



JASLIKA

Uptake of E-learning by Catholic Scholars in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda - A Rapid Inquiry

SUMMARY REPORT

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About **JASLIKA**



Founded in 2016, Jaslika is a Nairobi-based consulting firm and a foundation that combines professionalism and passion to deliver quality services and inspire change. It offers advisory, training and research services focusing on education, child rights, and environmental sectors to provide sustainable solutions that permeate cultural and generational boundaries. Since its formation, Jaslika has been working at the intersection of education and child protection focusing on issues of equity, equality and social justice.

The Jaslika emblem reflects our ethos. Designed as concentric circles, it is inspired by traditional African cosmology denoting wholism, something that has no beginning nor an end, signifying the interconnectedness of life and humanity and expressing the idea of perpetuity, continuity and infinity. The dotted lines radiating from the core of the emblem draw attention to connecting the dots, connecting generations and connecting communities. It encapsulates our conceptualisation of the indivisibility of values, and our concern with transforming society in and through a value-based education system that is connected, interdependent and promotes the safety and well-being of the whole child.



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASEC	African Sisters Education Collaborative
CSP	Catholic Scholarship Programme
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-depth Interview
KII	Key Informant Interview
MAXQDA 2022	A qualitative research tool that can be used for coding and analysing source materials.
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NGLP	New Generation Leadership Programme
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

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01 INTRODUCTION

In December 2021, Porticus Africa commissioned Nairobi-based Jaslika to conduct a rapid inquiry on the uptake of e-learning by religious scholars participating in the New Generation Leadership Programme (NGLP) in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The study was consultative and participatory. Through the use of diverse but complementary data collection methodologies, the views of 358 scholars (70% female) and other stakeholders were collected, focusing on their perceptions and experiences of the scholarship programme. The main aim of the study was to identify actionable recommendations for improving a leadership programme that is relevant, impactful, sustainable and COVID-19 safe.

The data highlights challenges to the implementation of the NGLP caused by the abrupt and swift spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges that are as much infrastructural and economic as they are attitudinal. The data also spotlights the opportunities created for positive changes by the pandemic - to an acceptance of remote learning - demonstrating a mindshift in how learning is perceived and the possibilities for wall-less classrooms, expansion of reach and new ways of delivering content. Our findings reflect the creativity and resilience of many of the study participants to cope and adapt to the new social and economic realities.

This summary report presents findings of the study, organised around four main questions:

1. What did we do? Who did we talk to?
2. What did we find?
3. What did we learn?
4. What should be done moving forward?

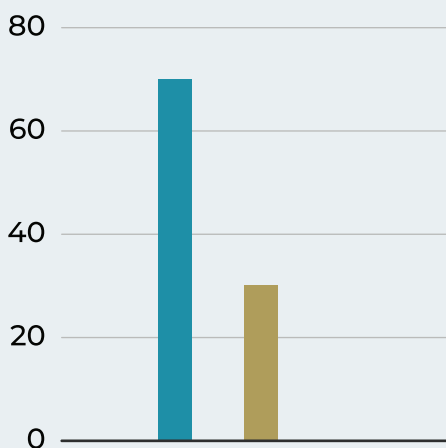
02 WHAT DID WE DO? WHO DID WE TALK TO?

We collected data using a mixed method approach. Our choice of methods enabled us to place the NGLP scholars at the centre of the data collection and analysis process. Capturing their perspectives using a semi-structured online survey questionnaire, in depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Key informant interviews were conducted and consultative meetings held with other stakeholders including NGLP Board members and NGLP Executive Secretary, host university representatives, service providers, course facilitators/instructors, Superiors of the Congregations, and alumni in each of the three programme countries.

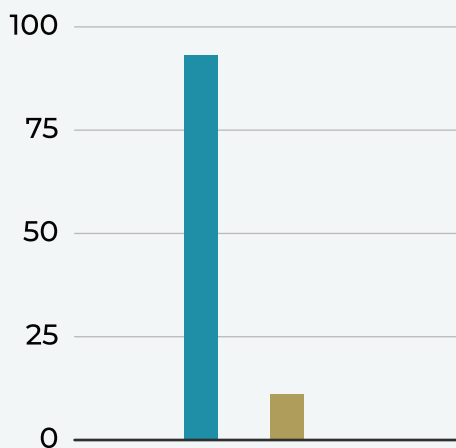
The survey was administered on-line using scholars' WhatsApp groups. The qualitative consultations and interviews were partly conducted using video conferencing applications like Google Meet, Zoom and occasionally Skype. This was done for study participants who could not be reached physically because of distance, preference of the interviewees and/or to minimise risk of exposure to COVID-19 infection. However, where possible, some of the interviews and all FGDs were done in person. The presence of dedicated country teams facilitated the collection of in-person data. Through these combined methods we reached out to 358 religious scholars and other purposively selected stakeholders between mid-December 2021 and February 2022.

Figure 1. Study Participants' Profile

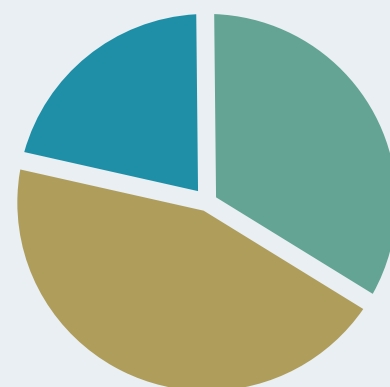
● FEMALE
● MALE



● RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS
● OTHERS



● UGANDA 20.9 %
● TANZANIA 44.4 %
● KENYA 34.6 %



An analysis of the profile of study participants (see figure 1) indicates that

- The overwhelming majority were religious scholars (90%);
- There were more female than male participants (over 70%); and
- There were a proportionately higher number of participants from Tanzania.

The study process began in December 2021 and ended in July 2022 with the dissemination of the reports. The process consisted of six iterative steps as illustrated by figure 2.

