The COVID-19 Pandemic and Higher Education Quality Systems in Africa

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has left no aspect of modern life untouched.

It has created an unprecedented test on the rigidity of higher education systems across SSA.

IUCEA partnered with ESSA to conduct a survey in 2021, to understand the impact of the pandemic on HEIs.

This presentation is an extract from the survey report to demonstrate the impact of the pandemic on the quality of:

- Teaching, and learning

- Exams and assessment

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the higher education sector in many new and unexpected ways

Methodology

- Survey data was collected using an online tool (SurveyMonkey)

- Coverage: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, & Uganda

- Survey participants: students, faculty members, MOE officials, and HEI regulators.

- Data was collected between 12th April and 14th June 2021

- Overall, we had 1,658 responses with a 52% completion rate

- Enough responses for a statistical relevant analysis at regional level.

Survey respondents' distribution

Category	Number	Completion rate (%)
Faculty member	731	70
Students	803	38
VC/ Principal	65	52
Academic registrar	48	42
MOE official	5	60
Regulator	6	50

Approximately 97 percent of higher education students in SSA —roughly 750,00 people—had their studies abruptly distrusted.

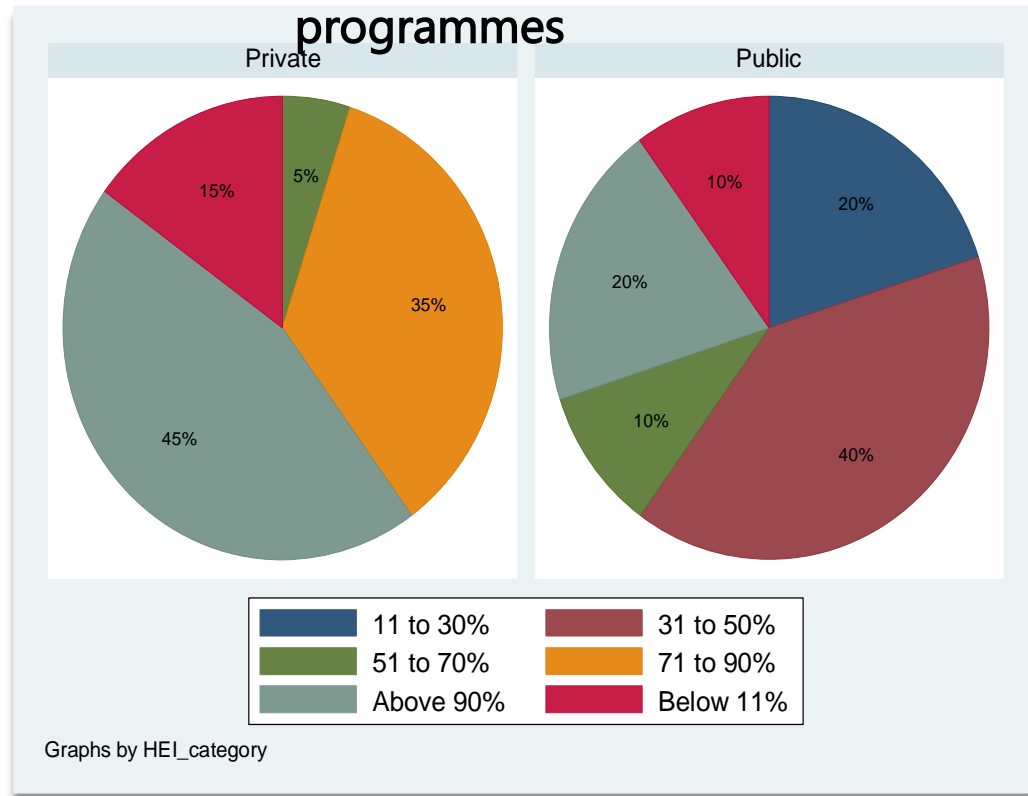# COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND TEACHING, LEARNING, ASSESSMENT

