



JASLIKA

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

## Authored by

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by Catholic Scholars in  
Kenya, Tanzania and  
Uganda: A Rapid Inquiry  
Synthesis Report**

July 2022

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## About **JASLIKA**

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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

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

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Introduction

In December 2021, Porticus Africa commissioned Jaslika Consulting 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 aimed at identifying actionable recommendations for improving the NGLP. This report describes the study methodology, highlights the key findings and presents actionable recommendations for programme improvement with a focus on the uptake of e-learning by scholars.

## About NGLP

The NGLP, formerly known as the Catholic Scholarship Programme (CSP) is a scholarship programme supported by Porticus Africa for Catholic religious scholars in East Africa. The programme aims at upgrading the academic qualifications of scholars and equipping them with leadership skills in service of the Catholic Church. It targets religious sisters (60%), religious brothers (20%), priests (10%), laypeople (10%).

## What did we do? Who did we target?

The study was consultative and participatory, reaching out to 358 religious scholars and other stakeholders (NGLP Board members, the NGLP executive secretary's office, host university representatives, service providers, course facilitators/instructors and alumni) in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The majority (70%) of the study participants were women.

A team of 16 country-based researchers collected the data, focusing on the perceptions and experiences of the study participants on the scholarship programme. The qualitative data consisted of open-ended consultations and individual and group interviews. A semi-structured online survey was administered to scholars through Whatsapp groups. The qualitative consultations and interviews were conducted both in-person and using video conferencing

applications like Google Meet, Zoom and occasionally Skype when necessary to minimise risk of exposure to COVID-19 infection.

## What did we find?

The study findings reveal the complexity of the problem that was investigated. It highlighted 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 drivers of their engagement in e-learning.

### Impact of COVID-19 on the NGLP

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the NGLP at institutional, programme and individual levels in different ways. Institutions of higher learning along with basic education institutions closed down indefinitely, reopening in phases. The exact duration of closure and phased reopening differed from one country to another. At the same time, the 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 on-line learning earlier than others.

The NGLP was unprepared to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 on learning. Furthermore, the digital divide between public and some private institutions that existed at the start of the pandemic, affected the access of some scholars to online learning.

The closure and rescheduling of some courses, both regular and mandatory, led to delays in and consequent deferment of the graduation dates. Some study participants felt that their performance had declined as a result of the change to online classes, attributing this largely to the lack of discussion groups, non-engaging facilitators, little or no feedback, connectivity and other technology related challenges. Scholars reported being traumatised due to COVID -19 related bereavements and constant fear of infection.

### Scholars' perceptions of e-learning

While scholars were exposed to online learning in their regular courses of study, as far as the NGLP mandatory courses were concerned, Servant Leadership was the only one of the four that had migrated fully to online instruction. Executive Management, which included a brief unit on IT, was taught offline as was Child Protection & 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. 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 video conferencing platforms to reach out to scholars because of the restrictions on accessing large groups physically. The pedagogy used did not incorporate interactive remote learning strategies.

Though three in four scholars (73%) participating in the quantitative survey identified on-line 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 were adamant that some courses like Child Protection require teaching the old-fashioned way. However, the hybrid/blended model appealed to many, including some of those rooting for in-person learning, provided some basic barriers to the uptake of e-learning by the scholars were addressed. The analysis pointed to the blended/hybrid model as the most preferred option in all countries as it combines the strengths of in-person delivery with the advantages of online learning.

## Barriers to up-taking of e-learning

The online survey revealed barriers to the uptake of e-learning from the perspective of the scholars. The findings of the survey were reinforced by insights generated through the qualitative data.

The unavailability and inaccessibility of internet and power connectivity was identified by 71 percent of survey respondents as the most common barrier to the full participation of scholars in e-learning. Specific issues raised were the lack of access, slow and unstable internet, safety concerns arising from having “to be outside the buildings” especially at night and travelling long long distances to access internet networks. Additional internet-related barriers identified 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 in access to internet connectivity between institutions in which scholars were enrolled with a few scholars reporting the absence of WiFi within their institutions. Frequent power outages disrupted internet connectivity, leading to loss of class time, delays in handing in assignments and doing tests.

An additional 16 percent cited unaffordability of data bundles (attributed to hiking of taxes



levied on data bundles especially in Uganda), WiFi and appropriate devices as factors affecting access. Scholars coming from poorer congregations complained of having to borrow or share devices because they did not own any, or they were old or the quality was too low to handle e-learning platforms. 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. 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.

About 11 percent of the respondents highlighted IT and skills gaps in both scholars and lecturers/course facilitators, described by one key informant as “disparity of skills”. It was observed that lecturers/course facilitators struggled with online engagement of scholars as they had limited pedagogical skills to actively engage students online, making lessons tedious and unattractive for students. Other challenges related to online learning were difficulties of lecturers to explain concepts, lecturer’s sharing books and notes without explanation and assessment (examination) challenges. Scholars’ struggled with navigating online spaces and the hardware. The lower entry level digital skills were more pronounced in women and older scholars. Their ability to adapt to e-learning was perceived to take longer, compared to the younger and male counterparts.

The remaining 2 percent of the respondents mentioned barriers such as a non-conducive learning environment, social distractions and competing priorities coinciding with the timing of online lessons. Scholars reported missing online classes due to competing priorities linked to congregational responsibilities. Female scholars (both religious sisters and laity), faced 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 multiple responsibilities with their study. Some of the mandatory NGLP lessons reportedly clashed with the time for their routine prayers; others talked of conflicts in scheduling of NGLP 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 as it conflicted with the scheduling of an activity in the congregation.

## Feasibility of e-learning for NGLP

The study assessed the feasibility of e-learning for NGLP in terms of the programme's perceived relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability

**Relevance:** There was consensus that the NGLP is relevant. It addresses the knowledge and skills gaps of scholars to be better leaders and accomplish their mission as religious sisters, religious brothers, priests and laypeople working for the betterment of humanity through and for the Catholic Church. It has provided opportunities to the religious scholars 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 pursue their courses of studies remotely. Relevance of the NGLP was further reflected in programme response to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the four 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.

**Effectiveness:** The unpreparedness of participating institutions, the programme itself, scholars and course facilitators/lecturers for the transition to e-learning hampered effectiveness. For women scholars, in particular, virtual learning restricted opportunities for socialisation and the human touch, including personalised teacher-scholar interactions, thereby negatively affecting effective learning outcomes. For lecturers/course facilitators, monitoring virtual attendance was problematic.

**Efficiency:** Apart from the inadequacy of the infrastructure (internet and power accessibility and availability) there were also issues of unaffordability and inappropriateness of devices as noted in earlier pages. On the positive side, online learning was perceived to be cost effective as it eliminated commuting expenses, time wastage in traffic jams for day scholars and accommodation and associated costs for those in residence. Remote learning was also perceived to have expanded the knowledge frontier in one's field of study and opened up possibilities, and facilitated connections across cultures and communities at a relatively low cost.

**Sustainability:** Sustainability is embedded in programme relevance. The NGLP was perceived as addressing the needs of scholars for professional development. 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, scholars pursuing their courses of study in different universities had acquired digital skills, and acknowledged the importance of e-learning during and post-COVID

19. Despite this, they recognised the challenges of sustaining e-learning platforms for the mandatory courses. These include the recurring costs of internet connection, and the high cost of purchasing appropriate devices for accessing the online platform and maintaining them. While the programme was perceived as not being sustainable, the seeds of sustainability were acknowledged as being present, and surmountable through commitment, collaboration and creativity.

## What did we learn?

1. In all three countries, despite some contextual differences, the issues affecting the uptake of e-learning by NGLP scholars were similar.
2. The pre-pandemic internet infrastructure gaps were aggravated during COVID -19 limiting access to online learning by scholars enrolled in less endowed institutions and located in remote and poorer regions. The lack of institutional readiness to handle online teaching impacted on the quality of learning. Though only the Servant Leadership of the four mandatory courses had migrated online, many scholars were exposed to different IT skills in their regular courses of study. They were able to use the skills acquired in researching for assignments and preparing for tests, exams and assessments. Executive Management, a mandatory course, though not offered online, incorporated lessons on IT skills into the curriculum.
3. Preference for in-person instead of online learning may be driven by social factors rather than expectations of effective outcome. Though over 70% of scholars surveyed indicated that online classes were the most effective way of delivering learning during COVID-19, physical classes allowed them to travel away from their home locations, meet new people, make new friends, socialise and have more meaningful engagement with their course facilitators.
4. IT skills gaps evident in both scholars and lecturers/course facilitators are reflective of inadequate exposure and preparation at entry.
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.
6. Unstable internet, unreliable power connections and shared devices provide loopholes for both scholars and even some lecturers to play truant. The anonymity of internet platforms was perceived as providing opportunities to “cheat”; limiting the lecturer’s

ability to verify the identity of scholars and to monitor attendance, especially during online exams and assessments.

7. The high cost of laptops and smartphones may lead some scholars to either share devices or borrow them from others to enable access to online classes.
8. Smartphones have their uses but are not good for attending classes for long periods of time at a go.
9. The poorer and less exposed a congregation, the less likely they would be to provide scholars with devices to facilitate their participation in e-learning.
10. The intersection of gender socialisation and the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church may result in the exclusion of religious sisters from some privileges and opportunities, including in some congregations, the lack of access to devices needed for effective participation in on-line learning.
11. Scholars' participation in online classes may be disrupted by competing duties assigned to them irrespective of gender, to the detriment of their need to concentrate on their lessons.

## What should be done?

The NGLP has been successful in all three countries despite the challenges posed by COVID-19. It has successfully reached out to consecrated women and men and laypeople in service of the Catholic Church who would otherwise not have opportunity to upgrade their academic qualifications and strengthen their servant leadership skills. It has 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. Despite this, there are persisting gaps and challenges. To seal these gaps will require investments in building capacity of both scholars and course facilitators and to equip them to engage effectively in online classes. It will need collaboration among 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 expected 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 or blended model.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## STUDY BACKGROUND

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### Introduction

#### **Box 1. Why the Catholic Scholarship Programme?**

*The purpose of the programme is to assist the Church through anybody working with and for it to make sure that the Church fulfils its responsibilities to the world. The idea behind it is that the Church should be the leader of development, the Church should call for global justice, the Church should call for global development, the Church should call for environmental conservation. You know, the Church should be the leader to make sure that the mother earth is well protected. Now you cannot use other people who are away from the Church to do issues for the Church. So we need to develop capacities of the people within the Church to help push this agenda of seeing that the Church is becoming the leader. Now the Church leaders cannot lead if they are not professionally capable of doing so.*

*We believe the Church has been a leader in education in comparison to the public, in comparison to any other institution. So if we need to have good schools, we need to have good teachers. Where do we get these teachers? We need to take our sisters and priests to school to study bachelors in education etc. So the Church has not been able to do that, so Porticus is here to add the number of those who are supposed to be taken to school. We need engineers, we need doctors, we need accountants, we need project managers. So, that's the purpose, why we have the Catholics Scholarship Programme. The primary agenda is to push the objectives of the church towards assisting the world. So as part of the project, we are here now to make sure that at least every year, we support fifty-five people in different professions - teachers, nurses, accountants, lawyers etc. so that they get this education and they assist the world in the future. So that's briefly the purpose of having the Catholic Scholarship Programme. (TZ/003/KII/ES/M)*

This report presents findings of a rapid survey undertaken to identify factors influencing the uptake of e-learning by the Next Generation Leadership Programme (NGLP) scholars in Kenya,

Tanzania and Uganda. Formerly NGLP was known as the Catholic Scholarship Programme or CSP.

The rapid inquiry was prompted by a need to understand the underlying reasons for the slow uptake and resistance to e-learning by the scholars as reported by the NGLP Executive Secretaries in the three countries in focus. The NGLP is designed for consecrated women and men and laypeople working with and for the Catholic Church in selected East African countries who have been selected to take up future leadership roles. As figure 1 illustrates, the NGLP has two components: First, the regular courses, which provide them with opportunities to upgrade their educational qualifications; and second, the mandatory courses, namely, Servant Leadership, Child Protection and Safeguarding, Executive Management Skills and Catholic Social Teaching that are intended to prepare them for their role as servant leaders (CSP, n.d.).



Figure 1. The NGLP components

## The Context

In Africa, the Catholic church is the largest non-state actor providing services particularly in the fields of education and health. Despite this, there is a critical gap of well-trained and experienced leaders within the religious congregations. Furthermore, many have not been trained adequately in child protection and safeguarding (Porticus, 2021). Religious sisters in particular, are more likely not to have higher education qualifications. Consequently, many are underqualified for the positions they hold, for example, as teachers, nurses, and bursars. In Africa, it is estimated that this could be over 70 percent (ASEC, n.d.).

The NGLP addresses this gap by providing financial support to religious sisters and brothers, priests and selected laypeople through the Catholic Scholarship Programme (CSP). The Programme takes affirmative action in favour of religious sisters by reserving as much as 60 percent of the scholarships for them.

The CSP was established in 2005 in Kenya to provide academic, professional and leadership training to African religious women and men and laity so as to enable them to play a leading role in transforming the Church and society. Since inception, the Programme has experienced tremendous growth expanding from Kenya in 2005 to Uganda in 2008 and Tanzania in 2011,

providing opportunities for upgrading academic qualifications and access to additional leadership courses to the target groups. These courses are mandatory, but the specific courses undertaken by a scholar depends on what level of education they are enrolled in: All those pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees have to do a short course in Servant Leadership developed and supported by Tangaza University College. Strathmore University was commissioned to draft and manage a course on Executive Management targeting the same level of scholars, while the Child Protection curriculum was developed by the Tangaza-based Institute of Youth Studies for those pursuing diploma and certificate courses. Finally, at the time the study was undertaken, Catholic Social Teaching was under development by the Catholic University of East Africa.

The NGLP receives financial support from Porticus, which is an international organisation that manages the philanthropic programmes of charitable entities established by Brenninkmeijer family entrepreneurs. It is hosted by Tangaza University College in Kenya, University of Kisubi in Uganda, and Mwenge Catholic University in Tanzania. A Scholarship Board in each of these countries manages the scholarship processes on behalf of Porticus. However, the scholarship beneficiaries are not necessarily enrolled in academic programmes in the host universities but are spread over different institutions of higher learning in the three countries.

## The rationale for the study – insights from the literature

### COVID-19 and remote learning

The utilisation of internet technology to promote learning has been in the global radar since the 1980s, though the term ‘e-learning’ was not coined until 1999. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of e-learning has expanded exponentially at all levels of learning. According to the World Economic Forum, “whether it is language apps, virtual tutoring, video conferencing tools, or online learning software, there has been a significant surge in usage of e-learning platforms since COVID-19” (Li and Lalani, 2020).

Globally, universities and other institutions of higher learning are increasingly embracing e-learning as a safe response to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most have re-organised their curriculum and established new pedagogical methods to engage students online (Mitchell, 2021). Indeed, online and remote learning is largely perceived to be necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ali, 2020). Zhejiang University in China and the Imperial College London are cited as good practices in the successful transition to online modes of learning. There are those who perceive the adoption of e-learning strategies as positive, as an efficient and effective way of reaching out to students, not only during the pandemic but beyond it as

well. However, the University World News cites global tertiary education expert, Jamil Salmi, as stating that “many universities in low-income countries struggled to put in place quality distance education programmes” (Mitchell, 2021). It also reports that “the Association of African Universities, which has 700 institutional members, summed up the experience over the past 16 months, saying that very few of their members were able to teach online adequately” (ibid).

In their study of teachers’ attitudes towards social media use in online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Jogezi et al. (2021) found that physical distancing necessitated by the pandemic had positively influenced the attitudes of teachers and religious scholars towards online learning following increased use of social media to facilitate it. They commended initiatives to positively shape teachers’ attitudes of social media use in online learning into practical application through supportive policies to overcome students’ deprivation from learning. However, the study did not establish the effectiveness of short courses offered remotely through different e-learning modalities compared to in-person teaching in the era of COVID-19.

Using an electronic questionnaire with a validated Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Zalat, Hamed and Bolbol (2021) explored factors that affect the acceptance and use of e-learning as a teaching tool by medical staff in Zagazig University, Egypt. They established that faculty staff increased experience in educational value following application of technological skills in providing online courses. They also found that younger age, teaching experience of less than 10 years and being of male gender determined e-learning acceptance in higher education.