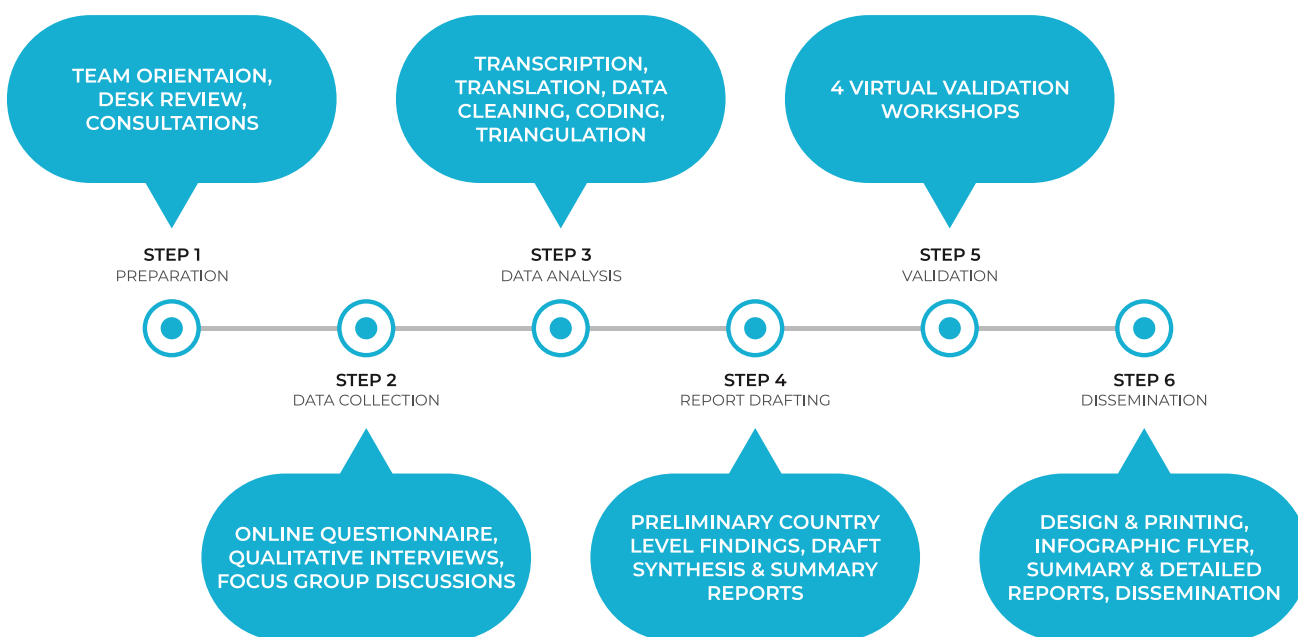


Figure 2. The 6-step study process

03 WHAT DID WE FIND?

A. Perceptions and Barriers

Scholars' voices on e-learning

COVID-19 has brought new ideas of learning, that learning does not need a classroom setup, you can learn as long as you're able to communicate with facilitators online. Even at home people can learn, even in the office people can learn, this modality of learning does not need a classroom setting. The big difference to me is that online learning needs much knowledge on how you can operate those devices, it needs a strong internet so that you can manage to communicate between you and supervisor, so if you don't have enough knowledge on how to operate the devices it brings a lot of challenges. Sometimes you can fail to get full content if you don't have knowledge on how to operate. And sometime incur a lot of cost rather than physical learning. (TZ/035/FGD/RS/F)

This online you really don't take so many things seriously, you lose that touch with your peers with your colleagues but it's not of their making of course, it's COVID that brought that. Physical interaction creates that bonding and relationship amongst the people that even you know, at least I know each and every one of my cohort, that is 2019 but it is because we were meeting physically. During the COVID period, this was not possible and reduced the rate of peer learning.

(UG/028/IDI/LP/M)

This section throws the spotlight on answering the following three key questions:

1. What has been the impact of Covid-19 on the Porticus scholarship programme?
2. What are the perceptions of scholars on various online learning modalities including e-learning?
3. What are the major reasons for the low uptake of online lessons by religious scholars?

Impact of COVID-19 on the NGLP

The COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures put in place by governments worldwide had an unprecedented impact on teaching and learning processes and outcomes, bringing with it significant disruptions to the provision of education across the globe. The East African region was no exception; here too, it increased learning losses and widened pre-existing inequalities in and through education. It caught governments and institutions of higher learning, especially in the global south, unawares. Institutions were forced to adapt to the new realities; many scrambled to adopt online learning delivery systems and to find alternatives to physical, face-to-face learning or risk obsolescence. While there were instances where the migration to on-line delivery modes were successful, study participants pointed out that this was not always the case in the institutions that they were enrolled in. Because the intention of religious scholars was to acquire higher education qualifications (postgraduate, undergraduate, diploma or certificate levels) in fields of their choice, the teaching-learning environments in the universities and other institutions that they joined was critical and affected learning outcomes, including in the mandatory NGLP courses.



Figure 3. NGLP Twin Components

Figure 3 illustrates the twin components of the NGLP, namely, (a) the regular courses of study (Masters, undergraduate degree, diploma and certificate) that enables scholars to upgrade their academic qualifications; and (b) the mandatory courses, which are designed to prepare them for their leadership roles in the service of the Catholic Church. There’s a symbiotic relationship between the two components: The scholars have to be nominated by their congregations for enrolment into an appropriate course of their choice. Once they are accepted as a scholar, they must maintain a minimum grade (B+) in their course of study in order to benefit fully from the scholarship, risking reduction in the amount and even complete withdrawal of support if they fail to do so. Therefore, we considered it essential to assess the effectiveness of e-learning in the delivery of the mandatory courses within the context of the wider learning needs of the scholars. With the above in mind, we explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Catholic scholarship programme at three levels, that is, institutional, programmatic and individual. Table 1 summarises the effects at these different levels as communicated by the study participants.

