Education in the 'New Normal' COVID-19 Pandemic Era: A Practical Example in the University of Yaounde I, Cameroon

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Abstract: **The COVID-19 pandemic, with staggering effects on man's activities all over the World has imposed a 'new normal' in the higher educational arena that stands to continue to prevail after the pandemic. Indeed, the manner in which knowledge is imparted has suddenly moved from the traditional onsite to a hybrid system, incorporating the classical face-to-face and online modes of course delivery. What is paradoxical is that this pedagogical paradigm-shift is being experienced in the University of Yaounde I at a time when the implementation of remote and other applications of educational technology is still quite fledgling in Cameroon. This study is qualitative in nature; involving in-depth interviews with 15 lecturers and 21 students randomly sampled from the University of Yaounde I. While data was analyzed through content-analysis, interpretations were made in the light of Kurt Lewin's Theory of Change and Homi Bhabha's Hybridity theory. Results reveal that uneven access to technological devices, inadequate training, and lack of conducive remote learning environments are hampering the new normal. To this effect, a number of recommendations have been made.**

Key words: **Education, 'New normal', COVID-19, Pandemic, and Era.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Mankind has known and experienced pandemics, but the one that was witnessed at the close of the year 2019 has gone into the annals of history as the most devastating. It is called corona virus or better still, COVID-19, declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 12th 2020 (Shereen and al., 2020). It is said to be of the Corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) families that brings about acute respiratory complications in humans. The COVID-19 pandemic originated from Wuhan, a town in China and succeeded to take several thousand lives within its initial weeks of existence. It later spread to other countries of the World; hence, becoming a global health concern, with staggering effects on most human activities (education inclusive). According to Shereen and al. (2020), the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on March 18th 2020 estimated that about 107 countries had implemented national school closures due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Cameroon inclusive); a situation that affected about 1.38 billion learners all over the world (UNESCO, 2020).

In Cameroon to be very specific, 4.5 million primary school pupils, 1.8 million secondary school students, 40,000 vocational training students, and 347,000 higher education students were obliged to stay out of school (UNSDG, 2020 cited by Mbodiam, 2020). According to Cameroon Web (2020) cited by the same author, the University of Yaounde I amid presidential silence was the first educational institution to issue a *communiqué* on the eve of 17 March 2020 listing academic measures it intended to take in response to COVID-19. To Mbodiam (2020), the above mentioned university initiated the lockdown of its campuses and suspended face-to-face academic activities; paving the way for a change in teaching methods by strengthening digital education as recommended by the Rector of the said institution.

With the advent of the new corona virus variant called *Omicron or B-11529*, the global infectious rate stood at 271,963,258 cases with 5,331,019 deaths and Cameroon alone recorded 107,662 cases with 1,836 deaths and no case of *Omicron* by December 17th 2021 (Cameroon-WHO COVID-19 dashboard, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic period has adversely affected the way education is delivered in the University of Yaounde I and hybrid education is gradually being appropriated into the habits of lecturers as well as students as a *new normal* that will certainly prevail after the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic era as used here refers to the period during and after the lockdown imposed on people and activities. The confinement period in Cameroon took close to seven (07) months; that is, from March 17th to October 5th 2020.

The University of Yaounde I which is the case study here owes its origin to the French mandatory period through what was known as *Fondation Française d'Enseignement Supérieur* (French Higher Education Foundation) in Ekounou-Yaounde. In October 1961, the Institute for University Studies was open and on July 26th 1962, the Federal University of Cameroon was created. It later became the University of Yaounde in 1973 and the 1993 University reform saw the creation of six State universities in Cameroon; hence, the University of Yaounde I (Decree, N°. 93/026 of 19 January 1993). It is a bilingual institution; with French and English being the official languages of instruction.

With that said, the question that looms is, how prepared are the University of Yaounde I lecturers and students to cope with the new pedagogical model in the current digitally-thirsty environment in Cameroon? This study falls within the confines of *Information, and Communication Technology (ICT) in Education*, specifically *Instructional Technology*. The overall objective of this study is, to ascertain the level of preparedness of lecturers and students in the adoption of new normal education in the COVID-19 pandemic era in the University of Yaounde I. Specifically, the intention is to:

- Identify the new pedagogical mode(s) used amid the COVID-19 pandemic period in the University of Yaounde I;
- Examine the level of preparedness of lecturers and students to cope with the new normal in the University of Yaounde I;
- Assess strengths and weaknesses of new normal education in the COVID-19 pandemic era in the University of Yaounde I;
- Propose mechanisms that can be used by the University of Yaounde I stakeholders to effectively adopt the new normal educational approach.

The present study is worthwhile, given that it throws light on the current technology in education stalemate and presents proposed measures that can be tapped to face with bravery pedagogical exigencies of the changing time; for, even though the introduction of the new normal education model is said to have been unplanned and rapid, it has come to stay in the Cameroon higher education arena in general and in the University of Yaounde I in particular.