Time taken by HEIs to transition to eLearning
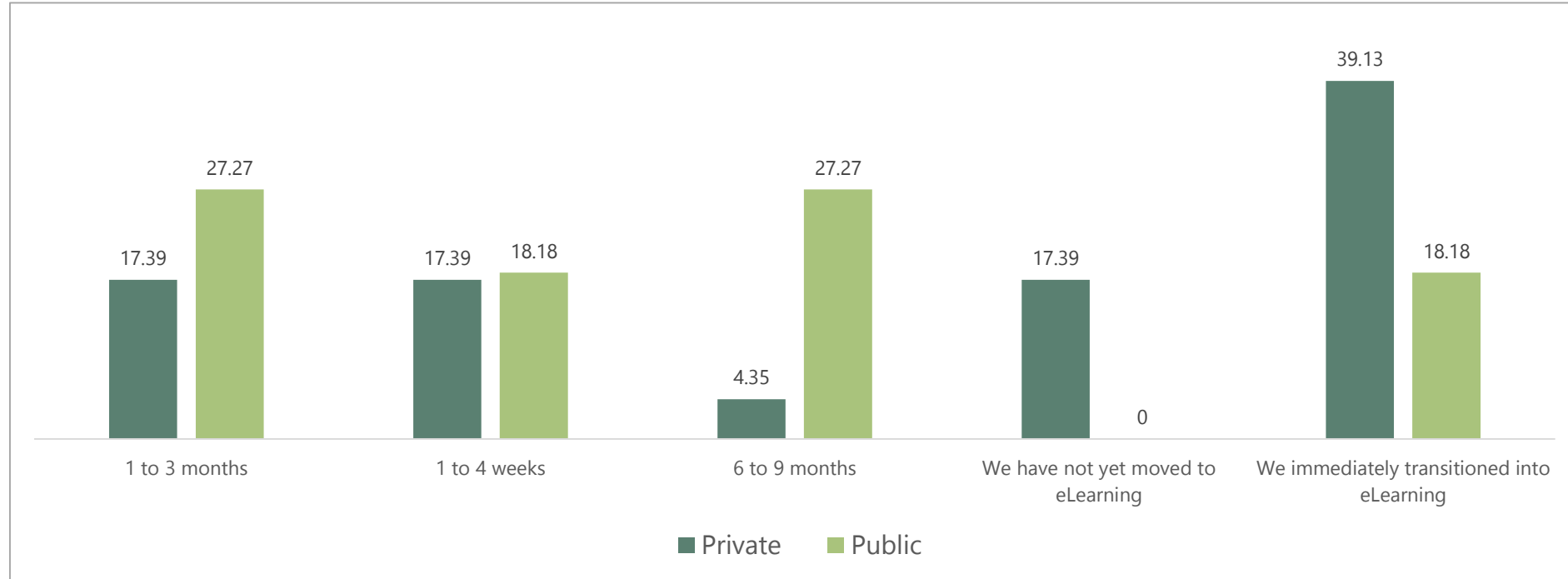
- 39.13% of private and 18.18% public HEIs were able to immediately transition to eLearning

Transitioning to eLearning during the COVID-19 pandemic

Academic programmes

Private / Public pie charts with legend:
- 11 to 30%
- 31 to 50%
- 51 to 70%
- 71 to 90%
- Above 90%
- Below 11%

Graphs by HEI_category

Students

Private / Public pie charts with legend:
- 11 to 30%
- 31 to 50%
- 51 to 70%
- 71 to 90%
- Above 90%
- Below 11%
- Not Applicable