## Barriers to uptake of e-learning

Zalat, Hamed and Bolbol (2021), investigating factors influencing the acceptance and use of e-learning as a teaching tool within higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic, found

*The highest barriers to e-learning were insufficient/unstable internet connectivity (40%), inadequate computer labs (36%), lack of computers/laptops (32%), and technical problems (32%). Younger age, teaching experience less than 10 years, and being a male are the most important indicators affecting e-learning acceptance. (p. 1)*

In an earlier study using desk review, focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews, Mgeni et al. (2019) investigated the contribution of learning management systems to the learning environment in the State University of Zanzibar. Their study revealed poor

internet connectivity and lack of access to computers as key challenges influencing the level of learning management systems in higher education institutions. In another study, Yunus et al. (2019) examined the integration of Web 2.0 in teaching and learning in the same university. The study, using qualitative data from course evaluation forms, established the need for higher learning institutions to improve on providing internet connectivity to both lecturers and students. They recommended that higher learning institutions adopt the use of Web 2.0 in all programmes and equip teaching- learning environments so as to enhance integration of technologies in them. They also recommended government support for technology infrastructure in higher learning institutions and training of lecturers and students for better integration of Web 2.0 in the teaching and learning environment. The low internet penetration in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, as reflected in table 1, is determined by limited government-supported technological infrastructure.

Table 1. Internet infrastructure supporting internet utilisation in East Africa

	Kenya	Tanzania	Uganda
Internet penetration (% of total population Jan 2022) <sup>1</sup>	42.0%	25.0%	29.1%
Mobile phone penetration (mobile connections) <sup>2</sup>	114.2%	86.2%	57.9%
Electricity access (2019)	70.0%	38.0%	41.0%

Other challenges to the uptake of e-learning in institutions of higher learning in developing countries relate to learners' attitudes (Ate et al., 2021), socio-cultural factors and instructors abilities to use e-learning systems successfully (Aldowah, Al-Samarraie and Ghazal, 2019). They showed challenges relating to course design having a strong relationship with instructors' individual challenges to implement e-learning technology in teaching. They thus argued that instructors in higher education institutions require more time, professional skills and competencies in order to design effective learning materials for e-learning and successfully implement e-learning systems.

Ali (2020, p.19) brings into the equation what he describes as the "politics of resistance". He writes, "Education administrators know that technology is never neutral and any change has a certain amount of resistance and contention", going further to assert that "online" and "blended learning" has been politicised. John Vivolo's observation that "the resistance can come from those who base their careers on facts and research, but continue to ignore the evidence. Even performance results get ignored", though made in the pre-COVID 19 era, remains valid even today (Vivolo, 2016).

<sup>1</sup> <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022>

<sup>2</sup> Digital in Kenya: All the Statistics You Need in 2021 – DataReportal

As noted above, the slow uptake or resistance to e-learning is common to many demographics including Catholic scholars. A study was commissioned by the Uganda Catholic Scholars' Programme to explore the dynamics of CSP scholars' COVID -19 resilience efforts and the dynamics of learning at home during the period between March and November 2020. The study singled out "poor experience with internet service providers" referring to weak signals and prohibitive cost of data bundles and non-conducive home environment as the main barrier to the uptake of e-learning by CSP scholars during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also suggested the absence of a "physical community of learners" and lack of basic skills for online learning, especially by religious sisters, as other possible inhibiting factors (CSP Uganda, Feb 2021), as the following quote indicates:

*The religious sisters had lower competence levels in operating and engaging with the online platform compared to the religious brothers, priests and laypeople. This low competence points to the limited day-to-day engagement of technology as a lifestyle choice among the religious sisters. (2021: p.15)*

The gender digital divide has drawn the attention of researchers globally. For example, Bhandari (2019) examined factors associated with women's unequal access to mobile phones across 51 countries. Using quantile regression methods to assess variations, Bhandari established that cultural environments that restrict women's autonomy often decrease their mobile technology access relative to men. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that hindrances to technology access, including affordability, lack of education as well as inherent biases and socio-cultural norms curtail women and girls' ability to benefit from the opportunities offered by the digital transformation (OECD, 2018). In Kenya, Ndzovu (2019) analysed how the radio stations provide female Muslim preachers access to the public, which traditionally has been the domain of males. Ndzovu noted that Muslim women despite their advanced education are not supposed to speak in public or engage in public disputation of religious matters. Although these studies point out opportunities and challenges faced by religious women (Bhandari, 2019; OECD., 2018; Ndzovu, 2019), they fail to explicitly explain opportunities and challenges to e-learning by religious women scholars, particularly those belonging to the Catholic religious congregations.

Though the Catholic Church is the largest non-state actor in Africa, playing a leading role as a development partner in education and health sectors, there is a critical gap of well-trained and experienced leaders within the religious congregations. Furthermore, many have not been trained adequately in child protection and safeguarding (Porticus, 2021). The NGLP addresses this gap by providing scholarships to religious sisters and brothers, priests and selected

laypeople.

An impact assessment of the CSP alumni notes that the alumni experienced multiple positive outcomes from completing their CSP-funded studies that were of value to their careers. They also made improvements in their organisations as a result of the CSP and were able to make a difference to their communities with the knowledge, skills and values that they had acquired (Valuy and Sangar, August 2021). Thus it is unlikely that the scholars are resistant to the e-learning courses because they find the content not relevant; the answer lies elsewhere. In order to reimagine the NGLP in a way that scholars find friendly, relevant, safe and sustainable, it is essential that the deeper barriers influencing acceptance of e-learning by the scholars are explored, their perspectives documented and used in redesigning the courses and the way they are delivered. In doing so, it would also be important to remember that the scholars are not a homogenous group, and their needs and concerns may vary by gender, location, degree level and vocation.

## Purpose and objectives of the rapid inquiry

The purpose of the rapid inquiry was to generate evidence on the underlying factors affecting the uptake of e-learning by CSP religious scholars that may be used to reimagine the NGLP in a way that scholars find friendly, relevant, safe and sustainable.

The specific objectives of the study were to

1. To explore the barriers influencing acceptance of e-learning by the religious scholars;
2. To identify the opportunities for strengthening the active participation of the religious scholars in e-learning CSP courses; and
3. To document the perspectives of religious scholars on what they think should be done to improve the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the programme delivery through e-learning.

## Research Questions

Deriving from the study objectives, the research addressed the following six 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?
4. How feasible is online learning in the context of the scholarship studies and courses that



are offered, that is, Executive Management, Servant Leadership, Catholic Social Teaching and Child Protection?

5. What is the technical capacity of host institutions for promoting e-learning?
6. What strategies/recommendations can be adopted to ensure continuation of the scholarship programme with maximal participation from all scholars?

## Operational Definitions

In order to establish a common understanding of key terminology used in this report, we offer operational definitions of the concepts.

1. *New Generation Leadership Programme* (NGLP) is the re-branded Catholic Scholarship Programme (CSP) supported by Porticus. However, the majority of the study participants used the older name for the initiative. Following this, we use both the new and old names interchangeably, depending on the context.
2. *Online learning* is a form of distance education that involves using technology to mediate the learning process. While there is no standard definition of e-learning, UNESCO - IBE defines it as,

*All forms of electronically supported teaching and learning, especially the web-based and computer based acquisition of, and engagement with, knowledge and skills. It may take place in or out of the classroom. It is often an essential component of distant education and may involve virtual learning environments (<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary>).*

Often used interchangeably with e-learning, online teaching is delivered entirely through the internet. In this report we do not differentiate between e-learning and online teaching.

3. *Blended and hybrid learning* are terms that are used interchangeably to represent classes that are carried out/to be carried out both online and in-person, or combine traditional face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning (Siemens et al., 2015).

## Organisation of the Study

This report synthesises the findings of the study from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. It is presented in five chapters, with Chapters One and Two providing an overview of the background, study objectives and questions, research methods and process including major challenges faced in the execution of the assignment. Chapters Three and Four present the

key findings focusing on key barriers to, and opportunities for the uptake of e-learning by the religious scholars. Finally, in Chapter Five we share insights from the research and present our recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO

# THE STUDY DESIGN AND PROCESS

### Introduction

The study adopted a mixed method design with an emphasis on the qualitative research paradigm. We opted to frame the study within the qualitative research paradigm given its appropriateness to the study focus, which was to discover the underlying barriers to the uptake of e-learning by religious scholars. Qualitative research facilitates discovery, enabling digging deep beneath the surface, and capturing the perspectives of the study participants in their own words rather than the researcher imposing their views on them. The research was implemented using a blended approach.

### Study Process

The study was implemented between the last week of November 2021 and the third week of April 2022, with four validation workshops spread over the end of April to mid May 2022. As highlighted in figure 2, the study process consisted of six iterative steps.

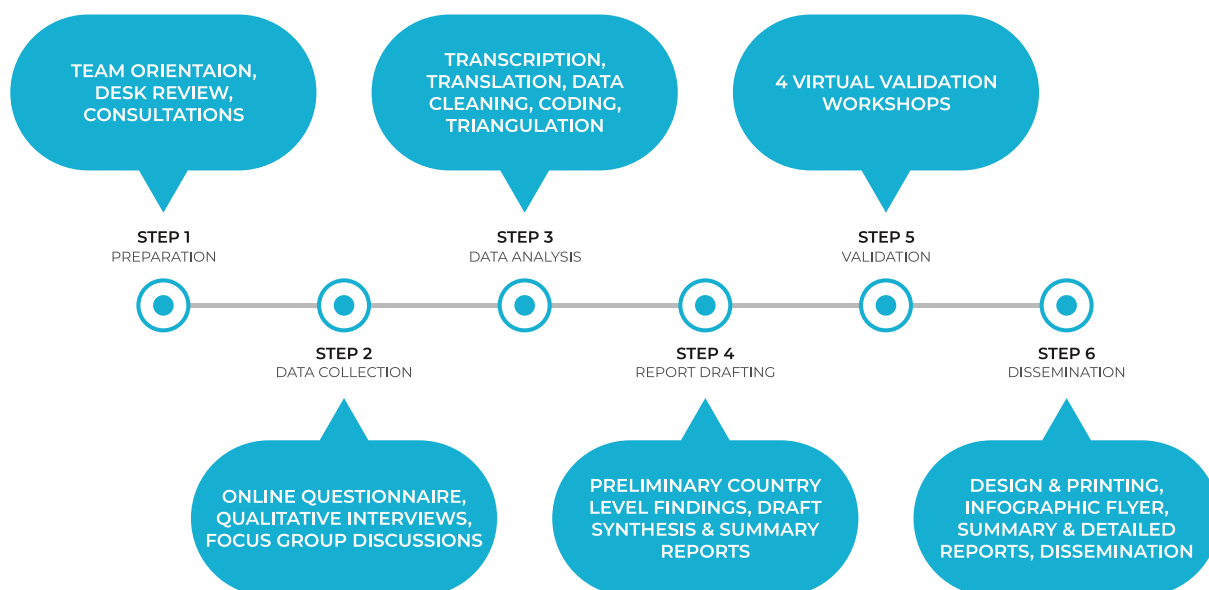


Figure 2. The 6-step study process

## Team Composition

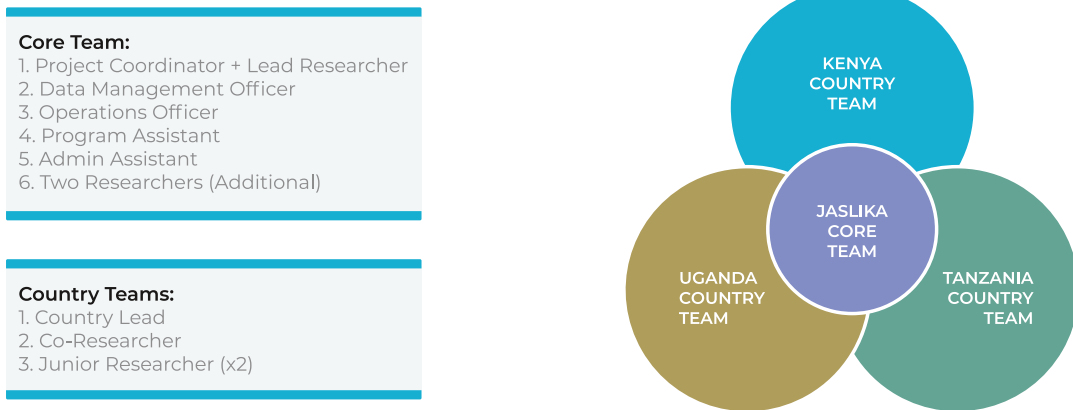


Figure 3. Study team structure and composition

The research team was carefully selected to reflect the multi-country scope of the study. As figure 3 illustrates, each of the three participating countries had its own team, comprising four researchers at different levels of experience. Having researchers on the ground in each country facilitated in-person data collection by minimising risks posed by possible inter-country COVID-19 related travel restrictions.

## Study Participants

The study had an overall sample of 358 participants, spread over the three countries, with almost half the research participants drawn from Tanzania, about a third from Kenya and just over a fifth from Uganda, as figure 4 indicates.

Figure 4. Participant profile by sex, vocation and country

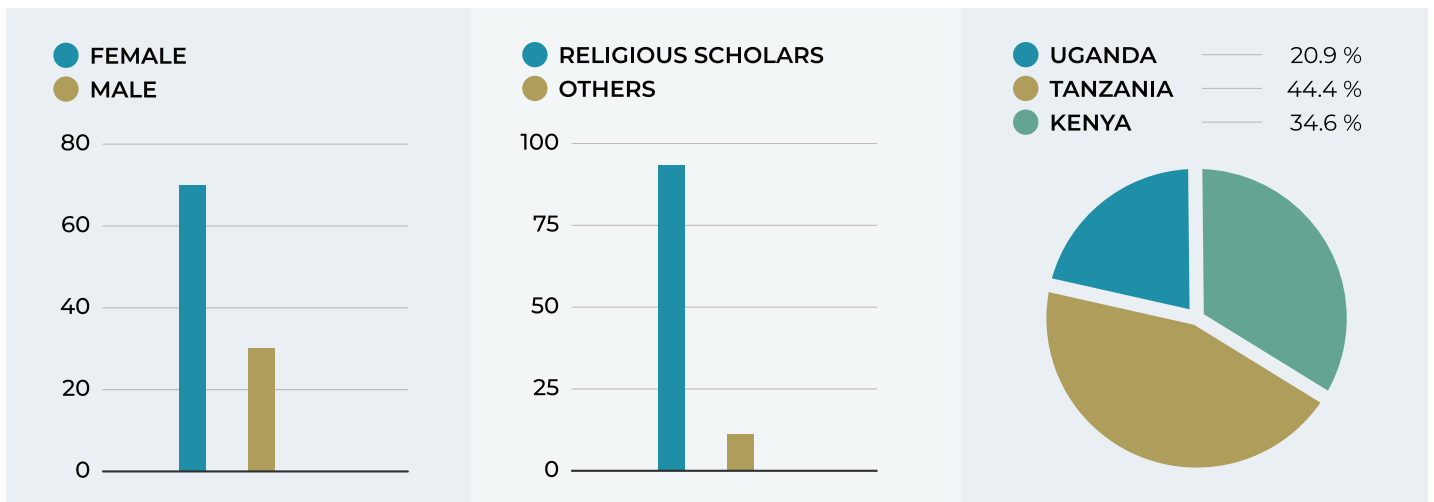


Table 2 provides a breakdown of the total sample in each country by sex. Overall, 70 percent of the sample were female. In Tanzania, females approximated 78 percent of the total study participants.

Table 2. Number of study participants by country and sex

Country	Female	Male	Total
Kenya	81	43	124
Tanzania	124	35	159
Uganda	46	29	75
Total	251	107	358

An overwhelming majority (89.9%) of the sample of 358 study participants were CSP scholars - religious sisters and brothers, priests and a few laypersons.

## Data collection methods and the generation of data

As highlighted in figure 5, interviews, discussions and a quantitative survey were used as the main data collection methods. Data mining was done from a joint consultative meeting held at inception with the NGLP Executive Secretaries, and subsequently from country consultations with representatives of the NGLP management in each country.