Table 1: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the religious scholars

Level	Description
Institutional level impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions of higher learning along with basic education institutions closed down and reopened in phases. • Lack of institutional readiness to handle online classes, at the onset of COVID-19 caused delays in resumption of online lessons. • Some institutions of higher learning had better Internet infrastructure, and were thus able to make the transition to online learning earlier than others. • Poor planning for lessons, since there was no timetable provided.
Programme level impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital divide between public and private institutions that existed at the start of the pandemic, affected the access of scholars to on-line learning. • The programme, like the education sector as a whole, was caught unprepared to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 on learning. • Programme overlap and rescheduling of the Servant Leadership Course. • Challenges in implementing courses online.
Impact at individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delays in completion of the course and consequent deferment of their graduation. • Rescheduling and staggering of the mandatory courses. • Perception that performance had declined as a result of online learning attributed largely to the lack of discussion groups, non-engaging facilitators, little or no feedback, connectivity and other technology related challenges. • Psychosocial trauma and constant fear of infection.

Scholars' perceptions of e-learning

Among the four mandatory CSP courses, Servant Leadership was the only one that had migrated fully to on-line instruction. Executive Management, which included a brief unit on IT, was taught offline as was Child Protection and Safeguarding. The Catholic Social Teaching was still in the design stage, and thus was not yet offered in Kenya and Uganda at the time we did the study. However, in Tanzania, the 3-day Child Protection workshop was extended to two additional days to enable scholars to provide room for Catholic Social Teaching. It is important to note that though Executive Management and Child Protection were offered physically, sometimes lecturers/course facilitators used remote methods because of the restrictions on accessing large groups physically. These were not done systematically and were more of "screen teaching", that is lecturing on a video conferencing platform without adapting the pedagogy to interactive remote learning strategies.

Though three in four scholars (73%) participating in the quantitative survey identified online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic as the most effective modality for delivering learning, there were divergent voices that pointed out the downside of doing so. Many felt that there was no escape from fully embracing internet-based technologies as tools for advancing learning. There were others who argued for physical classes. They were adamant that some courses like Child Protection require the human touch and thus teaching in the old-fashioned way was more appropriate for achieving the intended academic goals. However, the hybrid/blended model appealed to many, including some of those rooting for in-person learning. They agreed that the

application of the blended/hybrid model of learning was feasible provided some basic barriers to the uptake of e-learning by the scholars were addressed.

Table 2 summarises the pros and cons of each mode of learning delivery as argued by study participants. On the whole, the blended/hybrid model emerged from the data as the most preferred option across all three countries as it combines the strengths of in-person delivery with the advantages of online learning.

Table 2. Pros and cons of different options for delivery of NGLP courses

Modality	Pros	Cons
In-person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological benefits/satisfaction of interacting and socialising with peers • Quality engagement with lecturers during class • Continued engagement with lecturers after class (allows follow-ups, seeking clarifications) • Some content better suited to in-person delivery • Mandatory courses require physical presence to put theory into practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of contracting COVID-19 or other infectious diseases high • Time wasted in traffic jams commuting to and from institutions • Cost of transport for commuters and accommodation for residents (for the regular courses of study) • The human touch missing
E-learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying abreast of an increasingly tech world • Outreach greater • Enables social and professional networks beyond one's immediate boundaries • Gives access to latest knowledge and development in one's chosen field of study • Opens one's horizon in terms of knowledge, skills and connections • Saves time as one does not have to navigate through traffic jams in urban areas in particular • Saves money as neither commuting nor accommodation required as one can join in from home or work or anywhere else • Assures safety during pandemics like COVID 19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires appropriate internet and stable infrastructure • Cost to scholars/congregations may be high due to purchase of 'appropriate' devices and their maintenance • Cost of data bundles or internet connections scholars • Little or no positive interaction with lecturers/course facilitators
Hybrid/ Blended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiates students gently into online modes of learning • Strikes a balance between online and in-person instruction • Addresses the psychosocial needs of scholars • Scholars are able to benefit from most of the advantages of online learning, including doing research • Offers more scheduling flexibility to course facilitators and scholars • Students can watch the lectures at their own time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires lecturers to have strong organisational skills • Requires lecturers to be familiar with both physical and virtual teaching and learning • Requires scholars to have good time management skills • Needs good internet infrastructure and facilities • There is less interaction with lecturers and peers than in-person classes

Barriers to uptake of e-learning

The online survey revealed barriers to the uptake of e-learning from the perspective of the scholars. Figure 4 summarises the findings of the online survey. Internet-related barriers, which were identified by the vast majority of survey respondents, also emerged in the qualitative data as a key barrier across all three countries in focus. However, the qualitative data while confirming similar barriers as the survey, helped to unpack and interpret the survey responses, while uncovering hidden yet sociologically significant insights into the matter. The qualitative data went beyond pointing to the lack of access (no coverage), as well as slow and unstable internet to safety concerns arising from having “to be outside the buildings” especially at night and travelling long distances to access internet networks. Additional internet related barriers included inadequate bandwidth causing dropping of video calls, unclear videos and generally poor call quality that affected their e-learning experiences. The data drew attention to the inequities between institutions in which scholars were enrolled in relation to access to internet connectivity, with a few scholars reporting the absence of WiFi within their institutions. Closely related to the issue of the internet was frequent power outages (11%), which often disrupted internet connectivity, leading to loss of class time, delays in handing in assignments and doing tests.