Graphs by HEI_category
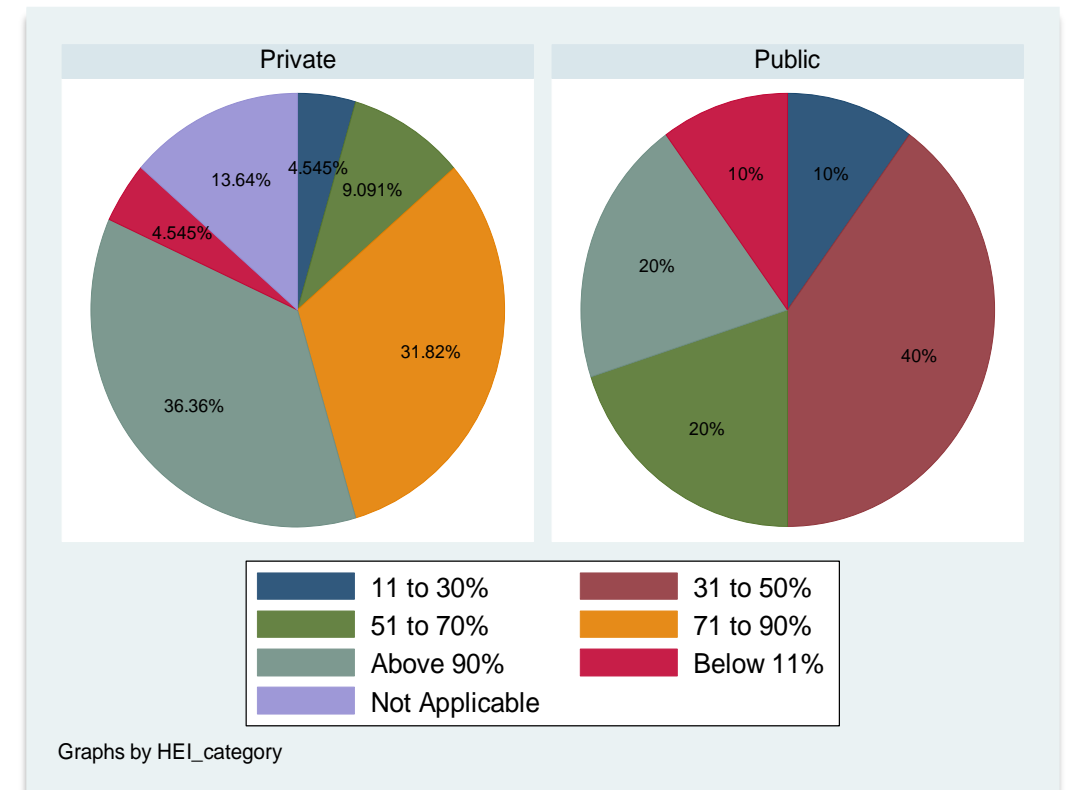
- 45% of private HEIs and 20% of public HEIs have managed to transition over 90% of their academic programs into eLearning.

- 36.4% of private HEIs and 20% of public HEIs have managed to transition over 90% of their students into eLearning.