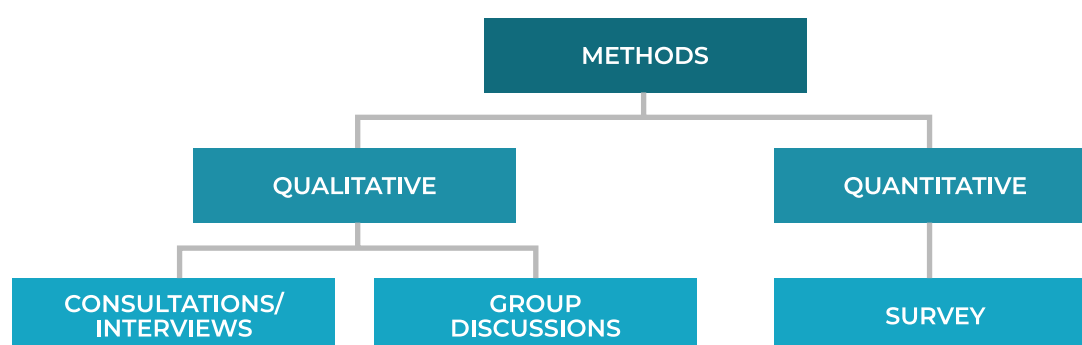


Figure 5. Data collection methods

More details on the individual data collection methods and process follow.

- a. Scholars' survey: An on-line survey questionnaire was administered in two phases; the first between December 20, 2021 and January 3, 2022 through an already existing

WhatsApp group in Uganda, and newly formed groups in Kenya and Tanzania, created for this purpose; and the second phase comprising follow-up telephone calls between January 5 and 16, 2022 for those who did not respond within the specified period. As indicated in table 3, a total of 186 scholars participated in the survey, of which 75 per cent were female.

Table 3. Survey respondents by country, sex and vocation

Country	Female			Male				Grand Total
	Lay Person	Religious Sister	Total	Lay Person	Priest	Religious Brother	Total	
Kenya	3	46	49	4	4	11	19	68
Tanzania	4	59	63	0	3	11	14	77
Uganda	4	24	28	4	3	6	13	41
<b>Total</b>	11	129	140	8	10	28	46	186

The overall survey completion rate was 95 percent. Even after taking into consideration that there were more females in our samples than males, the response rate was higher among the former (99%) than the latter gender (78%). Breakdown of the data by country shows Kenya leading with the highest percentage of responses (97%) in the survey followed by Tanzania (95%) and Uganda (93%) though as table 3 indicates, in absolute numbers, Tanzania had the largest sample.

Approximately 66 percent of the targeted sample responded online using the WhatsApp link. This is an average figure; in Uganda, it was lower with 50 percent of eligible respondents answering the questionnaire online, while in Kenya and Tanzania, the corresponding percentages were higher at 73 percent and 68 percent respectively. Junior researchers followed up with the non-responders using WhatsApp and/or the normal telephone lines, managing to push the completion rate to over 90 percent.

- b. Scholars' in-depth interviews: Analysis of the data on scholars' participation in in-depth interviews presented in table 4 indicate a reach of 83%, with the highest participation rate registered in Tanzania (90%), followed by Kenya (79%) and Uganda (75%). In this purposive sample, on average more male scholars (94%) responded to the request for interviews relative to female scholars (78%). However, in Kenya, there were two additional male scholars who were interviewed than planned.

Table 4. In-depth interviews conducted - targeted vs achieved sample by sex and country

Country	Targeted Sample			Achieved Sample		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Kenya	23	11	34	14	13	27
Tanzania	32	9	41	31	6	37
Uganda	13	11	24	8	10	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>82</b>

c. Scholars' FGDs

As table 5 reveals, a total of 54 scholars were reached through FGDs in the three countries, reflecting a response rate of just over half (57%) of what we had expected. There were a total of 8 FGD sessions (62%) of the targeted 13. Assembling men for the sessions was more difficult than women scholars.

Table 5. Total FGD sessions conducted by sex and country and total participants

FGD SESSIONS					
Country	Female Only	Male Only	Mixed	Total Sessions	Total Participants
Kenya	1	1	1	3	17
Tanzania	2	0	2	4	30
Uganda	0	0	1	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>54</b>

d. Key Informant Interviews (KIs)

There was no set target for the number of key informants to interview. The categories of 'experts' to be interviewed were identified during the country consultative meetings and follow-up discussions with the Executive Secretaries. The choice of the specific KIs was left to the discretion of the country and core research teams based on the guiding principles of value addition and point of saturation. The final sample of key informants were 34 (65% female) across the three countries as highlighted in table 6.

Table 6. Key informants by sex and category

	Female	Male	Total
CSP Boards	3	4	7
Executive Secretaries (ES) / ES Office	2	1	3
Host University Representatives	0	2	2
Superiors of the Congregations	4	0	4

Service Providers	5	1	6
Course Facilitators	3	2	5
Cluster Coordinators	4	1	5
Alumni	1	1	2
Total	22	12	34

## Data Analysis and Validation

The survey, which was quantitative with some open-ended questions, was analysed using descriptive statistics, and presented as tables and charts providing additional corroborating evidence. However, the bulk of the data that was generated was qualitative. Data analysis was thus guided by the principles and procedures of the qualitative research paradigm. It involved the following steps:

1. ***Preliminary data analysis:*** This began in the field and included the researchers' reflections of the process, context, challenges and outcomes. These were shared with the project lead in the form of individual and country-based team reports by the end of the fieldwork period. They helped to identify the researchers' biases and take these into consideration in the reporting process.
2. ***Transcriptions and translations:*** All interviews and FGDs were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts cleaned prior to data analysis by the junior researchers and trained Jaslika Youth members. In the case of Tanzania, where many of the interviews and FGDs were conducted in Kiswahili, the transcripts were translated into English. In all cases, the transcripts were validated by the senior researchers.
3. ***Data coding and entry:*** The qualitative data was coded and thematically analysed both manually and electronically using qualitative and mixed methods analysis software (MAXQDA 2022) paying special attention to emerging themes (see table 7) and subthemes linked to the research objectives. The data was further coded by country, gender, education level and vocation.

Table 7. Major coding themes

Impact of COVID-19: Institutional, Programmatic, Individual
Experiences of e-learning
Barriers to e-learning
Participants' recommendations
OECD assessment criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability (Motivation, Technical and Infrastructural Capacity)



4. **Triangulation:** The data from the different sources were triangulated (qualitative and quantitative and across countries) with consideration for what was common as well as unique across the different locales.
5. **Presentation of findings:** The study findings in this report are presented largely in narrative form with voices of the interviewees.
6. **Validation of results:** The NGLP Boards in each country and Porticus independently validated the study findings as being a true reflection of the situation on the ground. (See box 2).

### Box 2. Voices from the validation meetings

*Congratulations to the team. The report is very accessible and credible and what I think the consultants have done is to verbalise our own sort of intuitive insights that we have always had as facilitators or teachers or lecturers, as well as participating in training and things like that. – Participant, Kenya*

*Having reviewed the above-listed recommendation, and based on the previous online discussion and presentations by the JASLIKA team I think the recommendations are quite exhaustive. I therefore recommend them for further action. – Written feedback from Tanzania*

*It was very interesting reading the draft report that you put together to articulate the findings of this work. And listening to your presentation has been very informative. I enjoyed the level of detail in some sections of the report. – Participant, Uganda*

*That's an excellent point that you are raising; that we cannot operate in silos. – Participant, Porticus*

All issues raised by the validation meeting participants were reviewed, and incorporated into the final report as appropriate.

## Quality Assurance and Ethics

Quality assurance mechanisms were in-built into the study process to ensure rigour in data collection, ethical conduct and credibility of outcomes. They included:

1. Orientation workshops undertaken virtually to promote common understanding of the purpose of the study, application of the tools, procedures and expectations.
2. Virtual capacity strengthening workshops were built into the process for tools development, finalisation of the coding framework and validation. The participatory

approach taken in these sessions encouraged active participation by both senior and junior researchers, thereby enhancing ownership of the process and outcomes.

3. Regular check-in status meetings to monitor progress and harmonisation across countries were organised, facilitated by the Project Lead. They doubled as opportunities to identify possible challenges and troubleshoot.
4. Senior researchers in each country took a lead in conducting interviews and FGDs apart from selected key informant interviews for which the Project Lead took responsibility. Junior researchers were involved in the qualitative data collection process in capacity development positions and were involved in note taking, transcribing and coding of the data. In the case of Kenya, an additional senior researcher was assigned to support the country team in conducting some of the interviews. In Tanzania, a Jaslika Youth member who had been adequately trained and adept in conducting qualitative interviews supported the country team virtually by undertaking selected in-depth interviews.
5. The quantitative survey was administered and managed online by the Jaslika Project Officer whose tasks included data management. However, country-based junior researchers followed up on phone/WhatsApp to ensure completion of the questionnaire. Prior to the implementation of the survey, a pre-test was done to ensure clarity of the instrument and relevance of the questions.
6. The data coded by junior researchers was double checked independently and verified by senior researchers for accuracy and consistency.
7. Taking informed consent of all research participants was mandatory. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured through assigning unique identification numbers for all study participants and removing any personal identifiers from the interview transcripts. The redacted transcripts were stored in a shared drive with access restricted to the Project Lead, Project Officer and specific researchers as necessary.

## Challenges and Limitations

As initially conceptualised, the fieldwork was to take place between 9 to 22 December, 2021. Given the reality on the ground, we had to modify the timeline, kicking off the data collection process with the administration of the online survey on the 20th of December. In addition to the late start, there were five main challenges that we faced in accessing the study participants, scheduling of appointments and organising FGDs:

1. We started the process in the midst of the festive season when the institutions and offices closed down for the holidays. We were unable to secure interviews until after Christmas; the first appointments we got were on the 28th of December in Kenya and

Tanzania, and 29th of December in Uganda.

2. Most difficult to organise were the FGDs as targeted participants had dispersed for the holidays, and were not expected back until after the 10th of January, especially in the case of Kenya and Uganda and were therefore not available for being interviewed in-person.
3. Virtual interviews were not always an option. Many of the targeted informants had challenges in accessing internet or mobile telephone networks or not having access to appropriate devices in their home areas, especially if they were far away from major urban towns . Neither was it possible for the research team members to travel 6 to 10 hours to some of the distant locations where the scholars were resident.
4. Competing priorities and conflicts in their course timetables made it difficult for scholars to come together and participate in FGDs, since these required them to be in one place at any one time.
5. Another major factor that affected the fieldwork process was the ill-health of some targeted participants and research team members due to COVID-19 infection and/or the flu. There were several postponements/cancellations of appointments for the same reason, while other appointments were affected by bereavements.

## CHAPTER THREE

# PERCEPTIONS AND BARRIERS

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### Introduction

*We started doing online learning and that is when I started to appreciate the new system. You know as human beings we have been evolving, we started with the neolithic revolution then there was the scientific revolution and now we are at the age of information and communication revolution and despite the challenges I can say that there are a number of factors we can say that are favouring scholars. On the matters of time, it has saved a lot of time for the scholars. It is also cost effective, it is somehow cheaper compared to using transport on a daily basis. (KE/025/FGD/RS/F)*

*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 sometimes 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 is the first of two chapters that presents findings of the study. It explores perceptions of study participants on e-learning and the barriers to its low uptake by Catholic scholars within the context of the impact of COVID-19, and its effects on the NGLP.

## Impact of COVID-19 on the Scholarship Programme

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on NGLP was felt at institutional, programmatic and individual levels.

### Institutional level impact

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. 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 scrambling 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 online 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.

In all three East African countries, institutions of higher learning, along with basic education institutions closed down indefinitely in March 2020, but their reopening day varied from one country to another, with Tanzania experiencing the shortest period of closure as table 8 indicates.

Table 8. Closure of institutions of higher learning in East African countries due to COVID-19

Country	COVID-19 Closure	Reopening for On-line Learning	Reopening for Contact Learning
Kenya	March 2020	September 2020	January 2021
Tanzania	March 2020	April 2020	June 2020
Uganda	March 2020	April 2020	November 2020

The reopening was done in a phased manner, with learners first accessing remote learning months ahead of returning to campus for in-person classes. The words of this scholar from Tanzania resonated with the experiences of her peers from Kenya and Uganda:

*This pandemic really affected us because the colleges were closed and we returned home without knowing when it would end. When we were at home the government insisted on self-studying online at home but we were not very successful . (TZ/022/IDI/RS/F)*

Some institutions of higher learning had better internet infrastructure, and were therefore able to make the transition to online learning earlier than others. According to a key informant, Strathmore University in Kenya, for example, took only four days to migrate to an online mode (KE/001/KII/SP/F). In Uganda, the Kisubi Catholic University and Uganda Martyrs University, Nkonzi reopened to remote learning by April and May 2020 respectively as compared to Makerere University in July 2021. It is notable that the private institutions, like Strathmore University, are financially better endowed compared to the latter, which is public.

Generally, the lack of institutional readiness to handle online classes at the onset of COVID-19 caused delays in resumption of learning, with some facilitators/lecturers rushing through lessons once remote classes began. The priority appeared to be on ensuring the closure of the semester by holding examinations, rather than ensuring that learning had actually taken place.

*The university wanted to simply close in the calendar year. Because there are some lecturers who did not teach, like that first semester they did not teach, so it was a matter of doing the exams, then considering the semester finished. So maybe, you do exams and they say, "he has finished". (UG/025/IDI/LP/M)*

In some cases, there was poor planning of lessons, since there was no timetable provided. The scheduling of lessons, it was claimed by scholars, was at the discretion of the lecturers/course facilitators based on their convenience, sometimes resulting in shorter interactions with learners. Alleged one scholar,

*I'm giving an example of the university - we used to sign for the hours that the lecturers have finished attending. But with online, you see this man can come and talk for 45 minutes when you know he is supposed to take 2 hours. So he takes 30 minutes and he goes, he tells you I have finished. (Ibid)*

Higher education institutions also had to reconfigure their physical environment to comply with the COVID-19 mitigation measures. For example, at Kenyatta University in Kenya, more space was created to enable physical distancing by demolishing the walls between smaller classrooms that were adjacent to each other. At the same time, a rotational system was introduced whereby students accessed physical learning in batches, depending on cohort and course.

Provision of in-person learning also meant making changes in which the university community interacted with one another, professionally or socially. Following government requirements, everyone on campus was expected to wear masks, handwash, and maintain social distance from one another in and outside the classroom (TZ/018/IDI/LP/M).

## Programme level impact

The scholars are enrolled in various institutions in their countries of residence. This means that the digital divide between public and private institutions that existed at the start of the pandemic, affected their access to online learning, depending on where they were enrolled. An informant observed that, “Students who were in private institutions are the ones who were in school; the ones in public were not” (UG/030/KII/ES/M).

The mandatory courses offered under the Scholarship Programme had initially been conceptualised for in-person learning. Thus, the programme, like the education sector as a whole, was caught unprepared to deal with the impact of COVID-19 on learning. It was not always successful in migrating to online modes for a variety of factors discussed later in this chapter. In some instances, the implementation of courses had to be postponed; for example, Executive Management went through a review process in 2019/2020 to make it relevant and eliminate overlaps with Servant Leadership, but could not be implemented as originally anticipated because COVID-19 prevented holding “a face-to-face class”. It was finally implemented in Kenya and Uganda in 2021 with some groups of scholars, but was rescheduled in Tanzania from November 2021 to April 2022 (KE/001/KII/SP/F).

Confirming the rescheduling of the Executive Management course, a key informant lamented:

*COVID-19 has affected the courses very much because we had a timetable where we had planned already. For instance, last year, we had a plan to roll out the Executive Management training with Strathmore, which is in Nairobi, which was in lockdown. It was never possible to travel. So we did not do it hence we are planning to do it this year [2022], during class sessions which is going to be very difficult, but it has to be done because during the first quarter of the year, we need to finish up that activity. So remember we have three years and in three years, you need to make sure that a scholar is trained on Child Protection, Servant Leadership and Executive Management [depending on the education level of the scholar]. Now, for instance, those who finished last year were only trained in Child Protection. That means if the main objective - the vision - was to make sure that we have an accountant who has the skills about Child Protection, Executive Management and Servant Leadership, automatically this accountant has only gone out with Child Protection and Safeguarding skills so two more courses are pending. So I am not so sure if this scholar is going to have an impact as it was planned before because the purpose of the courses was not only to instil knowledge about the Executive Management about Servant Leadership. So it affected the vision and the objectives of having these people well trained in that particular angle. So, for me, I would say the CSP vision and objectives have not been met for now due to COVID-19. (TZ/003/KII/ES/M)*

Even when a course, like the Servant Leadership was offered virtually, the organisers faced multiple challenges implementing it. A key informant noted that despite the remote mode of delivery of the course, the logistics had to be done physically.