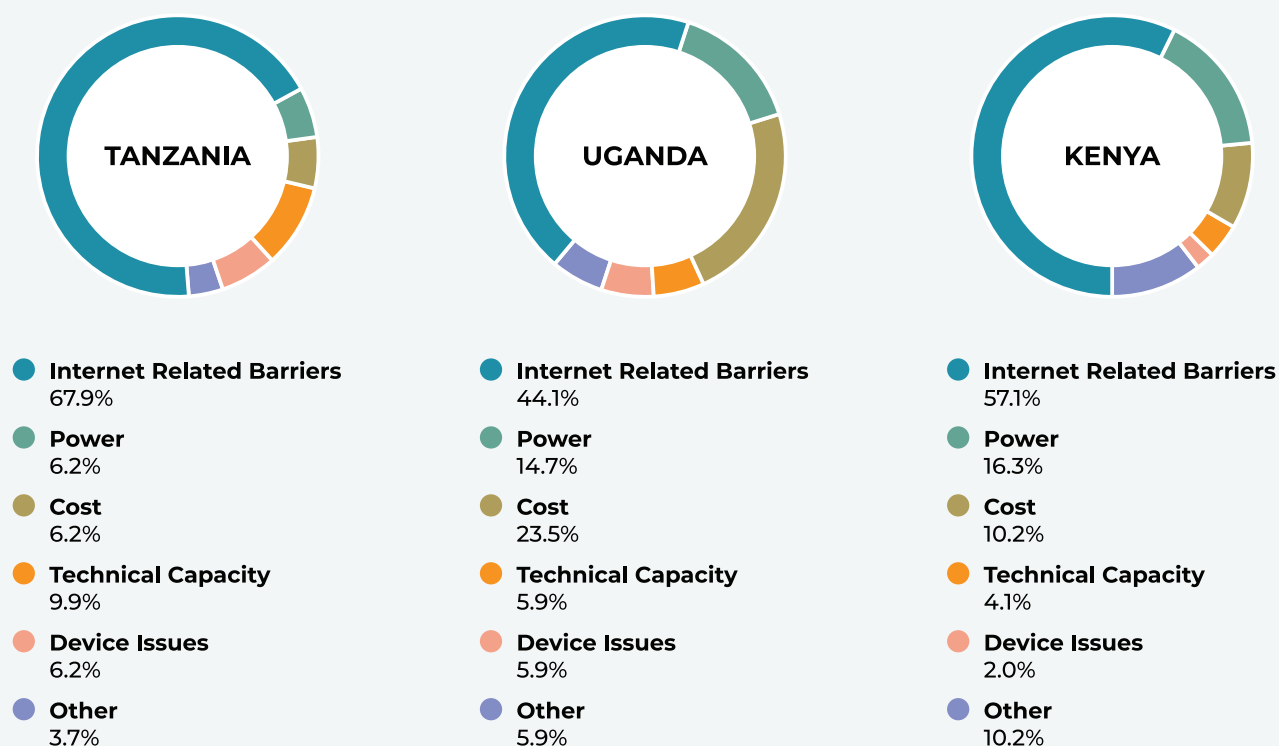


Figure 4. Barriers to the uptake of e-learning as identified by scholars by country in the online survey

A scholar observed that he had been affected by power blackouts on several occasions but was “saved” by having solar backup. However, many of his colleagues in the same region who had no alternative sources of power “went through hell” accessing on-line classes.

Exacerbating the internet-related barriers was the cost of data (attributed to hiking of taxes levied on data bundles particularly in Uganda). Some scholars, especially those coming from poorer congregations, complained of having to borrow or share devices because they did not own any, or their devices were old or the quality was too low to handle e-learning platforms. However, borrowing devices came with its own challenges; it led in some instances to missing classes because, as one scholar recalled, “the person I borrowed the phone from was not available for me to borrow that phone”.

Similarly, the use of smartphones to access online lessons, as many did, was not the ideal and was perceived to contribute to unsatisfactory learning experiences and poor outcomes. There were disruptions of on-going lessons from in-coming calls. It was not easy to multitask using the phone, for example, manoeuvring on the phone to open the document while attending a zoom meeting as one scholar reported. Problems with reading using the smartphone, strained eyes and short attention spans were challenges faced especially by the older scholars and those with poor eyesight.

Barriers related to skills gaps, which one key informant described as “disparity of skills” were also identified. Many scholars were unprepared and unexposed to requisite IT skills. The lower entry level digital skills were more pronounced in specific demographics, that is, women and older scholars. Their ability to adapt to e-learning was perceived to take longer, compared to the younger and male counterparts.

It was not only the scholars who were deficient in IT skills, so were many lecturers/course facilitators. Many did not have the pedagogical skills to actively engage students online. Scholars pointed out challenges related to online learning with regard to the ease of understanding concepts, lecturer – student interactions, lecturer’s sharing books and notes without explanation and assessment (examination) challenges.

Female scholars in particular, were challenged by competing demands on their time arising from their office work, domestic chores and/or other tasks assigned to them by the Superiors. A few talked of chronic fatigue as a result of juggling their multiple responsibilities with their study. Some CSP lessons also clashed with the time for their routine prayers, as noted by a scholar: “It usually seems awkward to some, when a community is expected to be going for routine prayers, and you say you are going to class”. Other scholars talked of conflicts in scheduling of CSP courses with their regular classes, leading to missing out on one or the

other. In one instance, a scholar expressed discontent when he was denied a certificate for the Servant Leadership course for missing the first few days of classes because it conflicted with a pre-scheduled, mandatory activity in the congregation.

Table 3 presents a composite list and description of the barriers as described by the scholars in indepth interviews, FGDs and the online survey.

Table 3. Barriers as described by scholars in the survey and qualitative methods

#	Barrier	Description
1	Unavailability and inaccessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No internet coverage, inadequate bandwidth, slow or unstable internet Weak WiFi signals Power blackouts, regular power outages
2	Unaffordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High cost of data bundles Insufficient funds to buy devices
3	Poor quality, borrowed and shared devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inappropriate devices i.e. using smartphones as an alternative to laptops Old and outdated devices that could not handle e-learning platforms Borrow or share with other students as coping strategies
4	Inadequate IT knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of knowledge and skill to navigate both the hardware (computer and smartphones) and the softwares Limited and poor IT skills. The entry level skills gap was more pronounced in Tanzania Women and older scholars take much longer to adapt compared to the younger and male counterparts
5	Pedagogical barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties in understanding concepts. i.e. in Tanzania there was an issue of English as a language of instruction, while in Uganda it was more of the accent used by the lecturers Lacked interactions; some lecturers shared books and notes with scholars with no explanation Hard and complicated online examinations, concerns on submitting assignments
6	Competing priorities distract scholars from e-learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congregational activities such as prayers, meals, domestic work, officework and other shared responsibilities Conflict between timetabling of some CSP lessons and normal university classes, missing out in one or the other
7	Unconducive home learning environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noisy environments Domestic responsibilities for female scholars affecting concentration in studies
8	Other Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tight university schedules; rushing from one session to the next Fatigue and reduced attention span for attending class after long day at work Inadequate training during the orientation for both the scholars and other stakeholders

B. Assessing implications of e-learning for NGLP

Anchored in four of the OECD impact assessment criteria, namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, in this part of the report, we respond to the two questions,

1. How feasible is online learning in the context of the scholarship studies and courses that are offered, Executive Management, and Servant Leadership, Catholic Social Teaching and Child Protection?
2. What is the technical capacity of host institutions for promoting e-learning?