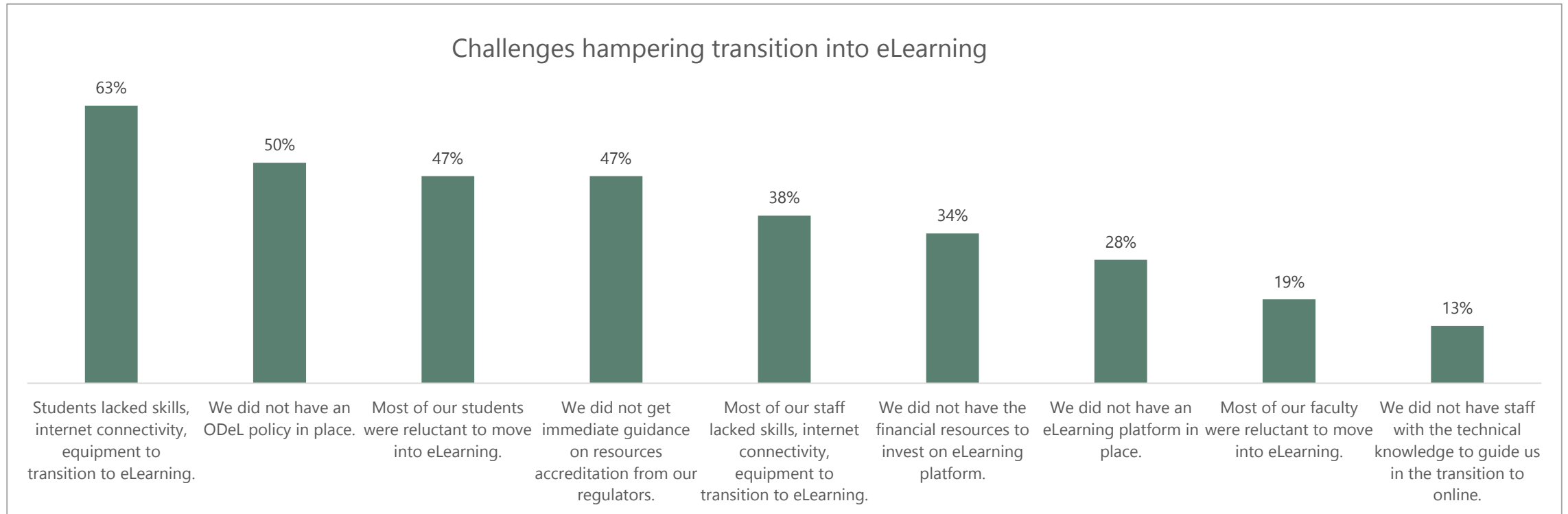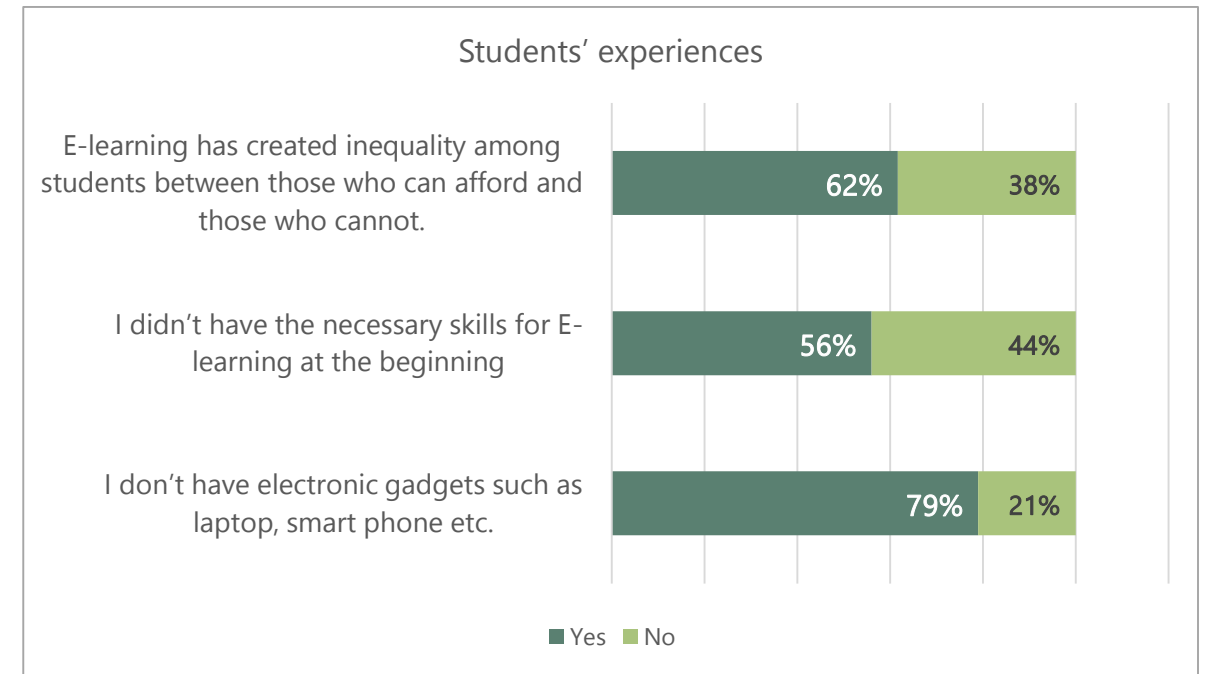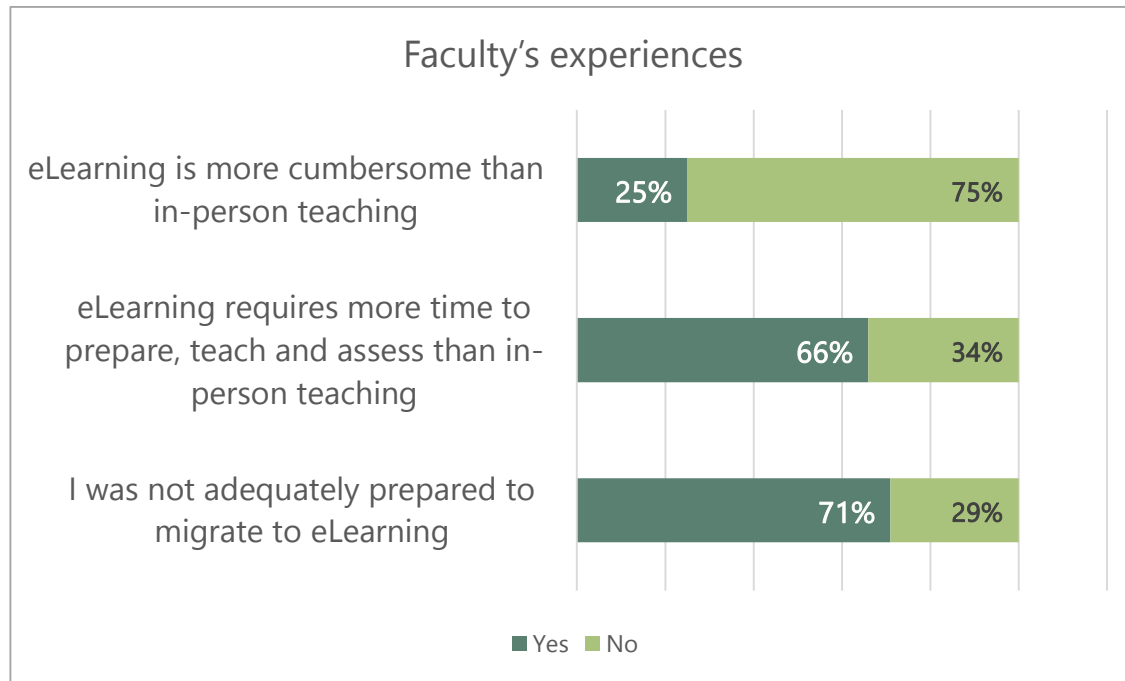# Factors hindering the transition to eLearning

