Sub-Saharan Africa, donor funding plays an even more critical role due to limited domestic financing and competing development priorities. The region receives over 40% of global education aid. This makes it the largest beneficiary of donor-funded programmes worldwide (World Bank, 2021) [28]. These interventions have contributed to significant progress in access to education. Out of this, the primary school enrolment has risen from 52% in 1990 to over 80% by 2020 (UNESCO, 2022) [21]. In additionally, donor-funded programmes have supported teacher recruitment, curriculum reforms, and school feeding programmes, which have improved attendance and retention rates (GPE, 2022) [10].

In spite of these gains, the region continues to face deep-rooted structural challenges that undermine the quality of education. For instance, more than 30% of teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa are untrained or under qualified. Apart from that, many countries, pupil-teacher ratios exceed 50:1, leading to overcrowded classrooms and reduced instructional effectiveness (World Bank, 2022) [29]. Moreover, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to teaching and learning materials, and weak education management systems continue to hinder progress (Sachs, 2020). While donor-funded programmes have improved short-term indicators such as surge in enrolment and teacher capacity, evidence suggests that many of these gains are difficult to sustain once donor support is withdrawn (UNESCO, 2022) [21].

Coming to Zambia, donor-funded education programmes have played a significant role in shaping the development and expansion of the education sector. For instance, the government currently allocates approximately 4.5% of GDP to education, which falls below the internationally recommended benchmark of 6%. This necessitates continued reliance on donor support to bridge financing gaps (Ministry of Education, 2023) [12].

In addition, development partners such as USAID, UNICEF, and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) have supported a wide range of initiatives. This includes teacher professional development, curriculum reforms, infrastructure development, and literacy improvement programmes (UNICEF, 2022) [24]. These interventions have contributed to increased access to education, with primary school enrolment exceeding 90% and improved gender parity in school participation (Ministry of Education, 2023) [12].

Nonetheless, despite these achievements, learning outcomes remain relatively low. National assessment data indicate that only about 45% of Grade 7 learners achieve minimum literacy standards, with rural areas performing significantly below national averages (Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ), 2022). For instance, rural districts such as Chongwe face additional and more complex challenges like persistent teacher shortages, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching and learning materials, limited access to continuous professional development opportunities and among others. In many cases, schools rely heavily on donor-funded interventions to address these gaps, which creates a dependency that threatens long-term sustainability (Ministry of Education, 2023) [12]. This situation underscores the need to critically examine not only the influence of donor-funded programmes on teaching and learning outcomes but also their sustainability within the local context (OECD, 2021) [15].

1.1 General Objective

To examine the influence and sustainability of donor-funded education programmes on teaching and learning outcomes in selected public schools in Chongwe District.

1.2 Specific Objectives

1. To assess the sustainability of donor-funded education programmes in public schools.
2. To evaluate the influence of these programmes on student learning outcomes.
3. To examine the factors that affect sustainability of donor-funded education programmes after the withdrawal of donor support.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Sustainability Theory, which is based on the principle that development interventions should meet present needs while ensuring that their benefits continue for future generations. In education, sustainability involves more than providing resources; it includes strengthening institutions, developing local capacity, promoting community ownership, and aligning interventions with government policies and systems (UNESCO, 2022) [21]. The theory is relevant because many donor-funded education programmes achieve positive short-term results but face difficulties after donor support ends. Weak institutional capacity, inadequate funding, limited local ownership, and poor integration into national systems can cause programme benefits to decline over time (OECD, 2021) [15]. For example, teacher training and learning materials may improve educational outcomes initially, but these gains may not continue without ongoing professional development, funding, replacement of materials, and maintenance systems (World Bank, 2021; GPE, 2022) [28, 10]. In Zambia, sustainability is affected by challenges such as inadequate funding, limited teacher support, and weak monitoring and evaluation, particularly in rural areas. These challenges can make it difficult for schools to continue donor-supported activities independently. In Chongwe District, where schools benefit from donor interventions such as learning materials, teaching aids, infrastructure, and teacher capacity building, Sustainability Theory provides a useful framework for examining whether these benefits continue after donor support is withdrawn.

The theory therefore guides the study in examining both the short-term outcomes and long-term sustainability of donor-funded education programmes. It focuses on factors such as institutional capacity, government ownership, resource availability, policy integration, and community participation. Applying this perspective will help identify the conditions necessary for sustaining educational improvements and provide evidence for strengthening the long-term effectiveness of donor-funded interventions in Zambia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainability of Donor-Funded Education Programmes

Sustainability of donor-funded education programmes refers to the ability to maintain programme benefits after donor funding ends. Although such programmes often improve teaching quality, learner performance and school management, these gains may decline when external financial and technical support is withdrawn. The OECD

(2021) [15] and World Bank (2021) [28] highlight that many donor-supported interventions experience reduced effectiveness after funding ends, particularly where programmes are not integrated into national education systems.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, sustainability is affected by dependence on donor funding, weak institutional capacity, limited government ownership and inadequate monitoring systems. Programmes are more likely to continue when governments, teachers and communities participate actively in planning and implementation. Strong government leadership also facilitates the integration of successful interventions into education policies, budgets and existing administrative structures (World Bank, 2022; UNESCO, 2022) [29, 21]. Continuous teacher training and effective monitoring are similarly important for maintaining educational improvements after donor support ends.

In Zambia, major sustainability challenges include limited domestic financing, weak institutional integration, teacher turnover, inadequate maintenance of learning materials and limited community participation. Some donor-funded initiatives fail to transition into routine government programmes after project completion because they remain dependent on external resources (Ministry of Education Zambia, 2022) [11]. Therefore, long-term sustainability requires greater government ownership, increased domestic investment, continuous teacher development, effective monitoring and evaluation, proper maintenance of educational resources, and stronger community involvement (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2022) [21, 29].