Figure 5 unpacks the four assessment criteria as used in the study.

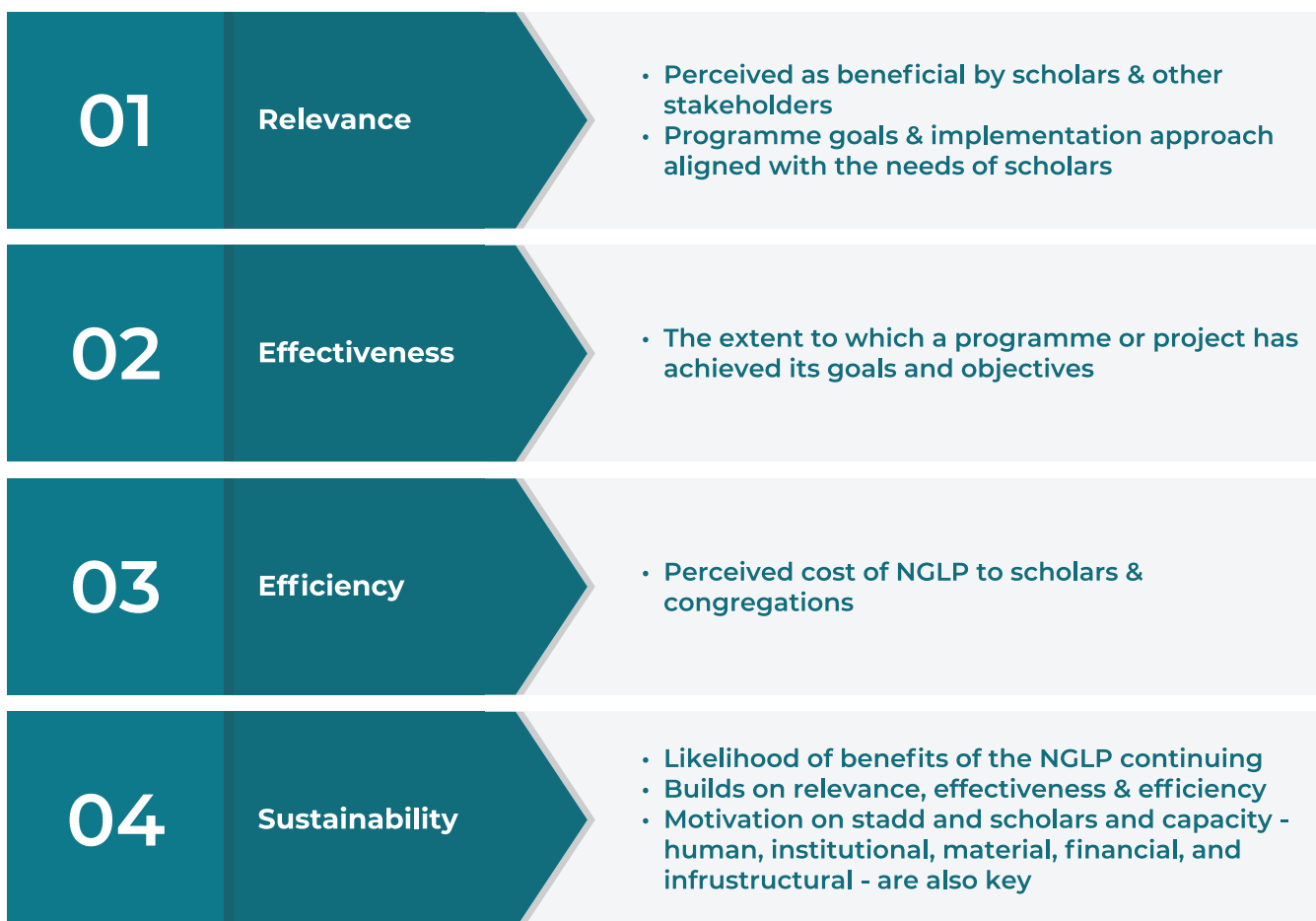


Figure 5. Description of assessment criteria used in the study

1. **Relevance:** There was a general consensus that the NGLP is relevant. Study participants agreed that it addresses the knowledge and skills gaps of scholars to be better leaders and accomplish their mission as religious sisters, religious brothers, priests and lay people working for the betterment of humanity through and for the Catholic Church. It has provided opportunities to upgrade their academic qualifications and reinforce their servant leadership skills even in the midst of the pandemic. It has inspired scholars to take part or start community initiatives, and enabled them to attend classes remotely.

Relevance of the NGLP was reflected in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. One

of the three mandatory courses was offered online, which was appropriate given the context. Where the courses were offered physically, care was taken to follow the COVID-19 safety protocols. This included the training and pilot sessions.

2. & 3. **Effectiveness and Efficiency:** The verdict on the effectiveness and efficiency of the NGLP was not as clear cut as that on the relevance. The effectiveness of the delivery was perceived to have been obstructed by barriers that already existed prior to the pandemic, but was aggravated by it. With a few notable exceptions, study participants observed that neither the institutions nor the programme was ready for a transition to e-learning in whatever form. Lecturers/course facilitators were not prepared nor were the scholars - apart from the issue of inadequacy of the infrastructure (internet and power accessibility and availability) there were also issues with the affordability and appropriateness of devices.