*You need to buy the data, you need to get the facilitators accommodation, you need to put them in one single room, you need to make sure the equipment is working, you need to get the IT. They have configured this thing in such a way that it will give the students who were watching a beautiful experience. All that stuff has to be done. I mean, you still have to do this physically despite the total lockdown. You have to go to the bank and pick up the money, send it to each of the scholars. You have to make sure that on a daily basis you are having those inner reviews so it was really, it was a hard thing for you to run in a lockdown kind of scenario. (UG/030/KII/ES/M)*



COVID-19 was perceived as “the disease which destroyed everything; it made everything not to be in order” (KE/028/IDI/RS/M). One of the things that was not “in order” was the way the courses were delivered. It was no longer feasible for scholars from different institutions to converge in one central venue to learn. Instead, a hybrid model was adopted to ensure physical distancing - one that allowed the majority to join in “online and some were on-site because of the issue of the numbers” (Ibid).

## Impact at the individual level

At the individual level, scholars expressed their frustration at the delays in completion of the course and consequent deferment of their graduation because of the COVID-19 closures (KE/027/FGD/RS/MIXED; UG/025/IDI/LP/M). A scholar described how the mitigation measures put in place for COVID-19 pandemic led to rescheduling and staggering of the mandatory courses, resulting in the deferment in completion of their course of study.

*The one for Servant Leadership - I did the one for Servant Leadership in 2020. Then last year I was supposed to have that one for Child Protection. But because of COVID, they had to be put into segments. The people were just having it in regions. So, ours they are still planning but some of us have already done it; they had it last month in December. They went to Dar es Salaam. So, for us, ours is near, nearly to come.*  
(TZ/005/IDI/RS/F)

Because of the mandatory NGLP courses, the scholars feared they would not be able to graduate without undertaking these even if they had completed all other units in their fields of study. In addition to the delays, some scholars indicated that their performance had declined as a result of online learning, attributing this largely to the lack of discussion groups, non-engaging facilitators, little or no feedback, connectivity and other technology related challenges discussed in more detail in the section on barriers. Others felt let down, that their expectations of the course had not been met,

*I wanted this course to make me a strong person and somebody who is equipped with those skills of a leader who is hands-on. But now I have missed that because I wanted to get leadership skills so that I can improve our school. I can say even the teachers should be an example to them but I have not practised though I am learning, but after learning I just come back home and sleep. But if it could be like after the course, I come and apply those skills I have gained. It would be very fine, but now*

*when we open I may apply them but not as when I was fresh and so it has greatly affected me. (UG/025/IDI/LP/M)*

Of deeper significance was the psychological trauma experienced by the scholars; in all three countries study participants talked of being either infected by the coronavirus or affected by it or both (KE/020/IDI/RS/F; KE/006/KII/B/F). The constant fear of infection exacerbated by stories of COVID-19 related deaths reported in the media and communicated through social networks made learning less of a priority for many of the scholars, with their health and safety taking centre stage. Thus, with the pandemic raging and infection and bereavement rates on the rise, the ability of many scholars to concentrate on studies diminished. This was succinctly expressed by a Ugandan scholar,

*COVID psychologically affected us, our brains, our emotions, our everything and the learning. The learning process may not be as before because some have been affected; they have had COVID like let me give you one example, we lost our sister, last year who was on catholic scholarship. She didn't complete it. She was doing BA in Kyambogo in education. She died in June. (UG/001/KII/B/F)*

The physical and consequently social isolation caused by the COVID-19 mitigation measures in all three countries, albeit to varying extent, impacted on the individual's psychological well-being and access to learning,

*When COVID came people were isolated and enclosed in different areas. So the challenge was, how do we go and meet with different people and that it was a must we need to go and learn. It was a bit challenging because travelling was also another problem. It was not safe to get into contact with so many people and we only made it through by the Grace of God and praying. (KE/002/IDI/RS/M)*

Finally, for many who accessed classes online from their homes or places of work, there was a blurring of boundaries between their personal, professional and school responsibilities.

## Experiences of e-learning

Among the four mandatory CSP courses, Servant Leadership was the only one that had migrated fully to online instruction. Executive Management, which included a brief unit on IT, was taught offline as was Child Protection. Sometimes, remote methods were used because of the restrictions on accessing large groups physically, but these were more of “screen teaching”

as one service provider described it. “Screen teaching” in the present context, refers to lecturing on a video conferencing platform without adapting the pedagogy to interactive remote learning strategies.

Overall, one 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. This is captured in figure 6.

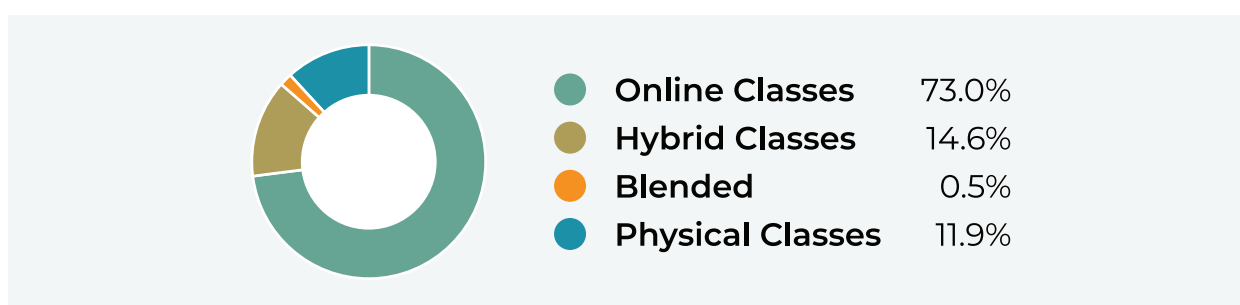


Figure 6: Scholar perspective of most effective modality for delivering learning during COVID-19

However, as figure 7 reveals, just over one-fifth of the surveyed study participants responded in the affirmative when asked if they had attended the mandatory Servant Leadership course online.

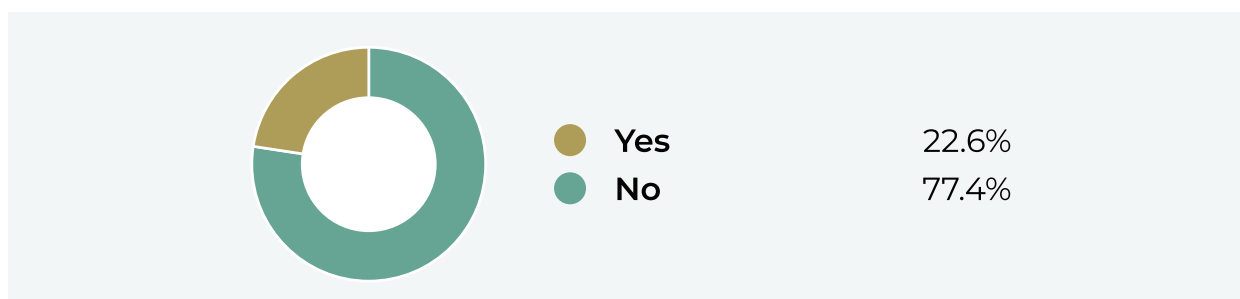


Figure 7. Percentage of scholars who attended online the mandatory CSP Servant Leadership<sup>5</sup>

Though at first glance the level of participation in this mandatory course appears to be very low, it must be remembered that it is not offered to all scholars but is restricted to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Thus, this cannot be taken as an accurate measure of the exposure of the NGLP scholars with different remote learning modalities. The qualitative interviews and FGDs revealed a scenario where many of the scholars, especially in Kenya and Uganda, had participated in courses, whether CSP or non-CSP, which were offered online. The

<sup>5</sup>Physical classes mean those attended in person on a classroom | Online classes includes session delivered via virtual internet based platforms and e-learning platforms | Blended means session delivered partly as online and partly physical | In the hybrid model, some students attend class in-person, while others join the class virtually from home. Educators teach remote and in-person students at the same time using tools like video conferencing hardware and software. <https://resources.owllabs.com/blog/hybrid-learning#>

discussion in the following paragraphs is thus informed by the experiences of the scholars, based on the use of a variety of remote learning strategies. As the narrative reveals, their experiences were both positive and negative.

## Positive experiences

There was a sense of the “inevitability” of embracing remote learning. “Technology has come, I must accept it”, said one scholar. “I can't insist that this is what I want, no” (TZ/003/IDI/RS/F). A key informant from Tanzania argued, echoing the perspectives of many others, including scholars, across all countries:

*Technology has been and is growing, and we must embrace technology in the present. And even as I say our country is scattered, students are scattered, there are many colleges, I think this will also help us by making sure we reach our goals on time. (TZ/028/KII/B/F)*

For some scholars, the on-line learning experiences were enriching, giving “ample opportunity for more discovery, more broadening of knowledge” (UG/031/FGD/RS/Mixed). They discovered online learning communities,

*Where we could post questions on the Canvas and we'd say please respond. And people would respond immediately and by the following day, people have already submitted, whereas if you give an assignment in a face-to-face environment, people will not respond maybe for the next two weeks, but here (online learning) was like instant. (UG/004/KII/CF/F)*

It also opened up horizons by connecting scholars to the world beyond their immediate environment. One FGD participant related how it enabled connecting “different people, that is, you can meet international people, who would physically be difficult to meet, people of different nationalities” (TZ/036/FGD/RS/F). Another scholar, a layperson, summed up his experience in the following words:

*Yes, they were very many very many benefits in that, first of all the mobilisation which was there and then linking to different colleagues and the resources we connected to - the canvas structure - very resourceful; the knowledge which we got, the lecturers, the instructors who gave their time and then linking up, I thought they were very very good and very positive and I feel that I learnt a lot. We are having*

*different people spread all over the continent still all over the whole world but still you can be brought together as a group. It was a nice experience and I remember when we were graduating, we were taking a photo, and a group photo from the screens; can you imagine? It is so beautiful, linking up with different people and of course not spending a lot of money travelling and saving time... yeah, it was good.*

(UG/026/IDI/LP/M)

Some appreciated Porticus for their flexibility and support they provided as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this support, they were able to access course materials online, which they could read at their convenience and study from home without external interference (UG/029/IDI/RS/M; UG/025/IDI/LP/M, UG/026/IDI/LP/M), and without the inconvenience of waking up early, preparing oneself for commuting and navigating through heavy traffic especially when it's hot, and spending money on transport (KE/014/IDI/RS/F). There were those who preferred the solitude, the quietness especially when doing exams, which enabled them “to concentrate than when I am in a crowd” claiming that it was “more comfortable for me to do it all alone because I am able to think about what I am doing” (Ibid).

## Negative experiences

However, as one Kenya-based key informant pointed out, there were both advantages and disadvantages to online learning. While on the one hand it was good because it was “much easier, they didn't have to hassle and all that” (KE/032/KII/L/F), on the other hand,

*It compromised education in the sense that they were not interacting with people, and the lecturer could have been teaching from wherever ... the toilet or wherever. You know that kind of thing.. And the exam, I don't think those exams were really done well. You know, like compromised. So the rate of education has really gone down because education is really interaction and discussion and all that. That's what I would have. Though now they have gone back to school, they are learning. (Ibid)*

Indeed, there were many more negative than positive experiences as related by the scholars and other key stakeholders. The scholars missed interacting with peers socially and physically, affecting the way they discussed assignments, practised what they learnt, bonding with their peers and learning from one another (UG/028/IDI/LP/M; KE/016/IDI/RS/F; KE/009/IDI/RS/F).

Some complained of course facilitators who did not have the right skills to engage online

learners, “who is just like preaching” or “taking you non-stop for a full day and you lose interest and track” (UG/028/IDI/LP/M). Confessed the informant, “You just log in for the purposes of logging in; you don't really feel that you're in class” (Ibid). Another scholar complained,

*When the class was launched, you were not even allowed to put on the microphone, so even if you had a question sometimes you could not reach on to the teacher. They were saying, write the question and you don't even know where to start to write, with the telephone it was very hard to write some question. (KE/016/IDI/RS/F)*

There were also complaints that the online learning “system” setup “failed due to internet challenges. So it came to a point where you waste time without success” (TZ/036/FGD/RS/F).

Scholars also talked of larger classes than they had been used to during in-person sessions. One of the consequences of this was not being able to get some information “because the class is so big and some students could be left out” (UG/012/IDI/RS/F). Another scholar recalled,

*We were limited, you know you're having a class of about 50 people that is one branch, that is Rubaga. At least, we knew each other we would interact and we would really be very active. But now when it comes to online classes, you're joined with other campuses, with Mbale you join with Masaka, with Nkozi, you realise you have something like 200 participants in one class. (UG/028/IDI/LP/M)*

The preference for physical, in-person classes by many scholars was pragmatic. In the words of Kenyan scholars,

*[When] we are through with class, then I have an opportunity to attend the library, an opportunity to see the teacher for something private that I think I did not understand. So there are a lot of those for physical classes. (KE/009/IDI/RS/F)*

*Sometimes the interaction with the lecturer is very enriching when we are listening to him and we would ask questions and he would clarify and that way, I will be able to understand better than when I am doing it online. (KE/014/IDI/RS/F)*

Other scholars fear the unknown. They feared not understanding and having the skills to use the internet platforms effectively. For example, one scholar, asked by the researcher of her views, responded “Online, I fear it”. When further probed why she feared it, she explained,

“Because I have stayed for long without studying. At least if the teacher is close, we can have some practice” (TZ/003/IDI/RS/F).

Scholars preferred physical forums as providing more opportunities for exchanging ideas, collaboration and problem solving.

*But when we are together, I understand A, then you understand B, if we share together, you find that we are building a very strong thing. Though, in this online programme that we are sharing, we are given assignments like that, discussing together. You find that it is not as active as when we meet physically. When we meet together like that, we are going to share different ideas. For instance, challenges which I am facing in my mission in a certain station, you may find that another person from another corner of this country is facing the same. When we share, do you find that this problem is solvable? Rather than if I am alone, how can I solve it? I find it is a very big challenge. While if I meet with my friends we discuss together, the problem is more solved. (TZ/001/IDI/RS/M)*

## Barriers to the up-take of e-learning

The barriers identified through the online survey questionnaire and the qualitative methods were largely similar. This may be attributed to the fact that the question on barriers in the survey was open-ended, encouraging the respondents to share their perspectives on the issue. However, the qualitative data helped to unpack and interpret the survey responses, and uncover hidden yet sociologically significant insights into the matter.

Table 9: Barriers to e-learning by country identified by NGLP scholars in online survey

	Tanzania	Uganda	Kenya
<b>Internet Related Barriers</b>	67.9%	44.1%	57.1%
<b>Power</b>	6.2%	14.7%	16.3%
<b>Cost</b>	6.2%	23.5%	10.2%
<b>Technical Capacity</b>	9.9%	5.9%	4.1%
<b>Device Issues</b>	6.2%	5.9%	2.0%
<b>Other</b>	3.7%	5.9%	10.2%

Table 9 summarises the barriers from the survey responses, indicating internet-related barriers to be the most frequently mentioned across all three countries by the scholars. The pie chart (table 9) reinforces this finding, revealing that on average, 3 in 5 respondents - approximately

60 percent - identified the internet to be the main barrier to scholars accessing e-learning.

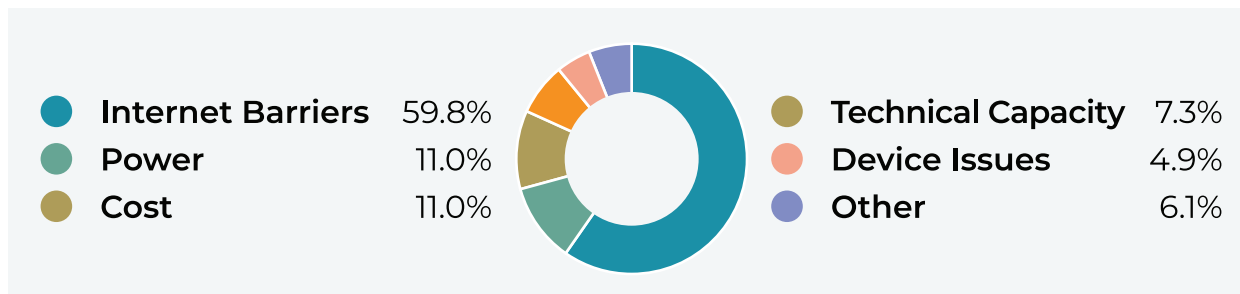


Figure 8: E-learning uptake barriers as percentage of total scholar survey responses

## Internet-related barriers and the non-availability of power

Internet-related barriers in table 8 and figure 9 above refer variously to the lack of access (no coverage), as well as slow and unstable internet. One scholar who expressed safety concerns, reported having “to be outside the buildings” and how “that environment [outside] is not very safe” (Scholars’ Survey, Tanzania). A sister, who was based in a remote part of Kenya, a country that claims higher internet penetration than the other two countries, narrated how she had to travel long distances to access internet network,

*Because there was no network, the electricity had not been put in place. I could find myself having a lot of problems and difficulties and it forced me sometimes to leave the community and go to the town where I could get network and power and stay there until we did the studies.*  
(KE/014/IDI/RS/F)

The qualitative data further pointed to additional internet-related barriers including inadequate bandwidth causing dropping of video calls, unclear videos and generally poor call quality that affected their e-learning experience. Not all institutions were prepared to support online learning on large scale as a key informant observed:

*There was an issue with not having a stable internet connection, which was a problem because our university is not well advised, and we only have standard connections to facilities, whereas other universities use WiFi and other stable technologies. There's also the issue of regular power outages, which disrupts the internet, and sometimes the connections aren't stable because different companies use Vodacom and Airtel, which causes disruptions because the internet isn't stable. Having no specific venue where we can sit together and attend the session, you'll find the other is at home or in another town, which is a*



*challenge. (TZ/030/KII/CF/F)*

Related to the issue of the internet is power outages (11%), which often disrupted internet connectivity, leading to loss of class time as illustrated by the above citation. 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 online classes.