2.2 Influence of Donor-Funded Education Programmes on Student Learning Outcomes

Donor-funded education programmes have contributed to improved student learning outcomes by supporting teacher training, provision of learning materials, curriculum reforms, learner assessment and innovative teaching approaches. Globally, these interventions have increasingly focused on improving literacy and numeracy because school attendance does not necessarily guarantee meaningful learning. For example, evidence from Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) programmes shows significant improvements in literacy and numeracy among participating learners (Banerjee *et al*., 2017) [2]. Similarly, access to textbooks, digital resources and teacher professional development has strengthened classroom instruction and learner engagement (UNESCO, 2023; Worldreader, 2022) [22, 30].

In Sub-Saharan Africa, donor-funded programmes have improved learning outcomes through teacher development, instructional materials, digital learning and school improvement initiatives. However, severe learning poverty remains a major challenge, with many children unable to read and understand simple texts despite attending school (World Bank, 2022) [29]. In Zambia, programmes such as the Catch-Up Programme, based on the TaRL approach, have recorded improvements in literacy and numeracy through differentiated instruction, continuous assessment and targeted remedial teaching (Ministry of Education, 2023) [12]. Nevertheless, national learning outcomes remain low, indicating that the positive effects of donor-supported programmes have not yet translated into system-wide improvements (ECZ, 2023) [8].

In Chongwe District, donor-funded programmes have contributed to improved teaching practices, learner participation, availability of learning materials and teacher competencies. Interventions involving learner grouping, formative assessment, remedial teaching and professional development have supported improvements in reading fluency, comprehension, numeracy and learner confidence (UNICEF Zambia, 2023; VVOB, 2021) [25, 26]. However, the effectiveness of these programmes is affected by poverty, inadequate resources, teacher shortages, uneven implementation and limited sustainability after donor funding ends. Community participation and stronger government support are therefore important for maintaining and expanding the learning gains achieved through donor-funded education programmes (Ministry of Education, 2023) [12].

2.3 Factors Influencing the Sustainability of Donor-Funded Education Programmes

The sustainability of donor-funded education programmes depends mainly on adequate financing, appropriate programme design and integration into government systems. Programmes are more likely to continue when governments gradually assume financial responsibility and incorporate programme costs into national budgets (World Bank, 2018; OECD, 2020) [27, 14]. Institutionalisation, monitoring and evaluation, capacity building and committed leadership also help maintain programme activities after donor support ends (UNESCO, 2020) [20].

In Africa and the SADC region, sustainability is affected by weak institutional capacity, limited human resources, poor governance and socioeconomic challenges. Continuous training of teachers and education managers strengthens local capacity, while community participation promotes ownership and resource mobilisation (UNICEF, 2022) [24]. Poverty, inadequate infrastructure, limited electricity and poor internet connectivity, especially in rural areas, also make it difficult to sustain donor-supported innovations (SADC, 2020) [19].

In Zambia, major challenges include inadequate domestic financing, donor dependency, weak institutional capacity and limited integration of programmes into government systems. Programmes aligned with national education policies and supported by continuous capacity building are more likely to continue after donor funding ends (Ministry of Education Zambia, 2022 [11]; Chileshe, 2020). Overall, sustainability requires government financing, strong institutions, policy alignment, capacity development and community ownership.

2.4 Literature Gap

First, there is limited research on the sustainability of donor-funded interventions after project completion. Most studies focus on achievements during implementation, with little evidence on whether these benefits are sustained after donor support ends (OECD, 2021) [15].

Second, existing studies often emphasise immediate outputs such as enrolment, teacher training, and infrastructure development, rather than long-term learning outcomes. Consequently, there is limited evidence on whether donor-funded programmes produce sustained improvements in learner achievement over time (UNICEF, 2021) [23].

Third, there is limited district-level and community-specific research on donor-funded education programmes in Zambia. Most studies focus on national or regional levels, despite the importance of local factors such as teacher availability,

school leadership, infrastructure, and community participation (MoE Zambia, 2022) [11]. This creates a contextual gap, particularly in districts such as Chongwe.

Fourth, limited attention has been given to how institutional capacity and governance influence programme sustainability at the local level. Few studies examine how district education offices and schools maintain programmes after donor support ends, creating an important gap in understanding long-term sustainability.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design complemented by a case study. In this study, the quantitative component focused on measurable aspects such as the extent of donor-funded programme implementation, availability of learning resources, and perceived changes in learner performance. While qualitative focused on deeper insights from teachers, learners, and education officials regarding the sustainability, challenges, and perceived effectiveness of these programmes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018) [5].

3.2 Target population

The target population for this study consists of teachers, school administrators, district education officials, and learners in selected public schools.

3.3 Sampling design

Purposive sampling was used to select schools that have benefited from donor-funded education programmes and key informants such as District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) officials, education standards officers, head teachers, and school administrators (Patton, 2015) [17]. Simple random sampling will be used to select teachers and learners from the selected schools, ensuring that each eligible participant has an equal chance of being included (Bryman, 2016) [4].

3.4 Sample Size determination

The study will use a sample size of 50 respondents. This will comprise, teachers, school administrators, district education officials, learners and parents. This sample size is appropriate for generating meaningful insights within the scope of a small-scale district-level study.

3.5 Data Presentation

Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires, interviews, and direct observation. Questionnaires gathered quantitative data on preparedness levels, availability of resources, and response capacity. While Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to obtain qualitative insights. secondary data was obtained from official documents such as disaster management reports, policy frameworks, and records from the ministry of education.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Qualitative Data

Qualitative data obtained through interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's (2021) [3] six-step model. It will involve data familiarisation, coding, development and review of themes, defining themes, and reporting findings.