The perceived “negative” attitude of scholars to the adoption of e-learning is provoked by the many barriers which need to be addressed to ensure effective and efficient delivery. As we have seen, many scholars borrow and share devices while others use smartphones, which have their own challenges as a tool for class participation especially for long hours at a stretch. The weak pedagogic skills of some lecturers make lessons tedious and unattractive. In addition, learning from home or the workplace has its own downside with frequent social and work-related interruptions, especially for the female scholars who expressed preference for residential courses as a way of avoiding some of the competing demands on their time.

On the positive side, online learning was perceived to be cost-effective as it eliminates commuting expenses (including wasting time in heavy traffic jams) for the day scholars and accommodation/associated costs for those in residence. It expands the knowledge frontier not only in one’s field of study but also helps make connections across cultures and communities.

4. **Sustainability:** Sustainability builds on relevance, effectiveness and efficiency discussed in the foregoing paragraphs. Motivation of staff and scholars and capacity - human, institutional, material, financial, and infrastructural - are also key to ensure that e-learning is embedded in the programme. The NGLP was perceived as addressing their needs for professional development and those of their communities. The programme offered an opportunity for them to upgrade their knowledge and

skills and reinforce values of service to the community and protection of the vulnerable. Though only one of the mandatory courses had migrated to e-learning by the time the study was conducted, scholars participating in the other courses in different universities had made use of digital skills, and acknowledged the importance of e-learning during and after COVID-19.

This notwithstanding, they also recognised the challenges of sustaining e-learning platforms for the mandatory courses. Among the challenges were the issue of recurring costs of internet connection, and purchase of appropriate gadgets for accessing the online platform (computers and / or smart phones) and maintaining them. The consensus seemed to be that the way it is now, the programme may not be sustainable but the seeds of sustainability were recognised as being present. Many of the barriers identified are not insurmountable, it requires the key actors in the NGLP - Porticus, NGLP Board, and the Executive Secretary - to eliminate, or at least reduce them through commitment, collaboration and creativity.

04 WHAT LESSONS DID WE LEARN?

The study findings reveal the complexity of the problem that we were investigating, that is, the uptake of e-learning by religious scholars under the NGLP. It highlights the perspective of stakeholders, especially the scholars documenting their experiences, both positive and negative, in accessing learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and identifying the key (but sometimes not so obvious) drivers of their engagement in online classes. In this section, we present eleven key learnings that emerged from the analysis.

The 11-Learning Points

The country contexts

Key Learning 1: There are contextual differences between the three countries, but the issues affecting the full participation of scholars in their course of study sponsored by the NGLP are similar. Contextual differences of relevance to the study were reflected in:

1. The differences in the infrastructure supporting internet utilisation. Available statistics put Kenya at the lead with regards to internet penetration, mobile phone connection and access to electricity.

Table 4. Internet infrastructure supporting internet utilisation in East Africa

	Kenya %	Tanzania %	Uganda %
Internet penetration (% of total population Jan 2022)	42.0	25.0	29.1
Mobile connections (Jan 2022)	114.2	86.2	57.9
Electricity access (2019)	70.0	38.0	41.0

2. The differences in the COVID-19 response: In Kenya and Uganda, there were stricter mitigation measures in place as compared to Tanzania. All three countries closed their educational institutions at about the same time in March 2020 but Tanzania reopened first by June 2020 ahead of Uganda in November of the same year, and Kenya in January 2021.

3. Differences in proficiency in the English language: In all three countries, English is officially the medium of instruction in institutions of higher learning. However, in Tanzania, the use of English is not widespread unlike Kenya and Uganda, which are ranked among the top countries in Africa in terms of English proficiency. Tanzanians are thus disadvantaged as, consistent with the language policies in the three countries, the NGLP scholars are expected to be able to comprehend and communicate in English with reasonable proficiency.

Impact of COVID-19

Key Learning 2: The infrastructure gap between institutions even within the same country reflects the digital divide between well resourced institutions and regions that existed at the start of the pandemic, affecting the access of scholars to on-line learning depending on where they were enrolled, and the achievement of their academic goals. The pandemic revealed deep inequities between institutions within the same country with regard to the internet infrastructure and programme preparedness. Though Kenya has better IT infrastructure as a country, even here some institutions especially in remote and poorer areas do not have the same facilities as the better endowed universities like Strathmore, Tangaza or Kenyatta universities. In all the countries, some study participants reported institutions with neither WiFi nor computer labs.

Though the impact of COVID-19 was widely felt at institutional, programme and individual levels across the board to a greater or lesser extent, for scholars in institutions with no or low preparedness and infrastructure, the negative experiences of e-learning were greater. The lack of institutional readiness to handle online teaching impacted on the quality of learning for the courses of study of the scholars, as well as the CSP mandatory courses.

The CSP mandatory courses were designed for in-person delivery. The only course that migrated online was Servant Leadership, a course that targets those NGLP scholars pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. This notwithstanding, many scholars were exposed to different IT skills through participation in the regular courses of study, which some scholars were able to apply in doing research for their assignments and preparing for their tests and exams. Executive Management, one of the three mandatory CSP courses, though not offered online, incorporated lessons on IT skills into the curriculum.

Perceptions and experiences of e-learning

Key Learning 3: Preference for in-person than online learning is driven by social factors instead

of the perception of effective outcome. Over 70 percent of scholars surveyed indicated that online classes were the most effective way of delivering learning during COVID-19, though they did not appear to have a clear understanding of what it entailed. However, regardless of their understanding and thoughts on effectiveness (and safety), many still preferred in-person delivery of lessons as it allowed them to travel away from their home locations, meet new people, make new friends, socialise as well as have more meaningful engagement with their course facilitators among other reasons.

Key Learning 4: IT skills gaps were not only evident in the scholars but also lecturers and course facilitators were not adequately prepared. Interventions to change mindsets must be accompanied by effective IT skills orientation and training; that is a prerequisite for the success of any new programme, and especially the uptake of e-learning. In the absence of clear understanding of the various modalities and/or skills to implement them, many scholars resorted to “screen teaching” or “lecturing” using video conferencing platforms like Zoom and Google Meet. Scholars complained of lecturers/course facilitators without the skills to engage them actively and effectively, making the online learning experience “boring”.