## Cost of Internet

The high cost of data bundles (included in the charts under the generic term ‘cost’ -11%) emerged as a major concern for scholars in all three countries. Even when WiFi was available at an institution, weak signal means “you will not have clear conversation or classes with the lecturer” making one “to buy your own data bundle for emergency” (UG/002/IDI/RS/F). This concern is captured in the quote below:

*When you are to use e-learning you would look at the price of data in Uganda. The tax was also hyped [so] you find that the data we used to buy in 2019, the price is too high now. And even the way it runs - it runs so fast; you find you can purchase data like 1gb and thinking that it will be enough for the whole session, you find that it really expires within like minutes. So when a scholar sometimes sees that you are supposed to incur costs, sometimes becomes reluctant, and in the end he or she misses a lecture because some people, you can wake up in the morning when you don't have any single coin to purchase data. So many end up missing out, and others - they will purchase what they have at that time and when it expires, then it will be done. (UG/024/IDI/LP/M)*

A fellow scholar confirms the high cost of using data bundles,

*I tried to calculate how much data a person can use. Personally I was using almost per month - I could use like [Ug Sh] 50,000 and that was the time when I was using Africell which was a bit cheap, but now when you go to MTN, you find that you sometimes use a lot. Airtel, it's also not cheap. So if you find that every month you're spending such money. (UG/021/IDI/P/M)*

## Poor quality, borrowed and shared devices

Study participants also linked accessibility to the type and quality of their devices, some describing them as “inappropriate” for the purpose, as well as costly to buy new more appropriate ones.

Though the mention of other barriers like lack of technical skills, no or inappropriate devices were in single digits, the qualitative data revealed deeper insights into these.

“When COVID struck, the world went upside down,” observed an alumna. “Everyone was expected to have a smartphone, a laptop, the internet and this was instant ” (KE/008/KII/AL/F). However, as a service provider pointed out, some scholars did not have any device and therefore would not attend online classes. Asked why they did not attend, they would say because they did not own a device and “the person I borrowed the phone from was not available for me to borrow that phone” (KE/007/KII/SP/F).

Some faculty members and scholars especially from the under-resourced congregations,

*Really struggled. Then a majority of our students, their congregations are differently gifted. There are some that are able to have these facilities while some are not. So the question now struck, how are we going to help them go to school because when we have paid your school fees but you are expected to study in your own congregation and the response we were getting is that’s the part where the community comes in. The superior and the congregation are supposed to take care of that. For myself I started asking, are we a strategic board or a committee, because had we been a strategic board we should have tried to reach out to other people. (KE/008/KII/AL/F)*

Another key informant, a service provider, agreed that not all congregations had the capacity to share with the scholars and support them to procure devices:

*Some congregations have so much been affected because most of the donors have passed away. Remember, we depend on Germany, Italy, and those other countries who have been so much affected by COVID-19. So, some of the congregations do not have schools, which can produce enough money to help the congregation and to help those who are in school. I am telling you a secret. This is the secret; some other congregations do not even have enough money to pay for accommodation. We are paying full school fees and we give them small*

*money for stationery. Some other congregations struggle to pay for accommodation to their scholars; can they manage to buy a laptop?*  
(KE/003/KII/SP/F)

It was alleged that some congregations do not allow religious sisters to have a smartphone (KE/003/KII/SP/F). An informant related the case of a sister who was “victimised” because

*She asked for a laptop. The school where she was teaching went online for everybody, so they require the staff to have laptops. She didn't have one. When she went to ask from the congregation, the congregation said, "We have no money to buy a laptop." Then the school said, "Fine, can we take a bit of your salary, buy for you as we buy for others?" Now that became an issue with the congregation and so you know finally as we speak now, she was thrown out from there because of that.*  
(KE/006/KII/B/F)

We do not have the data on frequency of such occurrences. The available data reveal multiple instances of scholars complaining of having to borrow or share devices because they did not own any. One course facilitator from Tanzania estimated that only four in a class of 70 students owned laptops; the majority could not afford them (TZ/030/KII/CF/F). Many had devices that were old and outdated and thus could not handle e-learning platforms. Several scholars noted that audibility was often a challenge,

*When the lectures are going on and then one is not able to ask questions and listen properly, sometimes, when the lectures are going on because of these old computers you cannot get the voice properly, the explanation properly so that one also becomes a hindrance in the course programme.* (UG/023/IDI/RS/M)

Another scholar complained, “My voice sometimes gets muted. When that happens, I leave for a while. Rejoining the meeting takes time” (Scholars Survey, Tanzania). Others noted problems with the video quality, which one informant described as a “Little bit terrible because right now you can see me very clearly, but for them, they would look something like a ghost because of the hazy pictures and some had faulty cameras” (UG/030/KII/ES/M). Sometimes the devices had a battery life so poor that they could not last the duration of lessons, let alone be used to follow up on assignments. In addition, they did not always have funds to repair the devices in case of a breakdown (UG/013/KII/HU/M).

Smartphones were mentioned as an alternative to laptops. Some scholars were able to buy their phones with the allowance from the scholarship (KE/002/IDI/RS/M). Others simply shared

the same device with their friends. However, using a smartphone or sharing a device had their own challenges. Observed a service provider,

*You try to imagine, you are a little lucky you are using your laptop right now but for me I am using my phone and I have to keep my phone in my hand. Now you imagine if that had to happen for seven days, that would be a problem. (UG/030/KII/ES/M)*

Other problems related to using smartphones and shared devices identified by the study participants are highlighted in table 10.

### Competing priorities distract scholars from e-learning

Table 10. Scholar experiences in using phones and shared devices to access classes

Inadequate skills to multitask using the phone. An informant described the challenges faced by his friend “manoeuvring on the phone to open the document while he is attending the zoom meeting” (UG/026/IDI/LP/M).
In-coming calls on the phone interfered with on-going lessons.
Problems with reading using the smartphone, a challenge faced especially by the older scholars and those with poor eyesight.
<p><i>Sometimes a device was shared between not only two or three scholars, but as many as 8, 9 or even 15 as illustrated by the following quote.</i></p> <p>I was teaching - just to give you an example - during COVID. We were having classes online. Other classes; not CSP classes but other classes but there was one community in that course. They were 15 [religious] brothers but all of them were to share the same screen. So I remember very well when I demanded I need to see everybody so that I can know everybody is there, you know, they told me: No sir, you know we are sharing this screen. That's why I knew they were sharing 15 of them - one screen! (KE/008/KII/SP/M)</p> <p>In a master’s class, at least 5 scholars were sharing one laptop. However, they did have access to internet connectivity, albeit unstable. You may ask a question but receive no response because the internet is down or someone is on the phone and not speaking clearly, making communication difficult. But now I see improvements, but that’s because the students we’re teaching are advanced, master’s and Ph.D. students who know what they’re doing and have the tools they need. (TZ/030/KII/CF/F)</p>
<p>Borrowing or sharing devices was a short term measure that addressed the immediate problem of not having access to the class. ICT skills need to be applied, observed a course facilitator, “to be able to remember and perfect it. So if you don’t have access to facilities after that it becomes a challenge to be able to practise what you’ve learnt” (KE/009/KII/SP/F).</p> <p>This echoed the concern of scholars across the region:</p> <p>I know that [not having a device] was one of the reasons, since if I had been following the instructions to the letter, I believe I would have gained a better comprehension and would have been able to think more clearly, but I was only listening at the time (TZ/034/IDI/RS/F).</p>

Scholars pointed out the challenge of competing demands on their time arising from their office work, domestic work and/or other tasks assigned to them by the Superiors. A Board member explained the resistance to online learning by some scholars, especially sisters:

*In the communities, there are a lot of activities that go on. You have to be there for prayers, for meals, you have to share responsibility. Now imagine someone is doing an exam and you have to do all the other chores that belong to the community and it's expected of you. Sisters are happier when they are here because here we don't follow them strictly, of course there are activities they do here but we don't follow them strictly like they have to be here at this time and if not, you are not a good member of the community. When you are a student you want some free time. More time for yourself to do research, prepare for exams just like any other person and I think those are some of the things the communities are sometimes not able to differentiate whether you are a student or not. (KE/033/KII/B/F)*

Study participants noted conflicts between the timetabling of some CSP lessons with the time for their routine prayers and other congregation activities (KE/003/KII/SP/; UG/022/IDI/P/M; TZ/009/IDI/LP/F).

*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. Timing is sometimes a challenge, since some of these lecturers teach in different universities, so he may say my class is at 5 p.m. but as a house we have a programme here - maybe it's time for mass, maybe it's time for prayers, maybe it's time for supper and for us religious, those special programmes - you cannot miss so long as you are around, you cannot miss. So there was that collision between the programme of the lecturer and community programmes, so sometimes you login and show you are online so that people are seeing you are around when actually you are off. (UG/022/IDI/P/M)*

Other scholars talked of conflicts in scheduling of CSP courses with their regular classes and/or congregation work, leading to missing out on one or the other (TZ/051/KII/B/M). Nevertheless, a scholar justified the assignment of duties by their community superiors, arguing

*Though I am a student there must be work as well, you cannot just be*

*waking up go to zoom, wake up go to zoom ,wake up go to zoom so they would be responsibilities that they would attach to you as long as you went home. (UG/030/KII/ES/M)*

A scholar felt aggrieved when he was denied a certificate for the Servant Leadership “despite informing them [of his unavailability the first few days] but it was not my own making, because such engagements sometimes they are unavoidable (UG/022/IDI/P/M). The course was scheduled at “a time when our congregation had to participate in a meeting where we vote our leaders” (Ibid).

## Unconducive home learning environments

For many scholars that we spoke to, the home environment was not always conducive for remote learning. Some described it as “difficult” for studying as it was “totally different from that of school” (TZ/052/KII/B/F).

*You know when you are at school even if you are tired you will be with your fellows you can learn together you are tired but you will put effort to study different when you are at home if you are tired with home chores it was difficult for you to study for many people, especially for those who don't have smart phone or television. It is so rare for the student to study when they are at home. (Ibid)*

The issue of children making noise in the background was raised by both male and female study participants across the three countries (UG/026/DI/LP/M; KE/013/IDI/LP/F; KE/027/FGD/RS/MIXED; KE/007/KII/SP/F). Female scholars, in particular, had to contend with domestic responsibilities such as childcare alongside attending to their lessons. In a mixed focus group discussion, a male participant confirmed that it was easier for a man to “sit and listen through the class” while joining in from home as less was expected of them in the domestic sphere (Ibid).

In addition, there were what may be described as “social distractions” arising from unannounced visits by friends, relatives and acquaintances who appeared oblivious of the possibility that they could be interrupting on-going remote learning sessions. One female scholar related the kind of interruptions that she sometimes experienced in the midst of her online classes:

*Here I am living in a [...], someone may knock inside and say, 'Have to see you; something has happened - there is something urgent which you have to attend to.' Sometimes I have to go to attend to something which I have or is urgent. So that is what I would say as my experience of e-learning, of online learning. (KE/009/IDI/RS/F)*

Another scholar had this to say,

*Sometimes also there were a lot of noise problems. You would learn, but at some moment you would find that you are being disturbed by either your neighbour or whoever. So you had to go to another place which is more conducive. (KE/028/IDI/RS/M)*

Noisy environments were identified as sources of distraction, making concentration difficult at least for some of the scholars (TZ/045/KII/B/F). In some cases, the culprits were inconsiderate colleagues who kept on shouting. "Even if you say, 'Sisters, I'm in class, they will keep quiet for like 5 minutes. After five minutes, one comes with a song and yet you are there listening" (UG/008/IDI/RS/F).

A key informant pointed out the challenge that scholars faced in finding a quiet room from where to access their online classes forcing them to sit outdoors in the compound,

*And then in the compound as he is seated, probably in the compound, somebody would pass and you know, scream their name [eeh, ehh] or the goat would pass! So something like that, you know. Then you know that feedback, you would receive feedback from the goat and so on and so forth. It was not very, very smooth. (UG/030/KII/ES/M)*

Combined with a poor internet network, noisy environments added to the frustrations of some scholars,

*For example whether you're having a room where you want to be a bit quiet but then you realise that room the network is not good and then you have to move to the other side or to a place where there is a good network, but then you realise that place with a good network, it is noisy or it is outside. (UG/026/IDI/LP/M)*

## **Inadequate IT knowledge and skills**

The knowledge and skills to navigate both the hardware (computers and smartphones) and

associated software is a key barrier to e-learning. This emerged in the qualitative data as a significant problem across all countries (UG/030/KII/ES/M). However, according to a course facilitator,

*The skills are there, let me say it's the disparity in the skills. So some participants are very well aware. They are good at what they need to know about these IT skills; then other participants are very green.*

*I think in one of the training sessions we even had to help somebody to get an email address, on the day of the training. So that becomes a bit of a steep curve because then they have to catch up very fast and be able to do what everyone else is doing.*

*So it's just the disparity in the level of skills that are needed to have the training done online. Fully online. (KE/009/KII/SP/F)*

The entry level skills gap was more pronounced in Tanzania. There were scholars who admitted to inadequate knowledge and skills to effectively use computers even many months after the introduction of online learning in the country. According to one scholar, she could “only do a few things like typing; there are things that I can't do on my computer” (TZ/044/IDI/RS/F). Elaborating, she said: “Maybe the use of mobile phones, I know but there are things I don't know like Zoom. I don't even know how to use email if I get questions” (Ibid). This skill gap was confirmed by another religious sister,

*When we were told to have a course, for example, Servant Leadership, which is done online because of this pandemic, we didn't participate in full because of different reasons. For example, some of us - **we were not familiar with how to use these facilities, how to use computers, how to use Zoom meetings**. And we have taken some orientation but we didn't participate in full. That is why some of us, we, didn't participate in full, because of this problem. (TZ/002/IDI/RS/F)*

In addition, 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. A service provider shared her insights on the issue of gender and age divides in accessing e-learning.

*We did notice the male participants in terms of technology, you know, the ones who are not very aged. You know we had like fathers who are quite aged. So you find for them [use of] technology was an issue.*



*But for the ones who were younger, they were okay. In fact, for some of them, even the computer and the laptops, the software was quite current and as we train them, we tell them, do this, we find that even some of them were showing the others how to do it, that is the male participants. For the ladies, like now mentioning the people who did not have Gmail accounts, were the ladies. They did not have email accounts; they had no idea how to fill in the questions; you know the questions, we use the Google form and it tells you, you know on the 'scale of one to four, click'. You find someone has no clue how to go about it. So, I can say in terms of knowledge the ladies - it's a bit wanting and I think it's the rigidity - wanting to learn something new - they find it a bit hard. You would hear someone say 'This is hard, how do I go about this?' But the good thing is once women learn, they are very good at it, specifically during presentations. We told them, they have to present them online on the last day. The lady had perfect work, you know, you find their slides are well arranged and the work is thoroughly done **so I can say the female is a bit slow and a bit rigid but once they learn, they do it well.***  
(SP/KII/001/F)

The insights of the service provider cited above were confirmed by female scholars from all three countries, some of whom admitted that they did not know how to use the video conferencing platforms and other related technologies especially at the beginning of the pandemic. "I could not upload the work", recalled a female religious scholar from Kenya. "Before the COVID-19 we had not yet been taught about the computer and how to use it and how to work online" (KE/014/IDI/RS/F).