Challenges hampering transition into eLearning

63%		
50%	47%	47%
38%	34%	28%
19%	13%	

- Students lacked skills, internet connectivity, equipment to transition to eLearning. — 63%
- We did not have an ODeL policy in place. — 50%
- Most of our students were reluctant to move into eLearning. — 47%
- We did not get immediate guidance on resources accreditation from our regulators. — 47%
- Most of our staff lacked skills, internet connectivity, equipment to transition to eLearning. — 38%
- We did not have the financial resources to invest on eLearning platform. — 34%
- We did not have an eLearning platform in place. — 28%
- Most of our faculty were reluctant to move into eLearning. — 19%
- We did not have staff with the technical knowledge to guide us in the transition to online. — 13%

- There was a general lack of digital and virtual skills and infrastructure, policy, and skills to transition to eLearning

- No clear guidance on how to conduct online learning from regulators.

- No clear guidance on the accreditation of online recourses by regulators.
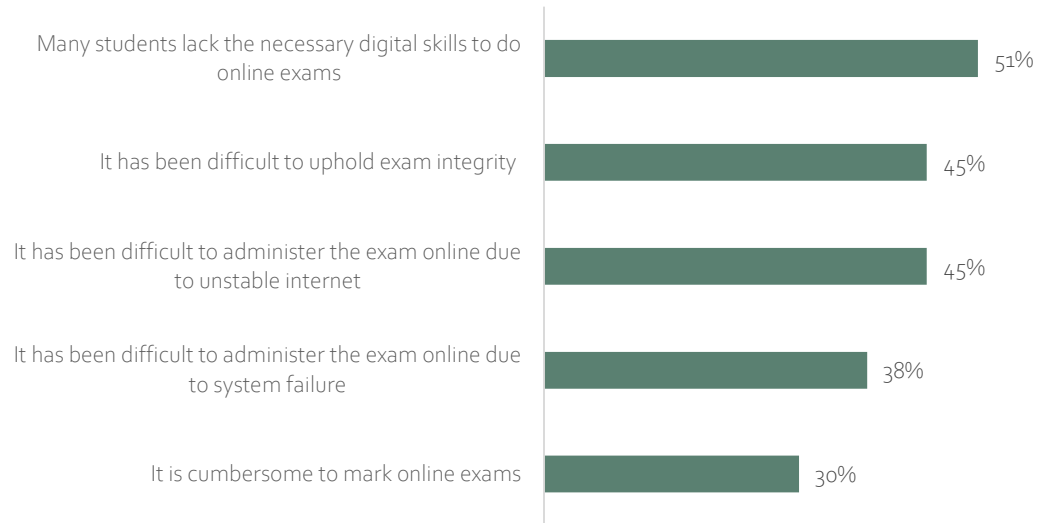
Teaching and learning remotely [experiences of students and faculty]