3.6.2 Quantitative analysis

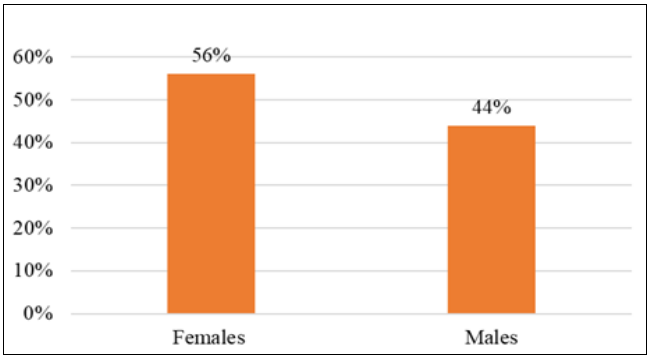
Quantitative data collected through questionnaires will be coded, entered, and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), where descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to identify patterns and trends in respondents' views regarding donor-funded education programmes (Pallant, 2020) [16].

4. Findings and Results

The presentation follows the thematic areas derived from the study's objectives.

4.1 Presentation of Results on Background Characteristics of the Respondents

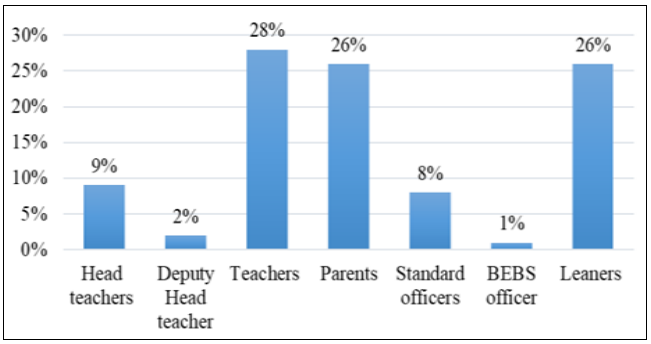
Fig 1: The findings indicate that the sample was evenly balanced by gender, with 28 females and 22 males. These findings translated into 56% and 44%, respectively.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 1: Gender of respondents

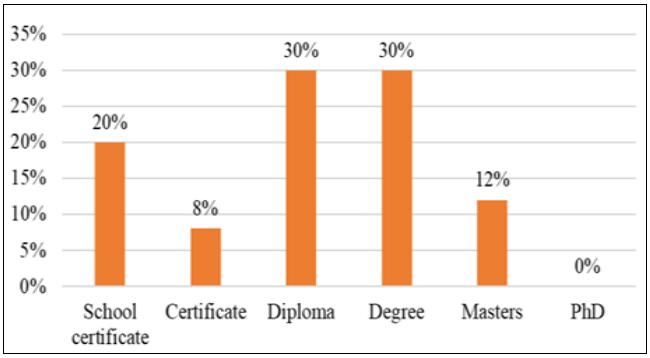
Fig 2: Teachers formed the largest respondent group at 28%, followed by Parent and learners at 26% each. Standards Officers accounted for 8%, Head Teachers 9%, DEBS Officials 1% and Deputy Head Teachers 2%.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 2: Categories of respondents

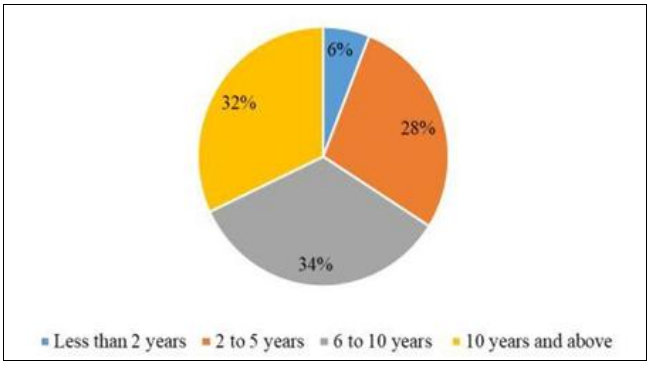
Fig 3: 30% of the respondents held a Bachelor's Degree, while another 30% held Diplomas, with 12% holding Master's Degrees and 28% held Certificates. Overall, 42.0% had at least a Bachelor's Degree, indicating that most respondents had an educational background suitable for providing informed views on programme sustainability.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 3: Highest educational qualification

Fig 4: Respondents with 6 to 10 years of association represented 34%, those with more than 10 years represented 32%, and those with 2 to 5 years represented 28%. Only 6% had less than two years of association. Thus, 66% had been associated with the school for at least six years, suggesting substantial institutional experience among respondents.

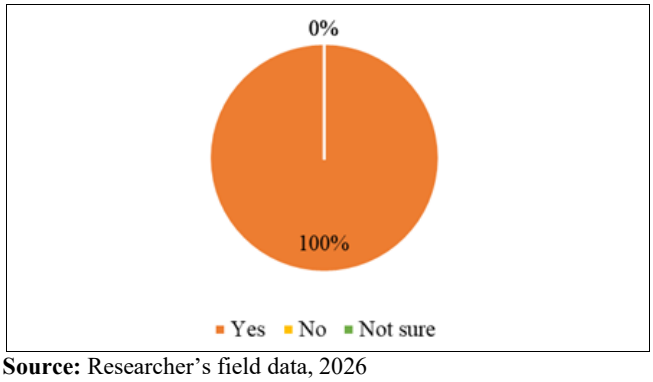


Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 4: Years of association with the school

4.2 Presentation of Results Based on Thematic Area Developed from Objective One: Sustainability of Donor-Funded Education Programmes

Fig 5 presents data on beneficiary status. All 50 respondents indicated that they had benefited from donor-funded programmes. This translates into a 100%.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 5: Beneficiary status

Table 6: The findings indicate that Water and Sanitation was the most frequently reported programme, mentioned by 74% of respondents, followed by School feeding at 64% and Numeracy at 60%. Learning Materials and Teacher Training were also widely reported at 56% and 54%, respectively. ICT Support was mentioned by 46%, Literacy by 44%, and School Infrastructure by 50%. The results show that donor support covered a broad mix of welfare, infrastructure, teaching and learning interventions.