One elderly priest from Uganda recalled,

*Challenges were coming, like functions on the platform which I didn't know how to use, it was called blue button -blue button something like that - you could just press the blue button and the lecturer starts speaking so that, one, I could get a challenge because I didn't know how to use it even when it comes to talk. I wanted to share, but you cannot share because you don't know how to use it. (UG/021/IDI/P/M)*

Sometimes, the elderly solicited the help of younger scholars who they perceived to be "knowledgeable about these issues"(TZ/034/IDI/RS/F). However, challenges associated with e-learning were not limited to only those with poor IT skills. Sometimes it was complicated even for those who could navigate the hardware and software as highlighted by this scholar,

*I just said that I have a small tab, now the tab could not access the canvas infrastructure, so what I could do I would download on the phone, then send through Bluetooth to open the document on the tab. So, I would download on the phone and then send it through Bluetooth to the tab or through I-connect to the computer then I transfer the things and I read it from a separate device, yeah. So personally, I was helped because of the ICT knowledge I had before. (UG/026/IDI/LP/M)*

## Pedagogical barriers

Scholars pointed out challenges related to online learning as difficulties in understanding concepts, lecturer - student interactions, lecturers' sharing books and notes without explanation, and assessments (examinations).

*If I compare my [online] studies to my physical studies for the first semester of year one when we still had physical classes, the way I understood things then is not the way I understand things now. Those things that I studied during the physical classes I understand better than those of the online classes. (UG/002/IDI/RS/F)*

*There are times when it didn't go well. Like some lecturers could download notes and just put them on the platform without explaining; there are some teachers who even have never talked either on zoom or whatever. For them, they just upload notes. They say you're mature enough; you just read the notes they are there. So for me I found that that one didn't go well. (UG/021/IDI/P/M)*

Scholars pointed out that interactions with lecturers was not as good as it would have been if the lessons were face-to-face,

*You know when you're face to face with the lecturer, you know as a learner there are very many things that you can get from a person when you are physically together there, because there is what they call body language, it can help you tell when a person will welcome your question or concern. (UG/023/IDI/RS/M)*

There were complaints that some lecturers did not know how to organise group discussions online. As a result, scholars missed out on group discussions despite it being a requirement in some subjects (TZ/010/IDI/RS/M).

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the way lecturers taught; because of the long closure “they had to come and compensate for the topics and days,” observed one scholar. “That means the lecturers had to go fast in order to cover the topics that had to be taught during the time when university was closed (TZ/044/IDI/RS/F).

In Tanzania, the use of English as the language of instruction was a significant barrier for some scholars and lecturers. It was difficult for some of the students to follow lectures delivered in English, whether online or offline. However, this challenge was to some extent mitigated by scholars who were fluent in English stepping in to assist their peers, explaining to them in Kiswahili (SP/004/KII/F).

In Uganda, the problem was not so much understanding English per se, but the accent used by the lecturers, as one key informant pointed out:

*Some of our accents are really different, they may be talking about even a familiar topic and you cannot understand. So the learner who can't understand the accent may miss out on some details. That is the disadvantage. But when it is face-to-face, you can say 'Excuse me. Go slower' or 'can you repeat'?* (UG/005/KII/B/F)

Scholars had concerns around submitting assignments and doing exams online. Some felt that online exams were “really hard” and “complicated” (UG/002/IDI/RS/F). They raised concerns about not always being able to submit their work on time because of internet-related problems or lack of technical skills. One scholar expressed frustration that,

*Sometimes when you send the work, you find that some parts didn't go. You are sending the work, some parts didn't go. [chuckling] So you can note, it would be hard to know that some parts did not go afterwards, when they have already even finished marking.* (UG/025/IDI/LP/M)

Often, course facilitators did not allow late submissions even, “if it was due to the failure of the platform” (UG/022/IDI/P/M). An informant from Uganda recalled late submissions being accepted only after scholars protested. However, he questioned, “What about those who were far away and failed to do so? There is one who even went out, was in Karamoja. She had to drop out of the course” (Ibid).

## Other barriers

The challenges affected course facilitators as well. They complained of fatigue and reduced

attention span when attending lessons after a long day at work (UG/017/KII/CF/M), or rushing from one session to the next because of a tight university schedule (TZ/030/KII/CF/F). Inadequate orientation/training of lecturers (not necessarily facilitators of the mandatory courses) was a big issue identified by both scholars and other stakeholders.

## Conclusion

This chapter highlighted challenges caused by the abrupt and swift spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. A spotlight is also thrown on the opportunities created for positive change by the pandemic, for example, the acceptance of the change from physical to remote learning, triggering a mindshift on how learning is perceived and the possibilities of 'wall less' classrooms, expansion of reach and new ways of delivering content. The findings reflect the creativity and resilience of many of the study participants in coping with and adapting to the new circumstances.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# ASSESSING IMPLICATIONS OF E-LEARNING FOR NGLP

### Introduction

In this chapter, we assess the implications of e-learning for NGLP by addressing research question 4: ‘How feasible is online learning in the context of the scholarship studies and courses that are offered, namely, Executive Management, Servant Leadership, Catholic Social Teaching and Child Protection?’ linked to this is question 5: ‘What is the technical capacity of host institutions for promoting e-learning?’

We base our assessment of feasibility and technical capacity on the experiences and perspectives of the NGLP community (scholars and other key stakeholders) over the last two years of the programme implementation process. Though the primary focus is on assessing the implications of e-learning for the programme, to some extent we touch on the physical delivery of the courses as well as the content. The analysis is anchored in the OECD impact assessment criteria, namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Figure 9 describes the concepts as used in this report.

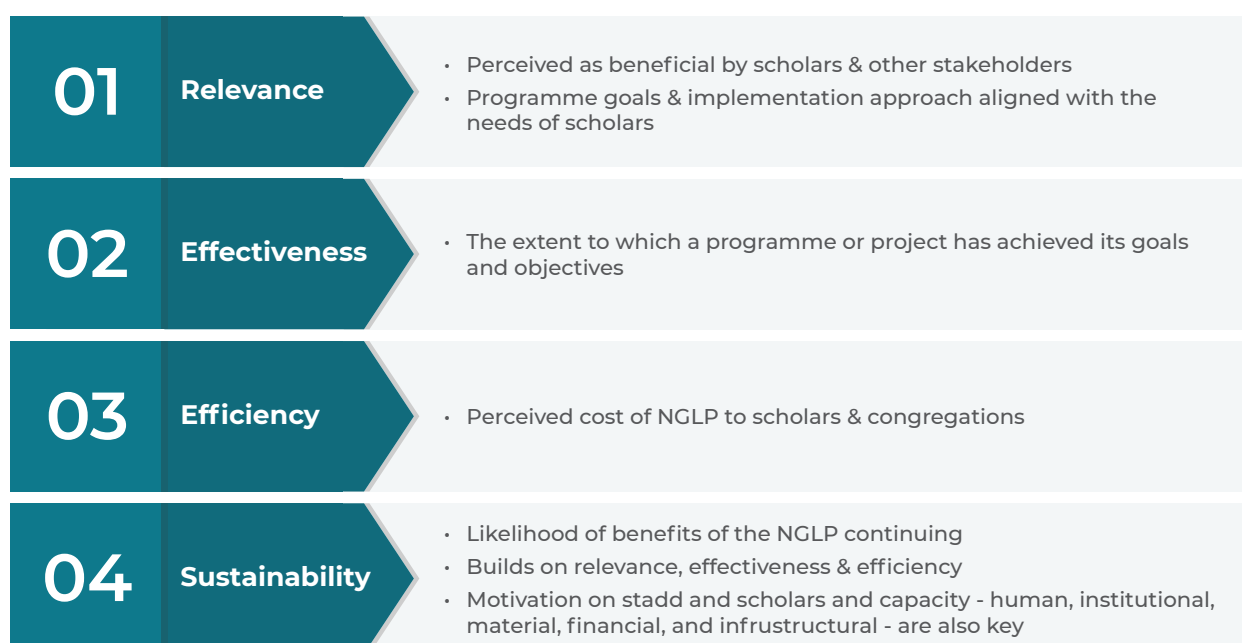


Figure 9. Description of assessment criterias

## Relevance

We assessed the relevance of the NGLP in general, within this broader context, of e-learning as a delivery mode during the COVID-19 pandemic, to help understand if target beneficiaries and stakeholders view it as useful and valuable, and whether the goals and implementation approach of the programme are aligned with the needs of the scholars. Our analysis takes into consideration the following elements: relevance to beneficiary and stakeholder needs, relevance to context, and relevance in terms of the process used to develop the curriculum.

### Relevance to beneficiary and stakeholder needs

From the study findings, it's quite clear that NGLP has been and continues to be very helpful not only to the direct beneficiaries but also to the communities that the scholars serve. It has empowered many scholars with leadership skills, facilitated their education albeit with interruptions caused by the pandemic, inspired scholars to take part or start community initiatives, and enabled them to attend classes remotely. The mandatory CSP courses have equipped the scholars with different skills, depending on the course that they undertook, pertaining to Servant Leadership, Child Protection and Executive Management.

### Leadership skills training

Accounts from several participants indicate that the NGLP had fostered leadership skills in them and strengthened the capacity of those already in leadership positions, like the consecrated people (UG/007/IDI/RS/F), helping them to “put into practice the servant leadership and management leadership principles” and instilling confidence to execute their responsibilities (UG/004/KII/RS/F).

### Opportunity for continuing education

The Programme, through the scholarship that it provides, has also enabled scholars to pursue their studies without being distracted by having to fundraise, with very little interruption like “when you're running up and down you are paying this and that, there's a lot of inconvenience” (UG/026/IDI/LP/M). Their tuition is covered and they are also given a stipend for scholastic materials. The sentiment expressed below is representative of others in the three countries:

*I was financially hard up so they rescued me, they gave me the tuition*

*and some money to assist me in my studies here and there so I am depending entirely on them; they are the ones sponsoring my studies now. Yes, so I am happy with them. (UG/023/IDI/RS/M)*

## Relevance of the mandatory CSP courses

Many participants in this study found the mandatory courses by CSP (Executive Management, Servant Leadership and Child Protection) relevant and highly beneficial to them. These courses address the knowledge and skills gaps of scholars to be better leaders and accomplish their mission as religious sisters, religious brothers, priests and laypeople working for the betterment of humanity through and for the Catholic Church. For example, one scholar felt that the Child Protection course had instilled skills in her that she would be able to “use to benefit the society and to be able to maybe reduce some of the injustices that are taking place in our community” (UG/002/IDI/RS/F). Another had this to say,

*The child protection course has availed scholars with knowledge and information on children and their rights that also have interest in Social Justice. I was awakened to the needs of children. There are many children who are suffering but we don't know. (UG/007/IDI/RS/F).*

The views expressed by this Ugandan scholar reflected the sentiments of many others including her peers from Kenya and Tanzania. Said a Kenyan informant,

*What I also like I can say in terms of child protection, I like kids. I am very close with the kids and I like the best for them. So when I got the training, getting more to understand their rights and responsibilities that I can say was the best part of me to be able to know how to protect these kids, especially the ones we meet everyday and those who I am going to meet in schools. (KE/003/IDI/RS/F)*

The voice of a Tanzanian scholar, who at the time of the interview was attending the Child Protection and Safeguarding course in Dar-es-Salaam, vividly captures the relevance of this mandatory unit:

*This programme of CSPT [that] has facilitated for us; and I thank [them] for this seminar which is still going on and has enabled us to search and find out things that are going on in the world about child abuse and how to handle and how to help other people. Although it has just been a five day seminar it has a lot of things that have helped us. Because even*

*when you get out of here, at least you have an idea that I also should go and gather certain workers. May be in my organization there are workers and teachers, and others who are not teachers, to teach them about what Child Abuse is and its demerits and how it affects children. Therefore this is something that we have got which is a bit heavy. It has a lot of meaning especially in this modern world where this thing is continuing to be abused. (TZ/044/IDI/RS/F)*

The Executive Management avails the scholars with knowledge and skills for institutional management. The skills attained by the scholars include “bookkeeping, keeping records, accountability” (UG/012/IDI/RS/F).

## **Contextual relevance**

### **Inspired community initiatives**

The NGLP has inspired scholars to take part in community initiatives and leadership. The community initiatives have been used as a tool to reach and help the vulnerable in the community and “maybe reduce some of the injustices that are taking place in our community” (UG/002/IDI/RS/F). The scholars are reminded to take initiative and be creative. “Initiatives that support the community - that is the difference between our scholars and the scholars in other institutions” (UG/005/KII/B/F).

### **Programme adherence to Covid-19 regulations in delivery of learning**

Despite the challenges faced by both scholars and course facilitators, the use of IT to deliver learning was an appropriate response to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It helped to minimise physical contact between scholars, lecturers and other staff. In situations where in-person sessions were held, adequate care was taken to adhere to national and international COVID-19 safety protocols. For example, in Tanzania as in the other two countries, scholars were reminded to wash their hands using the running water available at the college entrance, sanitise, wear masks and when sitting in the classroom, to allow space for distancing. Similarly, service providers ensured adherence when training course facilitators and training trainers.



## Relevance of courses

The service providers did extensive consultations with stakeholders on course content to establish the relevance of the topics to include in the curriculum. The procedures followed for the development of the specific courses varied, however. For example, the Servant Leadership course was drafted by an expert and then tested in a meeting convened in Nairobi attended by “a group participants from Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, who eventually were to be trained to facilitate the Servant Leadership [course] in the different countries” (SP/006/KII/F), and subsequently refined based on the feedback received. The Child Protection course was developed in a participatory way in Nairobi with an initial brainstorming with diverse child protection and justice stakeholders.

*We brought together practitioners in the field and so we had on board and I am just trying to remember the different people, people from the probation department, people from Children’s Services, we had a legal person, we had somebody in the field of rehabilitation of children who had been in conflict with the law, we had teachers and we had our own faculty then some of them faculty, one who is specialised in both curriculum development and counselling psychology. And basically, we had a team of about eleven, I don’t have statistics with me because I am at home here, but then we had a team of about eleven people who came together to first of all, to share experiences of where they felt from their point of view as practitioners, where they felt the biggest challenges were to create where people needed to be trained or more informed, in order to make children safer in the society and in institution.*

(KE/037/KII/SP/F)

Though this session was Kenya-based, trainers from Tanzania and Uganda were trained and the course piloted in those countries. Feedback from these sessions were used to refine the content further, making them relevant to the specific country contexts.

## Effectiveness

### Box 4. Challenges to achieving the NGLP vision and objectives

*Now, for instance, those who finished last year were only trained in child protection. That means if the main objectives, the vision was to make sure that we have an accountant who has the skills about child protection, executive management and servant leadership automatically, this accountant has only gone out with child protection and safeguarding skills so two more courses are pending. So I am not so sure if this scholar is going to have the impact as it was planned before. The [original] purpose of the courses was not only to instil knowledge [about the regular courses] but about executive management, and about servant leadership. So it affected the vision and the objectives of having these people well trained in that particular angle. So, for me, I would say the CSP vision and objectives have not been met for now due to COVID-19. (TZ/KII/003/ES/M)*

Effectiveness tends to be assessed by the extent to which a programme or project has achieved its goals and objectives. The key informant from Tanzania cited in box 4 argues that the COVID-19 pandemic hindered the achievement of the overall NGLP “vision” and “objectives”. The following discussion unpacks this assertion based on the perceptions of both the scholars and stakeholders from the three countries, focusing on their experiences participating in their academic programmes and in the three mandatory courses.

### Meeting minimum criteria

Like many other scholarship programmes, the NGLP requires scholars to maintain a minimum grade overall in their academic programmes in order to continue receiving Porticus support. According to informants, they were required to maintain a grade of B+. We do not have the data to establish how many of the scholars actually attained this grade. However, as highlighted in the previous chapter, scholars talked of declining performances during COVID-19 due to a number of external and internal factors at the institutional, programme and individual levels. For these scholars, their academic programmes, many of which were either offered fully online or using blended or hybrid models, were not delivered effectively. There were others who dropped out or were pushed out by the system for not conforming to rules and regulations pertaining to the submission of assignments and sitting exams online. Scholars argued that this non-conformity was not intentional but had to do with a combination of unstable internet/power connectivity and inadequate digital skills to troubleshoot last minute challenges with up-loading their work.

## Mandatory CSP courses

Out of the four mandatory courses, scholars had been exposed to three of them depending on their education levels. The expected goals for each of the three courses are highlighted in table 11.

Table 11. Mandatory courses by academic goal

CSP Course	Academic Goal
Child Protection and Safeguarding	Increased awareness of, and prevention of child abuse in all its forms
Servant Leadership	Leadership and service as Catholic Leaders
Executive Management	Increased capacity to plan and implement projects and manage people

The extent to which scholars achieved the goals of these courses varied as discussed below.