Faculty's experiences

Statement	Yes	No
eLearning is more cumbersome than in-person teaching	25%	75%
eLearning requires more time to prepare, teach and assess than in-person teaching	66%	34%
I was not adequately prepared to migrate to eLearning	71%	29%

■ Yes ■ No

Students' experiences

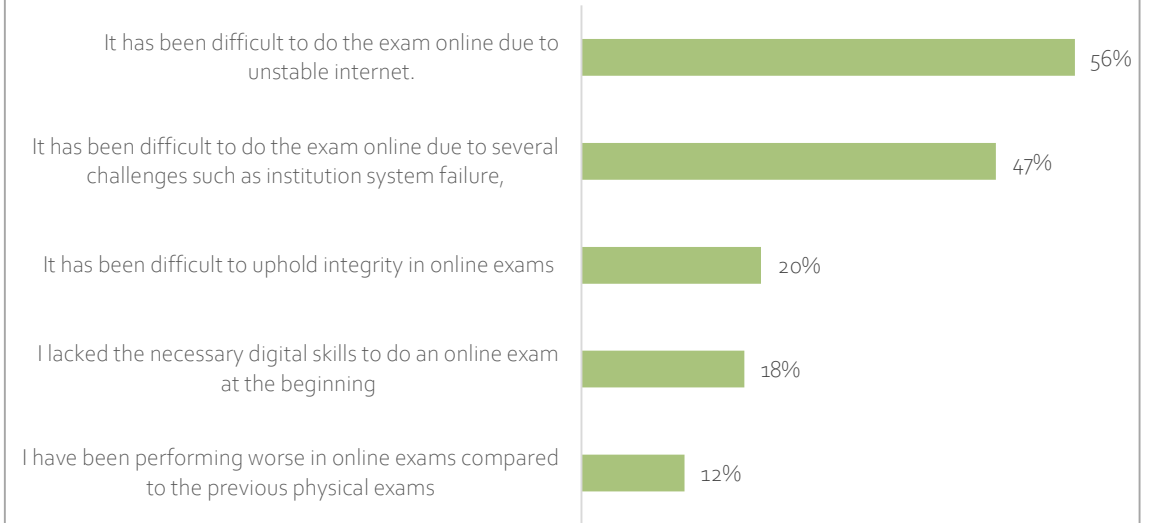| Statement	Yes	No
E-learning has created inequality among students between those who can afford and those who cannot.	62%	38%
I didn't have the necessary skills for E-learning at the beginning	56%	44%
I don't have electronic gadgets such as laptop, smart phone etc.	79%	21%

■ Yes ■ No

- Most faculty members were of the view that eLearning required more time compared to in-person teaching.

- Both students and faculty members lacked the necessary skills to transition to eLearning.

- Most students (62%) think eLearning has created inequalities in learning (digital divide).

Online examinations and assessment [experiences of students and faculty]

Challenges with online examinations (faculty)

Challenge	%
Many students lack the necessary digital skills to do online exams	51%
It has been difficult to uphold exam integrity	45%
It has been difficult to administer the exam online due to unstable internet	45%
It has been difficult to administer the exam online due to system failure	38%
It is cumbersome to mark online exams	30%

Challenges with online examinations (students)

Challenge	%
It has been difficult to do the exam online due to unstable internet.	56%
It has been difficult to do the exam online due to several challenges such as institution system failure,	47%
It has been difficult to uphold integrity in online exams	20%
I lacked the necessary digital skills to do an online exam at the beginning	18%
I have been performing worse in online exams compared to the previous physical exams	12%

- Lack of the necessary skills required to conduct and participate in exam remotely.

- Both students and faculty members raised concern about the difficulty in upholding integrity in online exams

- Difficulty in administering exams online due to system failure.