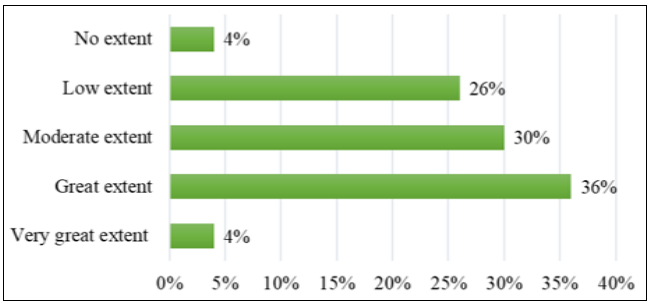
This was a multiple-response question. It allowed respondents to select more than one donor-funded programme from which they had benefited. Therefore, the percentages represent the proportion of respondents who reported benefiting from each programme and are not expected to sum to 100%. The denominator for each percentage is the total sample of 50 respondents.

Table 6: Types of donor-funded programmes from which respondents benefited

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Water and Sanitation	37	74%
School Feeding Programme	32	64%
Numeracy Programme	30	60%
Learning Materials	28	56%
Teacher Training	27	54%
School Infrastructure	25	50%
ICT Support	23	46%
Literacy Programme	22	44%

Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

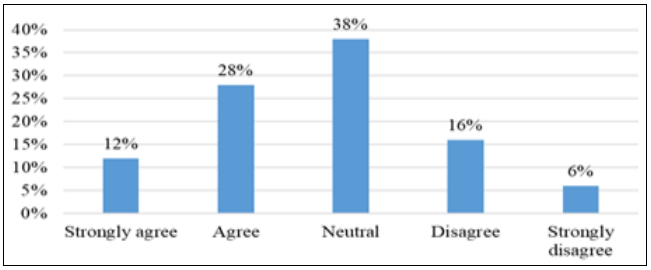
Fig 7 shows the extent to which programmes were sustained after donor support. Findings indicate that sustainability was mixed. A total of 40% reported that donor-funded activities were sustained to a great or very great extent, while 30% reported moderate sustainability. Another 26% reported low sustainability and 4% reported no sustainability. This means that 60% experienced only moderate, low or no sustainability, indicating a substantial post-donor sustainability gap.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 7: Extent to which programmes were sustained after donor support

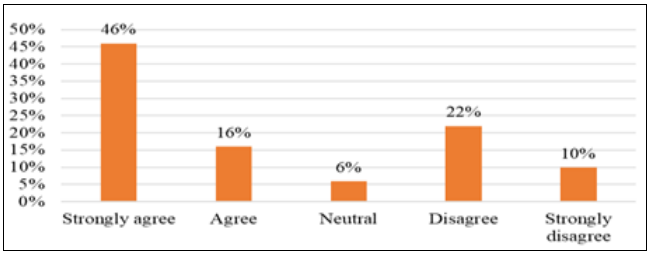
Fig 8 presents findings on the school-level continuation of donor-funded activities. Only 40% agreed or strongly agreed that the school had sustained most donor-funded activities, compared with 38% who were neutral and 22% who disagreed or strongly disagreed.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 8: School-level continuation of donor-funded activities

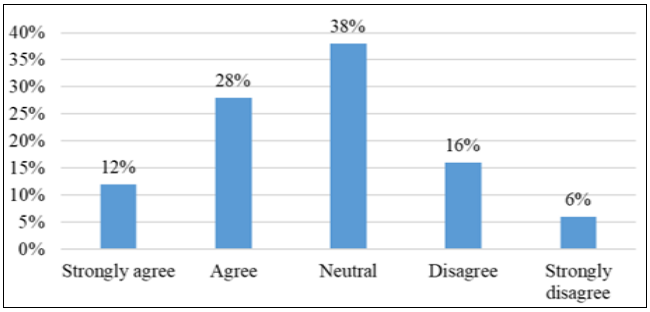
Fig 9 presents information on the management support for continuation of donor funded programmes after donor withdraw. Management support was relatively strong. 62% agreed or strongly agreed that management supports continuation. While another 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed with 6% remaining neutral.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 9: Management support for continuation

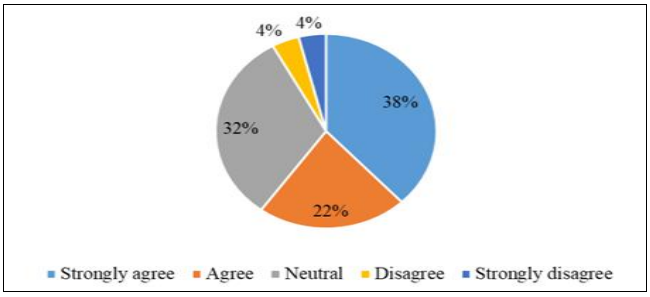
Fig 10 presents information on school level continuation of donor funded activities after donor withdraw. 40% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that management supports continuation of donor funded activities. While another 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed with 38% remaining neutral.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 10: School-level continuation of donor-funded activities

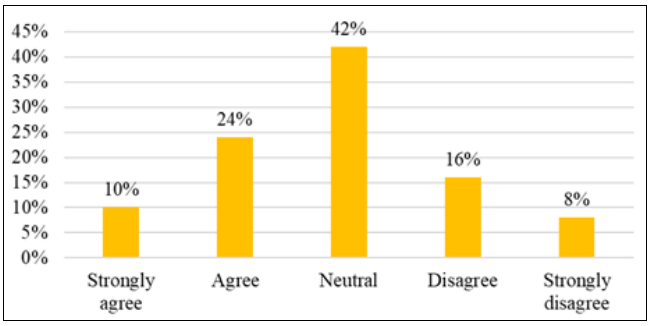
Fig 11 presents findings on continued application of teacher training knowledge. Three-fifths of respondents 60% agreed or strongly agreed that teachers continued applying knowledge gained through donor-funded training.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 11: Continued application of teacher training knowledge