### Child Protection and Safeguarding

The mandatory CSP course on Child Protection and Safeguarding (not to be confused with a longer core course for all their students offered by Tangaza) was offered exclusively in-person. The service providers and course facilitators interviewed argued convincingly.

*If it's going to be effective, it must have a significant proportion of interaction because situations also are different and they are emerging constantly. So, we cannot deliver something that is set in stone and you don't take into consideration their learning experience there.*

(SP/002/KII/F)

According to informants, the level of interaction required lends itself better to physical, or at best some form of blended or hybrid delivery models. There was a fear that the interactive nature of the course would be lost in a fully online model. One key informant observed, implementing all the interactive activities online is (1) very “strenuous” and “tiring” for the facilitators because of “the many methodologies included within our delivery” when done in-person; and (2) the personalised touch is missing (SP/004/KII/F).

### Servant Leadership

Role modelling is used as a strategy for ensuring effectiveness of the Servant Leadership course. Explained a course facilitator:

*I have to be a servant leader myself. I'm able to share what I am, my convictions, what I believe in. It's not only about theory but it is to bring home what, what I read, what I've lived and basically, I've found myself that I've been sharing my personal story, my personal life, what I've lived, what it means to be a servant leader, what it means to empower other people because that's what servant leadership is about.*

(UG/004/KII/CF/F)

By providing opportunities to the scholars to practise servant leadership, the course is able to achieve its goal as confirmed by a scholar from Kenya:

*From the time we began interacting, leave alone the classes, when we started the community service programme that is offered by the programme, reaching out and serving others has been the best in terms of my leadership growth. I can say that I have gained a lot and I look forward to gaining more because there is still an opportunity.*

(KE/030/IDI/RS/M)

## Executive Management

Scholars identified benefits of having been through the Executive Management skills training, from learning the importance of role modelling to working with adolescents to “solve the problems they are having” and being able to “harmonise even with issues in the families” (KE/027/FGD/RS/MIXED/MGM2). In the words of another scholar,

*In terms of another short course we were given, that is Executive Management, the part that I liked most - the part of taking responsibility as in being a leader of myself, so that I can be able to lead others and what I took from that course is that, being a leader does not mean I have to be in a position, I can lead in my own small ways. Anything that I am interested in doing, anything that I can do to help is a way of leading. That is how I can lead others, I do not have to be in a position to be given a chance, maybe superior or things like that. So in short those are the things I like.* (KE/003/IDI/RS/F)

## Effectiveness of e-learning during COVID-19

The concept of wall-less classrooms that one could join “wherever you are”. As one scholar observed, “you just switch on your gadget and you are there [in class]” (UG/003/IDI/RS/F). Another added, “It has the advantage that you know in the midst of the duties I have, I can be where I am and follow the lessons” (UG/031/FGD/RS/Mixed). This flexibility afforded scholars the opportunity to continue with their learning during the COVID-19 lockdown and in some instances, even after institutions had been opened for in-person classes. Study participants recognised that online learning,

*Has been a great opportunity. In the midst of the lockdown when we could not gather and interact face to face with lecturers as we could, this provision has enabled us to continue with our studies and it provides an opportunity for safe study. (Ibid)*

Enabling the scholars to serve their communities better is an academic goal of the NGLP. Participating in various online platforms improved the scholars’ skills in various aspects of technology, strengthened their IT and computer skills which they have eventually been able to utilise to help the community. A FGD participant appreciated that

*The e-learning system has improved on my side, it has given me a way forward, in that for example, me in my community, sometimes they give me an opportunity or a chance to help them in accounting since I am doing business. With this e-learning I have gained also new ways of how to deal with bookkeeping. (Ibid)*

Scholars identified how their computer and internet skills had strengthened, and their ability to utilise web-based resources by accessing e-libraries, and how to download resource materials. In the words of one scholar,

*I have improved in typing and how to send exams using email. Ahh, all those ones I think now it has helped me to gain some bit of knowledge of computers. Yes, so that is the benefit I have seen in e-learning. Maybe that is something I would not have gained but that one has helped me a lot apart from some demerits. (UG/023/IDI/RS/M)*

E-learning enabled scholars to explore more avenues of study like YouTube where they would find lecturers teaching similar subjects and supplement their learning. In addition, recordings of lecture sessions and learning materials were accessible to them from anywhere at any time on e-libraries and platforms like Canvas and ODEL and gave them the opportunity to refresh their

minds and preview them and also prepare ahead of the learning sessions. Scholars stressed that it was easier for them to have their concerns like questions and assignments responded to using the e-learning platforms.

There was a perception that the delivery styles of lecturers in the regular courses diminished the effectiveness of e-learning. According to some scholars, lecturers tended not to turn on their videos during online classes. They also did not use any visual aids “yet most of us learn better with visual aids”. The use of a pedagogy comparable to that used by “YouTube teachers” was proposed by an informant as a strategy to improve the effectiveness of online lessons:

*To me, if the system is very well organised, like what we see on YouTube, I think it is the way to go, because when you are on Youtube, you really see a teacher, demonstrating what exactly would be performed in class and you really pick. (UG/031/FGD/MIXED/RS/LP1)*

## Efficiency

Delivering classes online has financial and non-financial implications for both the scholarship programme and the scholars. Among other things, there is a need to have appropriate human resources, internet and physical infrastructure, facilities and equipment like computers and smartphones, internet data and electricity in place for online learning to run smoothly. In the discussion that follows, we explore issues that emerged from an analysis of the data that affect efficiency of the programme, looking at its perceived costs. It is important to note, that it was out of the scope of this study to do a systematic analysis of the cost effectiveness of NGLP or of e-learning. What we do present here are participants’ views on the perceived cost of online delivery vs physical classes.

### Perception of e-learning as less expensive

**Savings from accommodation and transport:** Many of the study participants perceived the cost of online lessons to be cheaper than physical classes in some respects. They noted that some of the costs of online learning were offset by savings made on accommodation (for off campus students) and transport to and from campus (for holiday programme students) as observed by a FGD participant:

*When you go to the costs, you will not like the face-to-face. I come here; I pay for accommodation. But when I am on e-learning, I will not pay for*

*accommodation, I will not pay for transport, I will not pay for the meals here. I will not suffer. (UG/031/FGD/RS/Mixed)*

A course facilitator explained:

*I am seated in Karamoja right now. If I were to travel to Kampala to meet you people, that is very expensive, even in terms of time and money and yet, I am discussing with you [online], it is cheaper. (UG/004/KII/CF/F)*

Though there are those who complained about expenses incurred in printing notes, others felt that this was an item that minimised costs, as scholars “no longer print out these things” since all the work is accessed on the computer.

***Time saving and convenient:*** “As long as you are connected to the internet you can learn anywhere. It is flexible” (KE/005/IDI/RS/M). E-learning was perceived as time saving by many scholars, especially postgraduate students who had to juggle between their jobs and classes. It also saved them time from having to travel to school for classes as they could access lessons virtually from their places of work or homes and only show up physically on campus to sit for their exams. The evening students were also saved from having to travel at night. A Board Member had this to say:

*If I was to drive from Gulu (district) to come to Kisubi (university) using my transport, It would be more time consuming than if I am here, if I came from my home in Arua and I am sleeping in Kisubi, I have left everything back home but if I do my e-learning and I am in Arua and I have my class maybe from 3 to 9pm, which means in the morning I can go to the garden, in the morning I can do my business, I can do a lot of my things than if I to move to the physical. (UG/001/KII/B/F)*

***Shared resources and wider outreach:*** E-learning platforms enables sharing of resources between different universities, as pointed out by the key informant quoted below:

*We're partnering with Zimbabwe, and, when we have one lecturer or one expert in a programme and you have like a hundred or two hundred people [students], you can't have those two hundred people meet. The expense on those people in face-to-face learning is more than what you'd spend on data when people are in their homes or wherever they are. So for me, I see it as an advantage; e-learning would be less expensive than face-to-face learning. (UG/005/KII/B/F)*

Through e-learning, information may be shared across a wide spectrum of students as

compared to traditional in-class learning. It was pointed out that very many students could be enrolled in a university as long as they could afford appropriate devices and had access to the e-learning platforms. (UG/001/KII/B/F)

***Cheaper option during COVID-19:*** The COVID-19 mitigation measures require ample space and adequate resources for physical distancing, sanitising and masking. It was pointed out that use of online technology to access learning ensures the safety of participants at a relatively lower cost than in-person classes.

### **Inadequacy of the scholarship**

The NGLP scholarship award is partial. The scholarship includes full tuition and functional fees for the duration of the course of study. In addition, a modest stipend is provided to cater for supplementary expenses such as books, stationary, research, and travel. During the COVID-19 pandemic many of the institutions where the scholars were enrolled shifted to delivering the regular courses online. In the case of the CSP mandatory courses, Servant Leadership, as earlier indicated, was offered remotely. Scholars were supported by the country NGLPs to cater for the internet-related expenses as a result of this shift through

1. Providing money for participation in the Servant Leadership course from the existing course facilitation budget; and
2. Allowing use of the money meant for stationary and other expenses to buy data bundles for the regular courses<sup>4</sup>.

Some scholars also used part of the stipend to buy smartphones. However, there was a perception that the stipend they received was not sufficient to cover all their expenses, including those related to online courses, as the following quotes from Kenya and Tanzania illustrate:

*We appreciate the support that we are receiving and now the issue of learning online, I think it is not quite adequate because maybe you have to do some printouts, you have to access materials, you have to use a lot of internet so that maybe even in research, you have to do a lot of research. (KE/013/IDI/LP/F)*

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<sup>4</sup> The Executive Secretaries from all three countries confirmed that scholars were allowed to use their stipend on data bundles and other internet-related costs.



*It is so little, because the financial assistance we are advised to use on stationery [...] but sometimes you need money for paying for credit but many times we are required to use it on stationery and buying textbooks for each semester. So if you spend that money on paying credit you will see yourself in a difficult situation. (TZ/040/IDI/RS/F)*

### **Sharing costs: Unable or unwilling?**

Though congregations are expected to share the costs in support of the scholars they nominate, this did not always seem to happen in reality. The most common explanation was that the majority come from congregations that are resource-constrained. It was argued that the poorer the congregation, the less likely they would prioritise the purchase of laptops or smartphones for the scholars to enable them to access online courses. In the previous chapter, we gave several examples of scholars, particularly female scholars, who have had to struggle with fully participating in their courses of study because of either the congregation's inability to buy devices for them or unwillingness to prioritise these as an essential tool for their full participation in online courses.

Another possible reason for not prioritising purchase of devices was offered during one of the validation meetings. One participant suggested that the reluctance could be driven by an undervaluation of e-learning by congregations having no or little exposure to its benefits. In his words,

*It could be a case of a vicious cycle of not necessarily lack of resources, but lack of exposure because of differences in congregations. There are congregations that have an international face, and the formation process is more around exposure, and some of even the Kenyan born congregations could have a more urban outlook and exposure. So then that exposure creates an awareness among the superiors, those in charge of these students to create a possibility for them and to provide the resources because they see the need for it, whereas those who might lack the exposure itself would limit the possibility of availability of resources, not because they're not available, but because they don't really understand the need for it, because they are not exposed themselves. So, it could be a little more nuanced than just evolved poverty or availability of economic resources. (VAL/3)*

## Sustainability

This section explores whether offering the CSP courses using e-learning modalities is sustainable in the three countries beyond the lifetime of the NGLP. Sustainability builds on relevance, effectiveness and efficiency discussed in the earlier part of this chapter. 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 majority of study participants recognised the NGLP as relevant, addressing their needs for professional development and those of their communities. The programme offered an opportunity for them to upgrade their knowledge and skills as well as reinforce values of service to the community, and protection of the vulnerable. However, by the time we did the fieldwork, only one of the four courses had migrated to e-learning though scholars participating in the other courses in different universities made use of digital skills, which they had acquired largely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

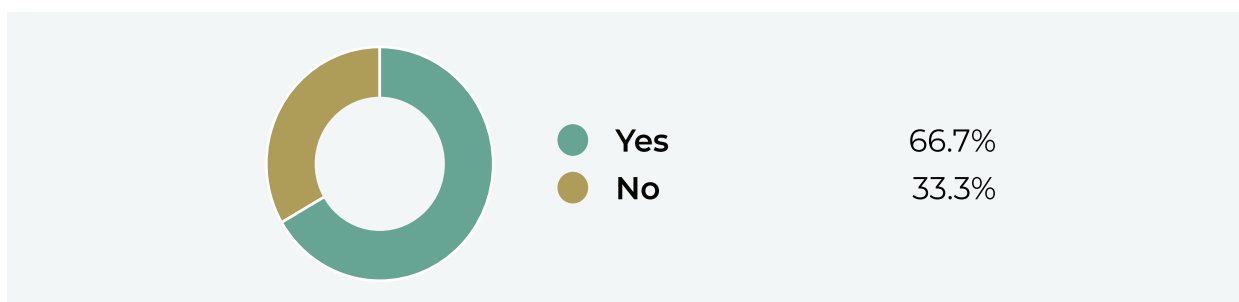


Figure 12. Percentage of scholars who agreed that e-learning would continue to be useful post-COVID-19

Nonetheless, both scholars and service providers acknowledged the importance of e-learning. As may be inferred from figure 12, two in three scholars who participated in the online survey agreed that online learning would be useful post the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 devices (e.g. computers and/or smart phones) for accessing the online platforms and maintaining them.

Asked if they saw this programme continuing beyond Porticus or any other donor funding in terms of sustainability, the consensus was this would be difficult. One informant predicted that “If they withdraw now, I think we would be in a lot of shambles” (TZ/003/KII/ES/M). Another key informant described this eventuality as being

*Tricky. The best thing would be unless we say that we have other donors engaged for sustainability, but now when we rely on one donor,*

*poses a challenge, suppose this donor is not there? Then definitely the programme may not be able to continue as expected.*

(KE/007/KII/ES/F)

Some institutions were looking for alternative ways to finance the running costs required to make e-learning for the mandatory CSP courses sustainable.

*How are we going to sustain these? If Porticus stopped today giving us the money, would we still stand? So if they have to allow us to look for other ways of sustaining this programme, how far can they allow us? That is a question we've been asking because we are thinking about the sustainability of this programme in the future. So that the board knows we have a role to look for, maybe for other partners, for other collaborations, and things like that. So that we are not just limited and yet we can see the needs are many. We would also like to expand it into something else. So that one and then of course, I know the board itself is actually chosen by Porticus, we don't have a role in it.*

(KE/006/KII/B/F)

A number of suggestions were put forward by study participants for enabling sustainability of e-learning. These ranged from lobbying the government, “because the government is like the overseer of their citizens” and thus it is their “duty to put the right infrastructure in place” so that “we can sustain programmes” (KE/021/FGD/RS/F) to targeting the congregations, particularly the Superiors and getting them to understand practically the importance of investing in internet technology so “they see the necessity of having this” (TZ/003/KII/ES/M). There were also recommendations for exploring new and strategic partnerships, as well as creating cultures where use of internet technology becomes the norm (Ibid).

## **Motivation**

The popularity of the NGLP scholarships is testified by the fact that the applications received each year are larger than the available spaces. For example, in Uganda in a recent academic year, over 120 applications were received, but only 40 could be admitted. The motivation of congregations to nominate religious sisters and brothers, priests and laypeople is to expand the pool of servant leaders who can minister to the needs of the Church and communities that they serve.

For the scholars, the first and most important driver for scholars' engagement in the NGLP

is the financial support they receive. This support that they get from the scholarship is programmed in terms of tuition fees and stipend to cater for scholastic materials that they would otherwise not afford by themselves. Secondly, they are highly inspired by the hands-on skills obtained through this programme, which improves how they relate with people at home and community and handle complex situations. For example, sessions on emotional intelligence and child protection were cited as highly motivating and relevant to their day-to-day work.

The motivation for participating in the NGLP does not necessarily equate to a drive to engage in online learning. For some scholars, the greater exposure to various online video conferencing platforms and IT skills and resources - whether something as simple as how to use the email function, or upload assignments to accessing the Learning Management System if available, to doing supplementary research for assignments - were motivating factors. For the consecrated scholars and laypeople who were employed, the prospect of plugging their tech skills gap and applying the acquired skills to their daily work enabling them to effectively and efficiently execute their duties and responsibilities was a driving force. For many, the internet opened up new horizons both intellectually and socially, giving access to new knowledge and fostering friendships and networks.