Barriers to uptake of e-learning

Key Learning 5: Internet penetration does not automatically translate to internet access. While internet access and power may not be available for scholars in some remote areas, even where they exist, intermittent connectivity, frequent electricity disruptions, and a lack of devices to access the Internet are a reality for not only those in remote areas but also in urban contexts including Nairobi, Kampala and Dar-Es-Salaam.

Key Learning 6: Unstable internet and power connections and shared devices provide loopholes for those scholars and even some lecturers to “play hookey”, and increases the possibility of cheating. As much as intermittent internet connectivity and electricity disruptions may be genuine reasons for not fully participating, they were perceived by some of the research participants (key informants and scholars) as providing an excuse to students and sometimes lecturers to play truant.

Additionally, some informants were concerned that the anonymity of internet platforms provide users the opportunity to “cheat”. By turning off the camera on pretext of low bandwidth, limiting the lecturer’s ability to verify the identity and monitor the scholar’s presence is diminished. This is particularly problematic during exams (for the regular courses) and online assessments (for the mandatory courses). On the flip side, suspicion was perceived by some informants to lead to demotivation.

Key Learning 7: The spirit of Ubuntu was evident in the coping strategies devised by scholars to be keepers of their fellow scholars. It was also reflected in the practice of borrowing and sharing the same devices as a response to the unaffordability of computers by most scholars. For example, more technologically savvy, often younger students tutored those not so digitally competent who tended to be older, and the female scholars, to acquire computer and IT skills so they could catch up with the rest of the class.

Unable to afford to buy their own devices with the capability for online learning, some scholars shared one device - sometimes even upto 15 of them - because they did not own a laptop or any other appropriate device to access the online classes. However, this strategy had its downside; scholars had challenges doing assignments and assessments. At the same time, course facilitators had difficulties monitoring the attendees.

Key Learning 8: Smartphones have their uses but are not good for attending classes for long periods of time at a go. Unfortunately, for some scholars that was the only option for accessing their lessons. Not only can attending hours-long lectures on the phone be tedious, some scholars complained of straining their eyes because of the small font, as well as challenges with uploading and downloading resources. Further, some smartphones are not compatible with certain applications and document formats. There's always the possibility of interruptions from incoming calls and messages.

Key Learning 9: The poorer a congregation, the less likely they would be to provide the resources required by the scholars to fully participate in their academic programmes. Some congregations were unable, and others unwilling to purchase devices for the scholars to attend the course as they did not consider it to be a priority. The lack of exposure to the benefits of e-learning could be an added reason in some instances why some congregations did not provide adequate support to the scholars.

Key Learning 10: The intersection of gender and hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church may result in the exclusion of religious sisters from some privileges and opportunities. Priests were more likely to have access to appropriate devices needed for on-line learning vs those towards the bottom of the hierarchy, that is, the religious sisters. Depending on the congregation, religious sisters who were yet to take vows were not allowed to have smartphones. Further, the impact of gender socialisation and the division of labour was reflected in the tensions between home responsibilities, workplace duties and school work; in the case of laywomen, the gender division of labour included coping with childcare duties. For religious sisters, the congregations expected them to perform domestic chores like cooking, and were assigned other responsibilities by their superiors even when they had online lessons to attend. Female scholars rather than male ones expressed preference for physical learning as

this afforded them the opportunity to get away from their duties in the congregations and focus on their role as students.

Key Learning 11: Competing priorities, and the lack of consideration by family, friends, and congregants, interfered with the participation of the scholars in their online learning. The gender dimension aside, both male and female scholars recalled instances of timetabling conflicts between regular and the CSP courses. In extreme cases, some scholars were torn between attending classes and participating in religious events which were scheduled at the same time.

There were also reports of neighbours, friends, and community members trivialising efforts by scholars to attend their classes from their residence by dropping in to socialise or pulling them out of online classes seeking their assistance to do totally unrelated things.

05 WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

The evidence suggests that many scholars would change their perceived resistance to e-learning if some of the barriers that they experience can be eliminated or at least reduced. Based on the hundreds of scholars we talked to during the course of the study we found that their resistance is defined by a pragmatic outlook - for many, they simply do not have the tools, while for others (women in particular, who are the majority) may not have uninterrupted time to learn from home/workplace, as they are expected to perform other roles/duties assigned to them at a time they should be online in class. For some congregations that appear to be hesitant and unable to support scholars with devices and other resources needed to fully participate in e-learning, the underlying factor may not be poverty alone. Rather, this hesitancy may be due to the lack of exposure and understanding of the true worth of possibilities that e-learning opens up for not only the scholars, but also for the congregations and communities that they serve.

The menu of recommendations and the call to action that we propose in this final section of the report reflect the insights from the multiple sources that we accessed - both primary sources from the field research and secondary from the rapid desk review. The recommendations and call to action are intended to improve access and the quality of experience of the religious scholars sponsored by the NGLP by addressing barriers to the uptake of e-learning by them, and enhancing relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the programme.

Recommendations

The compromise solution - blended learning

We are combining the two methodologies with what we are calling blended learning. Blended learning in the sense that it's true that some parts can be e-learning because the world is moving towards that but at the same time we don't forget our tradition. So e-learning can be combined with physical

learning, that is, blended. That would guarantee a smooth transition. In my view, I have told many of my colleagues that we are moving towards virtual learning, e-learning. (SP/008/KII/M)

The above quotation synthesises the way forward for the NGLP courses as recommended by both scholars and other key stakeholders that we talked to during the course of the study - some form of blended or hybrid model that takes into consideration the psychosocial needs of beneficiaries as well as leveraging on the strengths of e-learning for potentially larger outreach and knowledge mobilisation. However, for this to happen, it would be necessary to employ a multi pronged strategy that integrates the voices of scholars, taking into consideration both the external and internal environments in which NGLP courses are offered and addresses barriers at national (policy), institutional, programme and individual levels.