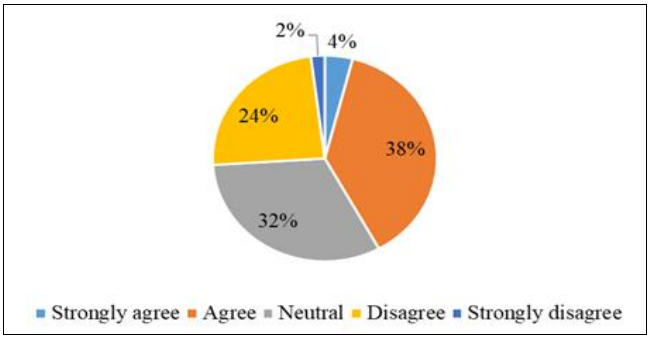
Fig 12 presents findings on community support after donor withdraw. Community support was less pronounced than management support. Only 34% agreed or strongly agreed that communities support continuation, while 42% were neutral and 24% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This indicates that community ownership remains a relatively weak area for sustaining donor-funded education interventions.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 12: Community support for continuation

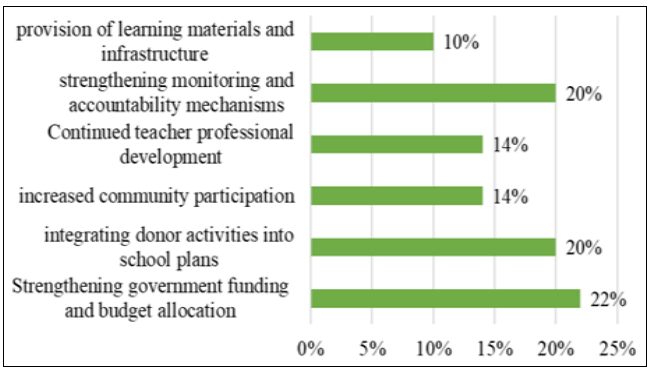
Fig 13 presents findings on Government integration of donor initiatives after donor withdraw. Government integration received a mixed assessment. Although 42% agreed or strongly agreed that government had integrated donor initiatives, 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 26% were neutral.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 13: Government integration of donor initiatives

Fig 14 presents findings on measures proposed by respondents to strengthen sustainability. Strengthening government funding and budget allocation was the most frequently proposed measure accounting for 22%, followed by integrating donor activities into school plans scoring 20% and strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms accounting for 20%. Continued teacher professional development and increased community participation each accounted for 14%, while provision of learning materials and infrastructure accounted for 10%. The pattern shows that respondents view financial, institutional and accountability mechanisms as central to sustainability.

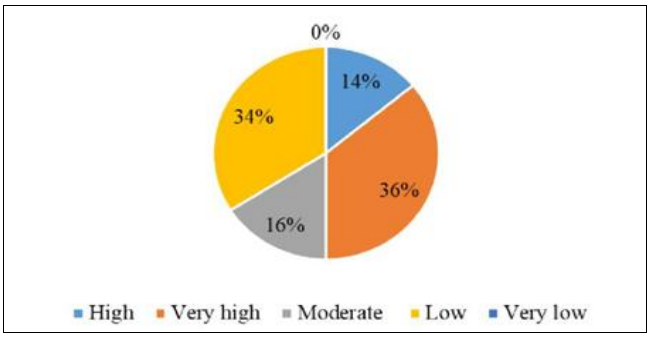


Source: Primary data, 2026

Fig 14: Measures proposed by respondents to strengthen sustainability

4.3 Presentation of Results Based on Thematic Area Developed from Objective Two: Influence of Donor-Funded Programmes on Learning Outcomes

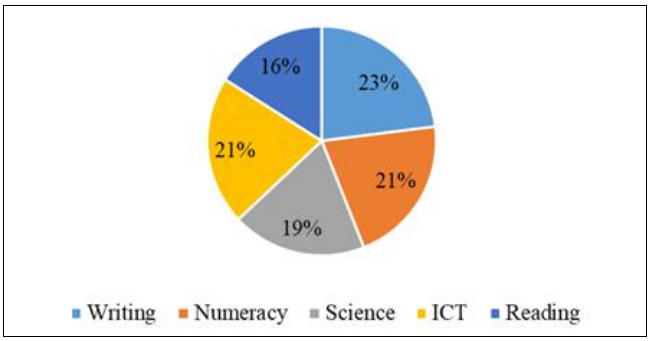
Fig 15 presents data on overall influence on learner performance. The perceived influence on learner performance was generally positive: 50.0% rated the influence as high and 14.0% as very high. Thus, 64.0% perceived a high or very high influence, compared with 34.0% who rated it moderate or low.



Source: Primary data, 2026

Fig 15: Overall influence on learner performance

Fig 16 presents data on the overall on how donor funded programmes improved learning areas. Writing was the most frequently reported improved learning area at 23%, followed by Numeracy at 21%, Science at 19%, ICT at 21% and Reading at 16%.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 16: Learning areas improved

Table 17 presents data on the outcomes rated as improved to a great or very great extent. The findings indicate that learner participation recorded the highest proportion of respondents, with 74%, indicating that it improved to a great or very great extent. This was followed by literacy, reported at 68%. Learner attendance and examination results each accounted for 56%, while teacher effectiveness also accounted for 62%. Numeracy recorded the lowest proportion, with 52%.