However, the quality of online engagement with the internet platforms and course facilitators/lecturers was a major consideration in sustainability of e-learning. The quality of engagement in turn was shaped by the effectiveness of content delivery, especially on whether the course facilitator used interactive pedagogical techniques. It was also defined by user experiences influenced by external factors like stable internet and power supply as well as the cost of appropriate equipment and data. Unless addressed, the quality of interaction, access and cost will continue to demotivate scholars and remain powerful barriers in the sustainability of e-learning provision for religious scholars.

## Capacity

To make e-learning sustainable, there is a need to build the capacity of the scholars to embrace e-learning, to ensure availability of financial, and technical infrastructures. Argued by some scholars in an FGD, was that the responsibility for “basic or the foundation for sustainability of either e-learning or online learning is infrastructure by the government” (KE/027/FGD/RS/MIXED).

## Human Capacity

The data reveals not only the digital gender divide but also skills' gaps between institutions. While some institutions like Strathmore and Tangaza in Nairobi were better prepared, the technical capacity of the staff in other institutions was partly, and sometimes inadequately, developed in a hurried response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As highlighted in foregoing discussions, scholars complained of lecturers/course facilitators who lacked knowledge and skills to manage online classes effectively. This inadequacy has implications for the long term sustainability of e-learning programmes.

Training learners before the start of online classes is crucial for the sustainability of an e-learning programme as it provides the learners with the skills and knowledge needed to fully utilise it. Some of the courses included orientation of scholars to navigate various internet video conferencing platforms and internet learning management systems. However, the duration of these sessions was perceived to be inadequate. The Executive Management course, for example, incorporated basic IT skills as a module in the curriculum providing one-to-one in-person coaching to scholars who demonstrated critical skills gaps.

## Financial and Institutional Capacity

Currently, the NGLP is fully funded by Porticus. This is not a sustainable model for the programme as donor funding can end at any time. In the event of this happening, the scholarship programme will come to an end in all three countries. One key informant expressed concern on

*how to sustain this programme in future because right now it is heavily reliant on a partner, on a sponsor and it is a programme that can easily die out if the partner withdraws support. So I think our idea is to think outside the box to make sure that tomorrow we are able to sustain the programme without the partner. (UG/013/KII/HU/M)*

Having a local secretariat that has the financial independence to support some of its learners will ensure that e-learning as one of the NLGP programme components is sustainable over a long period of time.

The institutions in this programme need to have the capacity to support the students in pursuing their studies online. For instance, they could set up e-learning centres as a means of cutting the internet data burden of the students but also facilitate access to computers. These centres would be very helpful to students in areas with bad internet connectivity.

*I think that is something we have to say that okay, those who come from the north, we shall use such and such a centre or diocese or institute to have this e-learning centre, those who come from the west, from central, from the east, you know, that would be something because if we invest in that, then it is also the responsibility of the host, host country or centre to maintain those centres. (UG/005/KII/B/F)*

To sustain e-learning, NGLP needs to revise the stipend given to the scholars to suit the new emerging educational needs that come with this modality like internet data, computers, and electricity among others.

*They have been given stipends. The stipend is about 1 million, 1 million is not enough to buy a laptop for instance. Maybe a used one, so the scholars have ended up buying laptops which keep breaking every year. (UG/014/KII/B/M)*

A hybrid system of class delivery could also be a driver to sustainability of online learning. Some of the courses are practical and as such cannot be fully delivered online. A few physical classes may be necessary to complement the theory classes delivered remotely.

## Material Capacity

E-learning is entirely dependent on the availability of devices like computers/laptops and smartphones. If the learners do not have these equipment, then they cannot effectively partake in learning online. However, the fact is that a number of participants cannot afford to buy some of these items. Some have to borrow or share to attend class as reported in the previous chapter. For e-learning to continue for a long period of time, these materials need to be made available to the scholars.

## Technical and Infrastructural Capacity

For e-learning to be sustainable, the right infrastructure must be put in place. This includes an integrated campus management system (UG/014/KII/B/M) including e-library, Content Management System, Learning Management System, Student Management System, Student Assessment System, reporting systems and presentation systems among others. For NGLP to run a sustainable online teaching and learning programme, all these need to be fully set up and functioning. The responsible people like facilitators have to also be trained on how to use this

infrastructure for teaching and learning.

*We have a big percentage of students who say that they would like to continue on online. I think it is important that we pay special attention to this group of students and that means that we need exactly as you have said to improve on the infrastructure to make sure that we are able to reach out. (UG/013/KII/HU/M)*

It is important to note that the NGLP host institutions have relatively good internet infrastructure, enabling them to continue offering e-learning opportunities to their students. However, the NGLP scholars are dispersed over various universities and colleges even within the same country. Assuming that the host institutions offer the mandatory courses centrally, it does not mean that all the scholars will have equal access to them given the infrastructural and technical inequalities between different campuses.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, our study suggests that

1. Most scholars and other stakeholders interviewed found the NGLP mandatory courses to be useful and beneficial irrespective of whether they were delivered in-person or online.
2. However, there was some hesitancy expressed regarding the extent to which the online delivery had been effective and efficient, and whether it would be sustainable over the longer term without external funding support from Porticus.
3. The barriers to scholars' full participation in e-learning needs to be strategically and creatively addressed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Introduction

The study findings reveal the complexity of the problem that we were investigating; 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 final chapter, we first summarise some of the key learnings that emerged from the analysis, including some unexpected results arising from the research process itself. Secondly, we propose recommendations addressing the final research question, ‘What strategies/recommendations can be adopted to ensure continuation of the scholarship programme with maximal participation from all scholars?’

### Emerging Lessons and Insights

- 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. There are differences in: (a) the infrastructure supporting internet utilisation; (b) the response of the respective governments to the COVID-19 pandemic; and (3) proficiency in the English language, which is officially the medium of instruction in institutions of higher education in all three countries.*
- 2. The pre-pandemic internet infrastructure gaps even within the same country were aggravated during COVID-19 limiting access to online learning by scholars enrolled in less endowed institutions, especially those located in remote and poorer regions. 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, for example, Strathmore, Tangaza or Kenyatta universities. In all the countries, study participants reported institutions with neither WiFi nor computer labs. Though universities hosting the NGLP in each country have relatively good internet infrastructure and capacity to sustain e-learning beyond COVID-19 and withdrawal of donor funding, not all scholars*



were enrolled in these. There were those scholars who were enrolled in institutions that did not have adequate facilities to support effective participation in e-learning. Thus, the mandatory NGLP courses, even if centralised and offered remotely by the host universities, would continue to exclude some scholars.

3. *Preference for in-person instead of online learning may be driven by social factors rather than expectations of effective outcome.* Over 70 percent of scholars surveyed indicated that online classes were the most effective way of delivering learning during COVID-19. However, through the in-depth interviews, we learnt regardless of their 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. There was a gender dimension to this; the preference for in-person classes was more common among women than men scholars.
4. *Both scholars and lecturers/course facilitators had inadequate exposure to IT skills and preparation at entry.* Scholars complained of lecturers/course facilitators without the skills to engage them actively and effectively, making their online learning experience “boring”. At the same time, scholars struggled with navigating e-learning platforms and performing tasks that required basic IT skills such as uploading assignments. Female and older scholars were perceived to have more difficulties at entry compared to younger male scholars.
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.
6. *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 for most scholars. For example, more technologically savvy, often younger students tutored those not so digitally competent who tended to be older and 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 in terms of following up on assignments as well as when it came to doing assessments and for the course facilitators, monitoring the attendees.
7. *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 lectures several hours at a go 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 used by the scholars were not compatible with certain applications and document formats. The possibility of interruptions from incoming calls and messages was real.

8. *Unstable internet, unreliable power connections and shared devices provided loopholes for unethical behaviour of some lecturers and scholars during online lessons.* As much as intermittent internet connectivity and electricity disruptions are 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. 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, 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).
9. *The poorer and less exposed a congregation, the less likely they would be to provide scholars with laptops or smartphones to facilitate their participation in online classes.* Some congregations were financially unable, and others unwilling to purchase devices for the scholars to attend the course as they did not consider it to be a priority and considered that it was the responsibility of the scholars to provide for themselves. This was confounded by the fact that scholars who are consecrated had taken a vow of poverty; meaning that they had no personal finances or resources to support their education.
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.* Thus, priests were more likely to have access to appropriate devices needed for online learning vs those towards the bottom of the hierarchy, that is, the religious sisters. The impact of gender socialisation and the division of labour was reflected in the tensions between home responsibilities including childcare in the case of laywomen, workplace duties and school work. For religious sisters, some 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.
11. *Scholars' participation in online lessons may be disrupted by competing duties assigned to them by their congregations, insensitive to their need to be in class.* The gender dimension aside, both male and female scholars recalled instances of timetabling conflicts between regular and the NGLP courses. In extreme cases, some scholars were torn

between attending classes and participating in religious events, which were scheduled at the same time. In addition, there was little consideration of online learning as serious business that requires the same commitment as going to a physical school. This lack of consideration was reflected in the demands made by some family members (in the case of laypeople), friends, neighbours and even congregants who trivialised efforts by scholars to attend their classes from their residence. There were reports of disruptions of online classes by people coming in to socialise or seeking assistance to do totally unrelated things.

## Unintended learning/benefits from the research process

Qualitative research is reflexive, the process impacting both on the research participants and the researchers. We received feedback from three different key informants on ways of engagement with the researchers that had helped them to look at issues differently:

1. The assumption they had made was that because the majority of scholars are women, gender bias is not an issue in the programme. This was not necessarily correct. The informants had not looked at the information available to them, for example in the form of class attendance, presentations, submission of evaluations with a gender lens to establish whether their assumptions were true or not.
2. Though some course facilitators talked of administering a pre-test to the scholars, they had not analysed the information gathered to establish the entry behaviour with regard to their IT skills nor subjected it to a gender analysis.
3. One key informant, who requested the researcher share the interview transcript, found it to be “very helpful” for her own purposes.

## Recommendations: Ensuring Maximal Participation

### Box 5. Combining e-learning with physical 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, 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 study participants - some form of **blended or hybrid model**. This would cater for the psychosocial needs of beneficiaries - that human touch - 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 **multipronged 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**.

These recommendations to the NGLP management and implementers, reflects the insights of the research team, drawing on the desk review and suggestions made by scholars and other stakeholders on the continuation of the scholarship programme. It further incorporates feedback from participants during the four validation meetings. The recommendations are organised in two clusters - first, the actions that may be initiated immediately or within the short-term, and second, in the medium or long-term.

## Immediate and short-term recommendations

The research identified 'low hanging fruits' that may be targeted in the immediate and short-term with no or little additional resources.

1. The congregations are the ones that nominate scholars for participation in the NGLP. While they obviously understand the importance of higher educational qualifications and leadership skills acquired by the scholars in service of the Catholic Church, not all congregations are equally resourced or exposed to the benefits that e-learning can bring. We therefore propose:
  - a. Sensitisation of the less exposed congregations on the benefits of creating conducive learning environments
  - b. Facilitation of scholars financially and/or in kind by the congregations to enable participation in e-learning and other online activities.
  - c. Negotiating with the congregations on ways they can contribute to the costs associated with e-learning that may include, but not restricted to, providing laptops, buying data bundles and printing learning materials.
2. Implementing effective skills development and mindset change programmes require understanding the specific needs of the beneficiaries. We propose:
  - a. Prior preparation of scholars for online or e-learning through a more rigorous orientation exercise or giving an ICT skilling course at the start of the programme to help them troubleshoot all or most of the challenges they may possibly

- encounter in accessing e-learning platforms.
- b. Initiation of mandatory needs assessment prior to orientation of scholars per cohort to determine the entry level behaviour and the prior exposure of staff and scholars to IT skills. The assessment findings should be disaggregated by gender, age, education levels, vocation and country.
  - c. Utilisation of the needs assessment findings to inform customisation of the training/orientation sessions to the needs of the scholars paying attention to digital gaps by gender, age, vocation and education levels. Some categories of trainees (elderly and women) may require longer orientation than the younger males.
  - d. Investing in the preparation of course facilitators and institutions to be able to use virtual learning spaces effectively. While limited exposure of scholars to virtual learning is one key contributor to the low appreciation of this mode of learning, it is also due to the limited IT skills of the lecturers/facilitators to actively engage scholars in the learning process using modern ways of content delivery and pedagogy using online tools.
3. Though the NGLP deliberately recruits more women scholars than men in recognition of their greater need for capacity enhancement, more needs to be done to ensure that they are able to participate fully in e-learning. Other actions proposed are:
- a. Building gender analysis capacity of service providers and course facilitators to enable them to address gender concerns in the NGLP programme implementation.
  - b. Organising gender sensitisation workshops taking an intersectional approach targeting the congregations. This means that other intersecting factors apart from gender like age, disability, regionality, and socio-economic status that entrench inequities are taken into consideration in the sensitisation process so they are able to see the interconnections and act to remove the barriers.
  - c. Providing the scholars with the tools they require and the space to engage meaningfully in the NGLP courses, both in person and online. (For example, by ensuring religious sisters have adequate time both online and offline to engage in their courses of study and mandatory courses).
  - d. Involving alumni in mentoring scholars, particularly women, on key aspects of leadership using both online and in-person media.
  - e. Designing a unit on gender and inclusion in the NGLP mandatory courses to ensure that both scholars and course facilitators (irrespective of gender) are exposed to the importance of gender equality and empowerment issues.
4. Currently, there is a silence on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the

programme. We recommend:

- a. Reviewing criteria for selection of scholars to include persons with disabilities (PWDs).
  - b. Introducing measures providing that the e-learning facilities and platforms are responsive to specific needs of PWDs .
5. Involve scholars in the process of timetabling to accommodate for different work schedules and religious/other priorities making implementation of e-learning classes seamless and reducing timetabling conflicts. Scholars have different work schedules and priorities that conflict with the timetables for their mandatory courses. Involving the scholars in the process of timetabling may reduce these conflicts and make the implementation seamless. Where possible, programmes could be made more flexible, not fixed in a period of time, so that those who are engaged in some church activities are able to attend. There were multiple cases reported of scholars who missed part of the online Servant Leadership training due to conflict in the schedule, which was fixed for a particular week.
  6. Encourage institutions of higher learning to develop an internal policy to assist them to guide access to best practices for the identification, protection and management of ICT and thus maximising the benefits and returns from their investment. A key component of the policy should be capacity building in technology skills and modalities targeting scholars and staff. The policy should be gender, age and disability responsive taking into account that not all staff and scholars have the same exposure to and level of expertise in IT and related skills.
  7. 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. Configuring scholar's devices to the university e-library and other online learning infrastructure so that they can easily access it and enabling it to access other devices both within and outside the university. Some online learning material could only be accessed on particular devices and only within the university premises.
  8. Post the scholarship application and evaluation online to introduce future scholars of the programme to what kind of similar or related technologies they would encounter during the course of their study as dimensions of learning continue to evolve.
  9. Establishing regular and systematic monitoring of programme implementation, both offline and online.
    - a. Regular and systematic monitoring of the programme implementation, collating the feedback through documentation of success stories, challenges and convening virtual and physical learnshops.
    - b. Designing effective systems to track lecturer attendance, course module

coverage and time given to students online, as some lecturers deprive students of quality time that they would get during in-person study by designating to them 60 percent of course content for self-study which students find hard to teach themselves and end up failing it when it is examined. Some also designate less time to students compared to what they are supposed to be offering hence students not getting value for the money invested in them.

- c. Following up on scholars even after their study to find out how they are faring in the fields which they studied. This would help the programme ascertain if the scholars are actually creating positive impacts in their communities.
- d. Collating the feedback of monitoring through documentation of success stories, good practices and lessons learnt.

## Medium and longer-term recommendations

Some of the barriers that frustrate the uptake of e-learning by scholars emanate from the external environment, and require policy and legislative interventions. These are clearly outside the direct control of the NGLP management and Porticus, which is the funding agency for the programme. We propose:

1. Networking and collaboration with strategic partners to address some of these barriers.
2. Joint advocacy for government intervention in regulating the cost of data bundles and access to the internet so that it can be affordable for scholars and other education actors living and working in contexts of adversity.
3. Development of ICT policies for education in general and institutions of higher learning in particular. In countries like Tanzania where such a policy already exists, enforcement remains weak due to lack of knowledge about its provisions and lack of monitoring. Through partnerships, proactively disseminate the policies, and advocate for budgetary allocations for monitoring implementation.
4. Partnerships and collaboration between academic institutions and business sectors is recommended for greater efficiency, availability and affordability of services. The partnerships may involve technology and internet service providers, phone and computer manufacturers/distributors, and finally academic institutions for benchmarking, learning, and sharing experiences and good practices.

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