COVID-19 AND HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE

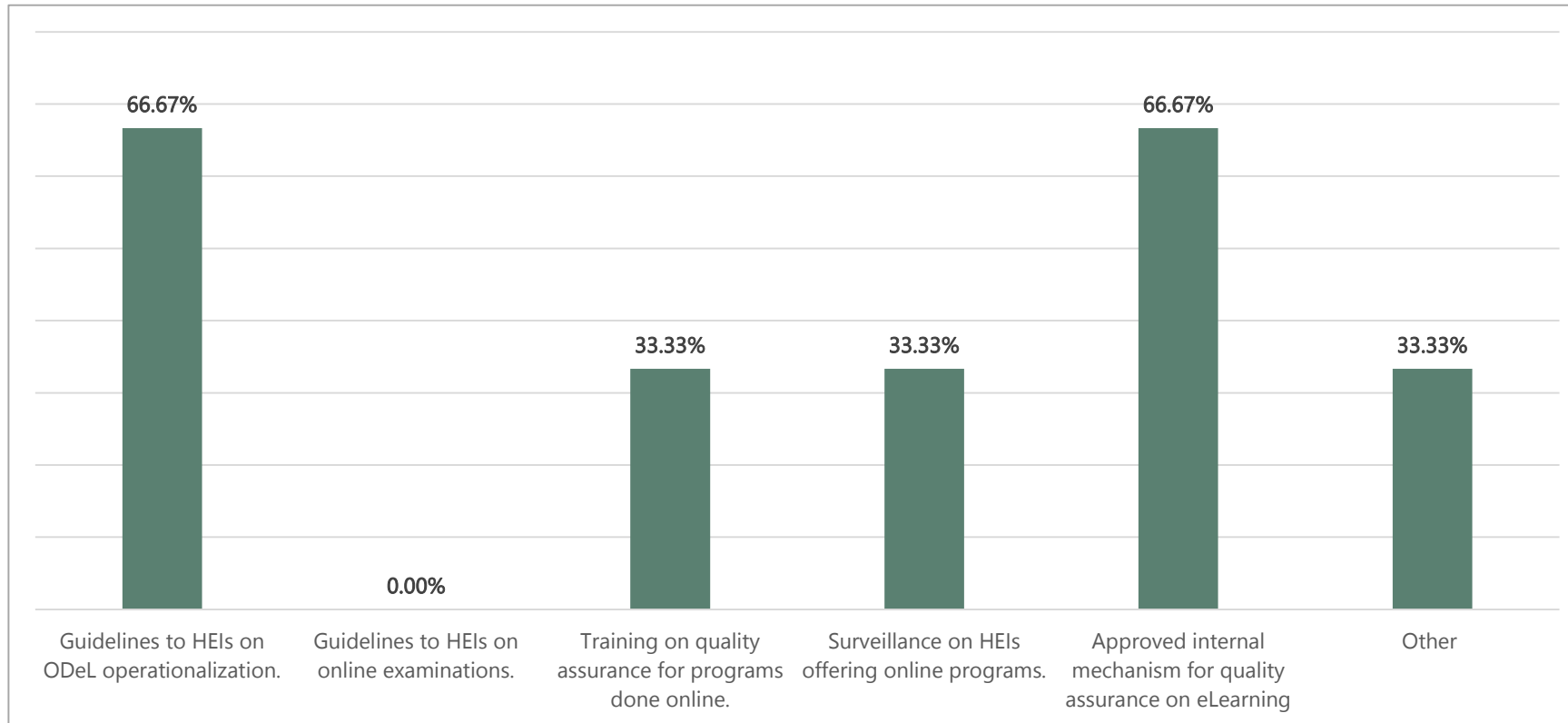# Measures taken by HEIs to ensure quality standards are maintained.

Institutional Support [Students]

- Training on how to use eLearning tools (61%)

- Prevision of internet bundles (12%)

- Access to premises with internet for eLearning (21%)

- Prevision of laptops (2%)

- No institutional support (32%)

Institutional Support [Faculty]

- Training on how to use eLearning tools (35%)

- Prevision of internet bundles (20%)

- Prevision of laptops (2%)
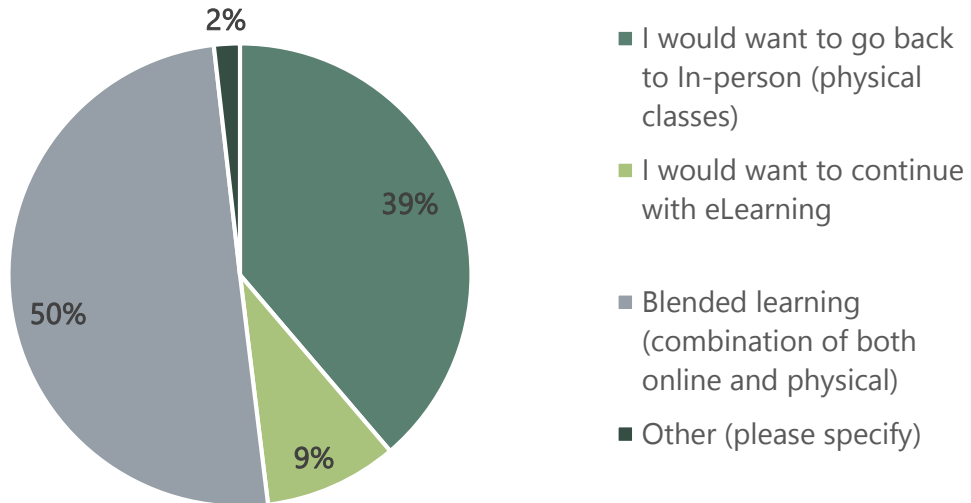
- No institutional support (38%)