Table 17: Outcomes rated as improved to a great or very great extent

Response	Frequency	Percentage
A. Learner attendance	28	56%
B. Participation	37	74%
C. Literacy	34	68%
D. Numeracy	26	52%
E. Examination results	28	56%
F. Teacher effectiveness	31	62%

Source: Primary data, 2026

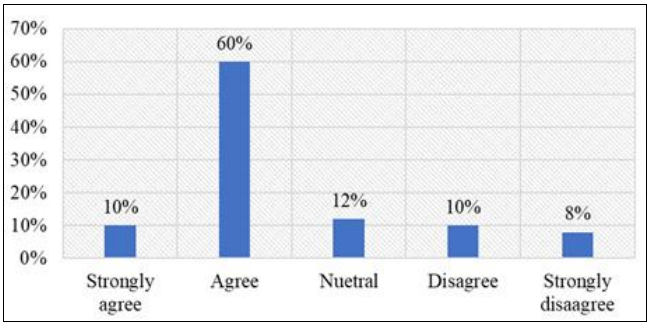
On intervention with the greatest perceived impact the findings indicate that respondents perceived ICT Support as the intervention that had the greatest impact on educational outcomes. ICT Support was selected by 10 respondents making it the most highly rated intervention.

School feeding programme and Learning materials were each identified by 9 respondents, making them the second most highly perceived interventions. The relatively strong rating for school feeding indicates the importance of addressing learners' basic welfare needs as a foundation for effective participation in education.

Literacy programmes and water and sanitation were each identified by 5 respondents. The rating for literacy programmes indicates that targeted interventions aimed at strengthening reading and writing skills were perceived to have made a meaningful contribution to learning outcomes. Water and sanitation interventions, although rated lower than ICT, school feeding and learning materials, were still considered important. Adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities can create a healthier and more conducive school environment, potentially reducing disruptions associated with poor sanitation and supporting regular school attendance.

School Infrastructure, Numeracy Programmes and Teacher Training were the least proposed. Although these interventions recorded the lowest individual percentages, their inclusion among the interventions perceived to have the greatest impact demonstrates that respondents recognised their contribution to educational development. Improved infrastructure can provide a more suitable learning environment, while numeracy programmes can address specific learning difficulties in mathematics and related competencies. Teacher training can strengthen pedagogical skills and improve teachers' capacity to deliver lessons effectively.

Fig 18 presents data on whether donor programmes and improved teaching quality. A strong majority, 80.0%, agreed or strongly agreed that donor programmes improved teaching quality, while 12.0% were neutral and only 8.0% disagreed.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 18: Perceived improvement in teaching quality

4.4 Presentation of Results Based on Thematic Area Developed from Objective Three: Factors Affecting Sustainability after Donor Withdrawal

The findings indicate that several challenges affected the sustainability of donor-funded education programmes after the withdrawal of donor support. Limited monitoring and accountability emerged as the most frequently identified challenge, accounting for 22% of the responses. This finding suggests that inadequate monitoring mechanisms may make

it difficult for schools and education authorities to track whether donor-funded activities continue to operate effectively after external funding ends. Weak accountability may also result in poor utilisation of available resources, limited follow-up of programme activities and insufficient identification of emerging problems. Without effective monitoring and accountability structures, schools may struggle to maintain the standards and practices established during the donor-support period.

Inadequate government funding after donor withdrawal was identified by 18% of respondents and represents another major challenge to sustainability. Many donor-funded programmes may depend heavily on external financial resources for the procurement of learning materials, maintenance of infrastructure, teacher development and implementation of educational activities. When donors withdraw, insufficient government funding can create a financial gap that prevents schools from continuing these activities at the same level. This finding suggests that sustainability requires greater integration of donor-supported programmes into government budgets and education-sector financing frameworks before donor funding comes to an end.

Similarly, limited learning materials and equipment accounted for 18% of the responses. The availability of textbooks, teaching aids, ICT equipment, stationery and other learning resources is essential for maintaining improvements achieved through donor-funded programmes. When these resources are not replaced or maintained after donor withdrawal, teachers may be unable to continue using the approaches and practices introduced through the programmes. The finding therefore suggests that sustainability is not only dependent on financial resources but also on the establishment of reliable systems for procuring, replacing and maintaining educational materials and equipment.

Insufficient teacher training and follow-up was reported by 16% of respondents. This indicates that although teachers may receive training during donor-funded programmes, the benefits of such training can decline if there is no continued professional development, mentoring or follow-up support. Teachers operate in changing educational environments and require opportunities to refresh their knowledge, develop new skills and address emerging classroom challenges. The absence of continuous training may therefore reduce the likelihood that teachers will maintain donor-supported teaching practices after the programme ends. This finding highlights the need to incorporate teacher professional development into regular government and school planning rather than treating it as an activity that ends with donor funding.

Poor maintenance of infrastructure, reported by 14% of respondents, was another important sustainability challenge. Donor-funded programmes may provide classrooms, sanitation facilities, ICT equipment, water systems and other physical infrastructure, but these investments require regular maintenance and financial resources. When responsibility for maintenance is not clearly established, infrastructure can deteriorate over time, reducing the long-term benefits of the initial investment. The finding therefore emphasises the importance of developing maintenance plans, allocating resources for repairs and assigning clear responsibilities to schools, communities and government authorities.

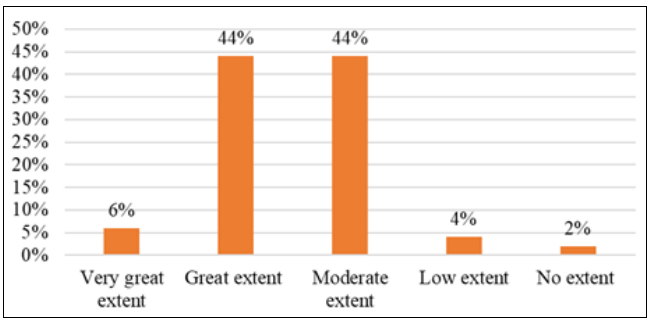
Finally, weak community participation was identified by 12% of respondents. Community involvement is important because local communities can contribute to the protection, maintenance and continued use of educational facilities and programmes. Where communities are not adequately involved in programme planning and implementation, there may be limited ownership of donor-funded initiatives. This can increase dependence on external organisations and make it difficult for communities to assume responsibility once donor support ends. Strengthening community participation through school committees, parent-teacher associations and other local structures can therefore contribute to greater ownership and sustainability. The said challenges are summarised as follows.