Table 5. Menu of recommendations by barriers and key actors responsible for follow-up and implementation

Barriers/ Gaps	Recommendations	Who?
Unavailability and inaccessibility of internet	Long-Term: Create a common e-library for scholar's supported by other online learning infrastructure ensuring document formats are compatible with different systems and tools for viewing and editing.	Executive Secretaries with Host Universities
	Medium-Term: Negotiate with internet service providers and computer manufacturers/distributors to support poorly resourced institutions and equalise the field for the NGLP scholars who pursue their course of study in these institutions.	Executive Secretary with Host Universities
	Short-Term: Review criteria for selection of scholars to include persons with disabilities (PWDs).	NGLP Board with Nominating Institutions
	Medium-Term: Incentivise PWDs by increasing the value of their stipend	Porticus with Nominating institutions
Unaffordability	Short-Term: Negotiate with the congregations to identify ways of contributing to the costs associated with online teaching and-learning that may include but not be limited to providing laptops, buying data bundles and facilitating printing.	NGLP Board with Nominating institutions
	Short-Term: Sensitise the congregations on the benefits of facilitating scholars financially and/or in kind to enable participation in e-learning and other online activities	NGLP Board and Nominating Institutions
	Medium-Term: Engage with technology and internet service providers to negotiate subsidised rates for WiFi connections and/or data bundles to be used by scholars and other students on campus.	Executive Secretary with Host universities
Poor quality, borrowed and shared devices	Long-Term: Explore the possibility of centralised procurement of devices for scholars instead of individual purchases to address issues of cost and quality.	Porticus with NGLP Board and Nominating institutions

Inadequate IT knowledge and skills (capacity gaps) and Pedagogical barriers	Short-Term: Train course facilitators/lecturers on interactive e-learning methodologies	NGLP Board with Service Providers
	Short-Term: Prepare scholars for e-learning through a rigorous orientation on IT skilling to help them troubleshoot all or most of their challenges in IT.	Executive Secretary with Course Facilitators
	Short-Term: Initiate mandatory needs assessment prior to orientation of scholars per cohort to determine the entry level behaviour and exposure of staff and scholars to IT skills. The assessment should enable analysis by gender, age, education levels, and vocation.	NGLP Board with Service Providers and Course Facilitators
	Short-Term: Utilise findings of the needs assessment to inform customisation of the training/orientation sessions to the needs of the scholars paying attention to digital skills' gaps by gender, age, vocation and education levels.	Porticus with Service Providers and Course Facilitators
Competing priorities distract scholars from e-learning	Short-Term: Negotiate and consult with universities where scholars are enrolled to align timetables for the mandatory and regular courses to reduce conflicts	Executive Secretary Host Universities
	Short-Term: Involve scholars in the process of timetabling to accommodate for different work schedules and religious /other priorities making implementation seamless and reduce conflicts.	Board Host Universities
Learning environments	Short-Term: Sensitise the congregations on the benefits of creating conducive learning environments for the scholars who participate in e-learning and other online activities	Board Nominating institution
Gender and inclusion	Medium-Term: Include a unit on gender and inclusion in the NGLP mandatory courses to ensure that scholars (irrespective of gender) are exposed to the importance of gender equality and empowerment issues.	Porticus with Service Providers
	Short-Term: Build gender analysis capacity of service providers and course facilitators to enable them to address gender concerns in the NGLP programme implementation.	Porticus with Service Providers and Course Facilitators
	Short-Term: Organise gender sensitisation workshops taking an intersectional approach targeting the congregations so they can act to remove the barriers, including providing the scholars with the tools they require and the space they need to engage meaningfully in the NGLP courses, both in person and online.	NGLP Board with Nominating Institution
Alumni	Long-Term: Clarify the role of the alumni in mentoring scholars on key aspects of leadership using both in person and virtual channels.	NGLP Board
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)	Short-Term: Regular and systematic monitoring of programme implementation, collating the feedback through documentation of success stories, challenges and convening virtual and physical learnshops.	NGLP Board with Service Providers
	Medium-Term: Designing a longitudinal study tracking scholars to ascertain if the scholars are actually creating positive impacts in their communities as a result of their participation in NGLP.	Porticus with NGLP Boards
	Medium-Term: Designing effective systems to track lecturer attendance, course module coverage and time given to students online, as some lecturers allegedly deprive students of quality time that they would get during in-person study by designating to them 60% of course content for self-study which students find hard to teach themselves and end up failing it when it is examined. Some	Porticus with service providers

	also designate less time to students compared to what they are supposed to be offering hence reduced value for money invested.	
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Conclusions

The overall consensus is that the NGLP has been successful in all the three countries despite the challenges posed COVID-19. It has succeeded in reaching out to consecrated women and men and lay people in service of the Catholic Church and their communities who would otherwise not have opportunity to upgrade their academic qualifications and strengthen their servant leadership skills. It has successfully taken affirmative action awarding scholarships to more religious women than men in an effort to reduce gender disparities in academic qualifications and prepare women for leadership roles within the Church. All this notwithstanding, there are persisting gaps and challenges. To seal these gaps will require investments in building capacity of both scholars and course facilitators and to tool them to engage effectively in lessons delivered online. It will need collaboration amongst various actors involved in the scholarship programme and new partnerships with both the public and private sectors to bridge the equity gaps as strategies to reduce costs and facilitate access for all scholars equally. Addressing equity gaps should involve reaching out proactively and advocating for the inclusion of the most excluded religious scholars, including but not restricted to female scholars with disabilities.

Gender parity is not the same as gender equality. The goal of gender equality is often frustrated by insensitivity to the competing roles that women play, sometimes to the detriment of their professional development. Scholars, especially women, should not have to choose between focusing on their learning (whether online or offline) or work assigned to them by their congregations on the basis of their perceived gender roles.

Finally, setting up an effective monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system is necessary for tracking the impact (or the lack of it) of the NGLP in all three countries whether delivered online or physically or using a hybrid/blended model.