Measures taken by regulators to ensure quality standards are maintained.

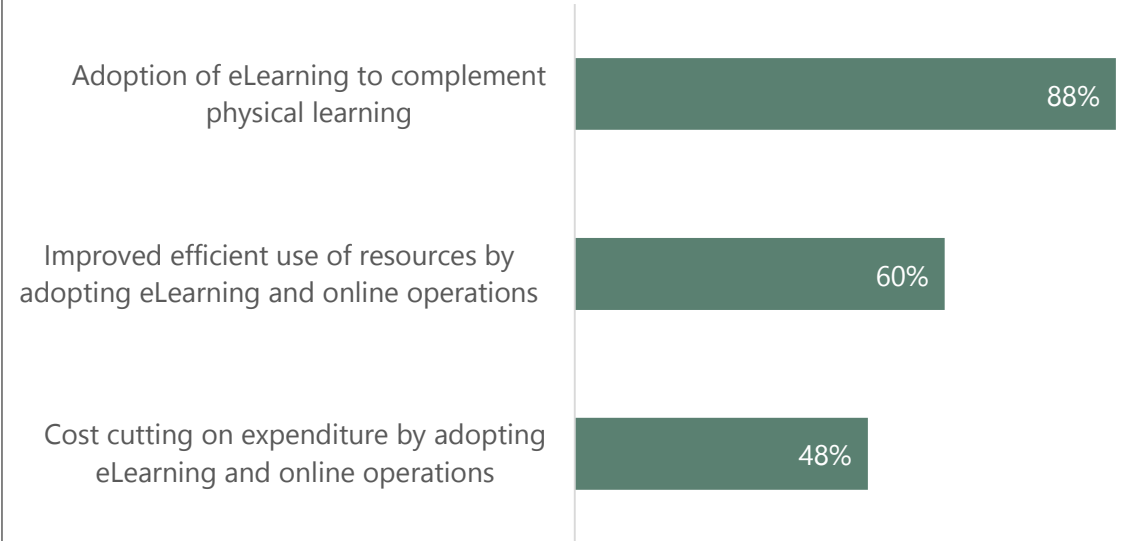| Category	Percentage
Guidelines to HEIs on ODeL operationalization.	66.67%
Guidelines to HEIs on online examinations.	0.00%
Training on quality assurance for programs done online.	33.33%
Surveillance on HEIs offering online programs.	33.33%
Approved internal mechanism for quality assurance on eLearning	66.67%
Other	33.33%

OUTLOOK ON THE MODE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE FUTURE

Future mode of teaching and learning

Future preferred mode of learning

- 2%
- 39%
- 50%
- 9%

■ I would want to go back to In-person (physical classes)

■ I would want to continue with eLearning

■ Blended learning (combination of both online and physical)

■ Other (please specify)

Faculty members view on the future of learning

Adoption of eLearning to complement physical learning — 88%

Improved efficient use of resources by adopting eLearning and online operations — 60%

Cost cutting on expenditure by adopting eLearning and online operations — 48%

- Student members prefer the future mode of learning to be blended.

- Faculty members recommend blended learning to be the future of education

Conclusion

- No clear guidance on how to conduct online teaching, learning and assessment.

- HEIs in the EAC region showed resilience in transitioning to eLearning.

- There is a general lack of digital and virtual infrastructure and delayed adoption of technology-supported solutions for online learning and assessment.

- There is a general concern about the integrity of online exams among students and faculty.

- Blended learning is the preferred mode of learning for both students and faculty members.

CALL TO ACTION

How can HEIs in Africa improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?

Thank you

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