Table 19: Perceived improvement in teaching quality

Response	Frequency	Percentage
A. Limited monitoring and accountability	11	22.0%
B. Inadequate government funding after donor withdrawal	9	18.0%
C. Limited learning materials and equipment	9	18.0%
D. Insufficient teacher training and follow-up	8	16.0%
E. Poor maintenance of infrastructure	7	14.0%
F. Weak community participation	6	12.0%

Source: Compiled by the researcher, 2026.

Fig 20 presents data on the extent to which challenges affect sustainability. Findings reveal that challenges were considered substantial. For instance, 50% reported that challenges affect sustainability to a great or very great extent, while 44% reported a moderate extent. Only 6% reported low or no extent. Therefore, 94% perceived at least a moderate effect of challenges on sustainability.



Source: Primary data, 2026

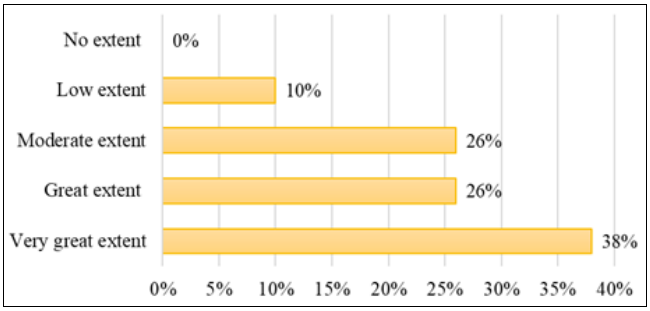
Fig 20: Extent to which challenges affect sustainability

On the Influence of Community Participation and Government Support on Sustainability. The findings indicate that community participation and government support play an important role in sustaining donor-funded education programmes after donor withdrawal. Community participation promotes local ownership, accountability and commitment, as communities are more likely to protect and support programmes they have been involved in implementing. Similarly, government support is essential for providing financial resources, integrating donor-funded activities into existing education systems and ensuring continued technical and institutional support.

However, the findings suggest that government financial support remains a challenge, particularly after donor funding ends. Without adequate government financing, schools may struggle to maintain infrastructure, provide learning

materials and continue teacher development activities. Therefore, sustainability requires stronger collaboration between government, schools and communities, with government providing consistent financial and institutional support while communities contribute through participation, monitoring and local ownership. Overall, stronger community involvement combined with sustained government commitment can significantly improve the likelihood that donor-funded education programmes will continue producing benefits after donor support has ended.

Fig 21 presents information on the influence of community participation and government support. Findings indicate that a combined 64% rated the influence of community participation and government support as great or very great, while 26% rated it moderate. Only 10% reported low influence.



Source: Researcher's field data, 2026

Fig 21: Influence of community participation and government support

Arising from the challenges noted above the respondents gave the following recommendations for improving sustainability. The leading recommendation, mentioned by 36% of respondents, was the need for sustainable government funding, adequate learning materials and stronger community participation. This recommendation reflects the view that donor-funded programmes are unlikely to remain effective after donor withdrawal unless government assumes greater responsibility for financing essential educational activities. Respondents also emphasised the continued availability of textbooks, teaching materials, ICT equipment and other resources required to maintain the gains achieved during donor-supported implementation. Stronger community participation was considered equally important because it can promote local ownership, accountability and collective responsibility for maintaining programme activities and resources.

A further 24% of respondents recommended stronger coordination among government, schools and communities, together with proper planning for sustainability before donor withdrawal. This suggests that sustainability should not be treated as an issue that arises only when donor funding ends. Instead, sustainability measures should be incorporated into programme design from the beginning, with clear responsibilities assigned to government institutions, schools and community structures. Effective coordination can also reduce duplication of activities, improve the use of available resources and ensure that donor-supported interventions are gradually incorporated into existing education systems.

Another 22% of respondents prioritised government financing, community ownership and continued teacher development. The emphasis on teacher development indicates that maintaining the skills and knowledge acquired through donor-funded training is essential for long-term programme benefits. Continuous professional development, mentoring and follow-up can enable teachers to sustain improved teaching practices even after external technical support has ended. At the same time, community ownership can help ensure that programmes remain relevant to local needs and that communities continue supporting educational activities.

Lastly, 18% of respondents emphasised the importance of integrating donor-funded activities into school plans and budgets, supported by effective monitoring and maintenance arrangements. This recommendation highlights the importance of institutionalising donor interventions rather than operating them as separate projects. Incorporating activities into annual school plans and budgets can increase their likelihood of receiving continued financial and administrative support. Regular monitoring can also help identify challenges early, while maintenance arrangements can protect infrastructure, equipment and other resources established through donor support.

4.5 Discussion of Results

The findings revealed that donor-funded educational programmes have contributed positively to education in Chongwe District, although their sustainability remains a challenge. All respondents reported benefiting from donor-funded programmes covering areas such as school feeding, water and sanitation, learning materials, teacher training, infrastructure, ICT and literacy. However, only 40% indicated that the programmes were sustained to a great or very great extent, while 60% reported moderate, low or no sustainability. This finding is consistent with OECD (2021) [15], which explains that development interventions can produce positive results during implementation but may experience declining effectiveness when external support is withdrawn. Similarly, UNESCO (2022) [21] argues that donor-funded education programmes are more sustainable when they are integrated into government systems, policies and budgets. Therefore, the low sustainability reported in the study suggests that some donor interventions had not been sufficiently institutionalised within existing education structures.

The study further established that school management played an important role in supporting programme continuation, with 62% of respondents indicating that school management supported donor-funded programmes. This finding is consistent with World Bank (2022) [29], which identifies leadership and institutional commitment as important factors in sustaining donor-supported education initiatives. However, the study also found that management support alone was insufficient because overall sustainability remained at only 40%. This suggests that school leadership needs to be complemented by government financing, monitoring, technical support and policy integration. The finding therefore agrees with the literature that sustainability requires an enabling institutional environment rather than depending only on individual school managers.

Teacher development was another important finding. Although 80% of respondents reported that donor-funded programmes improved teaching quality, only 60% indicated that teachers continued applying knowledge acquired through donor-funded training. This finding is consistent with World Bank (2021) [28] and UNESCO (2022) [21], who argue that the benefits of teacher training may decline when

teachers do not receive continuous professional development, mentoring and follow-up support. The difference between the 80% reporting improved teaching quality and the 60% reporting continued application of acquired knowledge therefore suggests that donor-funded training was effective initially, but its long-term impact depends on continued institutional support.

The findings also showed that donor-funded programmes positively influenced learner outcomes. About 64% of respondents rated the overall influence of donor-funded programmes on learner performance as high or very high. This is consistent with UNESCO (2023) [22], which emphasises that donor-funded education interventions increasingly focus on improving the quality of learning through teacher development, instructional approaches and learner-support interventions. The finding therefore indicates that donor support contributed not only to access to education but also to improvements in the learning process.

Learner participation was another area where the programmes demonstrated a positive influence, with 74% of respondents reporting improvement to a great or very great extent. This finding is consistent with GPE (2022) [10], which indicates that interventions such as school feeding, learning materials and supportive learning environments can improve attendance, participation and retention. The finding suggests that donor-funded programmes influenced learning indirectly as well as directly, because interventions addressing learners' welfare and school conditions can create an environment that encourages regular participation.

The study also found that 68% of respondents reported substantial improvement in literacy. This finding agrees with Worldreader (2022) [30], which emphasises the importance of access to reading materials, teacher support and appropriate literacy interventions in improving vocabulary, comprehension and learner motivation. It is also consistent with Banerjee *et al*. (2017) [2], who demonstrated that structured interventions based on learners' actual learning levels can improve literacy and numeracy. The findings therefore support the view that targeted donor-funded literacy interventions can contribute to improvements in learners' reading and related competencies.

The study further established that 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that donor-funded programmes improved teaching quality. This finding is consistent with UNESCO (2023) [22], which identifies teachers as an important determinant of learner achievement and highlights the role of professional development, instructional methods and classroom management in strengthening teaching quality. It also agrees with VVOB (2021) [26], which identifies differentiated instruction, formative assessment, learner-centred teaching and competency-based approaches as mechanisms for strengthening instructional quality. The findings therefore provide support for the argument that investment in teachers is an important pathway through which donor-funded programmes influence learner outcomes.

However, sustainability challenges were widespread, with 94% of respondents indicating that the identified challenges affected programme continuation to at least a moderate extent. Limited monitoring and accountability emerged as the most prominent challenge. This finding is consistent with UNESCO (2020) [20], which emphasises monitoring and evaluation as important for accountability, organisational learning and evidence-based decision-making. Weak monitoring can make it difficult to determine whether donor-funded activities are continuing effectively and whether resources are being properly utilised. The finding therefore suggests that stronger monitoring systems are necessary to protect programme gains after donor support ends.

Inadequate government funding and limited learning materials and equipment were each identified by 18% of respondents. These findings are consistent with World Bank (2018) [27], which argues that programmes integrated into national budgets are more likely to be sustained, and OECD (2020) [14], which emphasises the importance of planning for domestic financing before donor funding ends. Similarly, GPE (2022) [10] notes that educational resources require mechanisms for replenishment and maintenance if their benefits are to continue. The findings therefore demonstrate that sustainability requires government to progressively assume responsibility for recurrent costs, resources and maintenance while donor programmes are still being implemented.

Insufficient teacher training and follow-up was identified by 16% of respondents, while poor infrastructure maintenance accounted for 14%. These findings are consistent with UNESCO (2022) [21] and World Bank (2021) [28], who emphasise continuous teacher development, mentoring and professional support as necessary for maintaining improvements in teaching. The finding on infrastructure maintenance also supports the literature, which shows that donor-funded infrastructure can deteriorate when clear maintenance responsibilities and adequate resources are not established. Therefore, sustainability requires both continued human-capacity development and proper maintenance of physical resources.

Finally, weak community participation was identified by 12% of respondents, while only 34% indicated that communities supported the continuation of donor-funded programmes. This finding is consistent with GPE (2020) [9], which argues that limited stakeholder participation can weaken ownership and reduce the likelihood of programme continuation. It also agrees with UNICEF Zambia (2023) [25], which emphasises community participation as important for accountability, ownership and long-term sustainability. Furthermore, only 42% reported that government had integrated donor initiatives into existing systems, supporting UNESCO's (2022) [21] argument that programmes operating through parallel structures can weaken government ownership.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that donor-funded education programmes have made a meaningful contribution to improving teaching and learning outcomes in selected public schools in Chongwe District. ICT support, school feeding programme and learning materials perceived as among the most influential interventions. However, despite these positive outcomes, the sustainability of donor-funded programmes after donor withdrawal remains moderate and uneven. The findings show that positive programme outcomes during donor implementation do not automatically guarantee their continuation once external support ends.

The study further concludes that sustainable education programmes require stronger government ownership, adequate domestic financing, effective monitoring and accountability, and continuous teacher development. It also

requires maintenance of learning materials, infrastructure, and meaningful community participation. In contrast, the major sustainability challenges identified include, limited monitoring and accountability, inadequate government funding, and insufficient learning materials and equipment. Other challenges include inadequate teacher training and follow-up, poor infrastructure maintenance and weak community participation. This demonstrate that sustainability is a shared responsibility.

Finally, respondents suggest that donor-funded programmes should be progressively integrated into government and school plans and budgets, while communities should be empowered to take greater ownership.

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