II. CONTEXT

School and university closure in Cameroon became effective from the 17th of March 2020; leading to the confinement of millions of learners from the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of education. As a palliative measure to ensure pedagogical continuity however, remote, alternative, distance, and/or online teaching and learning for instructors and learners and teleconferencing for educational administrators was recommended a few weeks later (Mukum & Matsida, 2021). This saw the introduction of the *School on TV* initiative for primary school pupils and secondary school students in examination classes as well as the creation of online teaching-learning platforms through WhatsApp, Google classroom, Zoom, et cetera for learners in other levels and cycles. This has had tremendous effects on learners as well as instructors as most course content materials were never exhausted.

When barrier measures were relaxed at the verge of school resumption in October 2020, most techno-pedagogical mechanisms that were prescribed during the confinement period were maintained. In effect, a new pedagogical approach which is a blend of the classical face-to-face, online

and other self-directed learning models (Kibinkiri, 2019) became a *new normal,* especially in higher institutions of learning. The issue however is that this pedagogical paradigm-shift is being experienced in the University of Yaounde I at a time when the number of teachers (university lecturers inclusive) trained on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) usage across Africa hardly goes above 25% and about 50% of male and 20% of female instructors in Cameroon have taken about 50 hours of ICTs-assisted professional training (Karsenti, Collin & Harper-Merrett, 2012 cited by Apongnde, 2019a). It is rather unfortunate to note that only 17% of ICTs are used to teach different subjects and less than 5% of learners use ICTs in the learning process in Africa (Idem).

To Mbodiam (2019) cited by Mukum and Matsida (2021), teacher-learner interaction is hampered by Cameroon's low internet coverage, which currently stands at 30% overall and only 4% for broadband. While 74% of Cameroonian households have at least one mobile phone, this is not the case for computers, social network memberships, smart phones and tablets, respectively owned by only 24%, 12%, 20% and 2% of households (Idem). Worse of all, the average purchase price of a Smartphone in Cameroon is still very high; that is, about 50,000 CFA francs which is largely above the minimum wage of 36,270 CFA francs per month (Mbodiam (2020). These figures are very telling of an environment that is not suitable and conducive enough to sustain and guarantee quality higher education in the new normal COVID-19 era in Cameroon. The current stalemate is thus repugnant to the Qingdao Declaration on Post-2015 Education to be achieved by the year 2030 and Cameroon's Vision of becoming an emerging economy by the year 2035 (Apongnde, 2019a).

III. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study is exploratory nature, involving qualitative analyses. While the University of Yaounde I was purposefully chosen due to the fact that it was the first higher institution in Cameroon to adopt alternative educational approaches amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Cameroon Web, 2020) and its relative advancement in matters of *bi-modal* education, the random sampling technique was used to select 36 research participants from the University of Yaounde I (15 lecturers and 21 students). Research participants were taken from four faculties/attached institutions of the said institution. They include: the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Education, the Faculty Medicine and Biomedical Sciences and the Higher Teachers Training College. The table below illustrates the sample size for this study.

Figure 01: Table illustrating the sample size.

N°	Faculty/Institution	Lecturers	Students	Total
01	Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences	05	07	12

02	Faculty of Education	03	04	07
03	Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences	03	05	08
04	Higher Teachers Training College	04	05	09
	Total	**15**	**21**	**36**

Source: Field data, 2022

Students as well as lecturers selected to serve as informants were those that have been in their respective faculties/institutions since the 2019/2020 academic year; that is, people who were able to live the advent, spread and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. While data was collected through in-depth interviews, the *content analysis* approach was adopted in the process of analyzing the said data.

Results are presented in a narrative form and the discussion of results is done in the light of Kurt Lewin's Theory of Change and Homi Bhabha's Hybridity theory. The theory of Change as propounded by Kurt Lewin in 1990 is a methodology for planning, participation and evaluation that is usually applied in companies, philanthropy, non-profit activities, and government sectors to promote social change. It explains the process of change by outlining causal linkages in an initiative in the short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes (Kibinkiri, 2019). The links between outcomes are explained by *rationales* or statements of why one outcome is thought to be a prerequisite for another (Idem). This theory makes a distinction between desired and actual outcomes; hence, all stakeholders are required to model their desired outcomes before they decide on forms of intervention to achieve the said outcomes. It is worthy to note that the Theory of Change can begin at any stage of an initiative, depending on the intended use.

The Hybridity theory (Homi Bhabha's version of 1994) is fundamentally associated with the emergence of post-colonial discourse and its critiques of cultural imperialism. Hybridity is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once. Hybridity also demonstrates how cultures come to be represented by processes of iteration and translation through which their meanings are vicariously addressed through the other. The theory of Change and the Hybridity theory are relevant for this study because their principles and/or assumptions directly tie with the issue at stake; which is change in the pedagogical model and hybridity or *mixture* in the new model.

IV. RESULTS

The results of this study are organized around the specific objectives earlier presented. They have to do with the new pedagogical mode(s) used amid the COVID-19 pandemic period, the level of preparedness of lecturers and students to cope with the new normal, strengths and weaknesses of new normal education in the COVID-19 pandemic era, and mechanisms that can be used by the University of Yaounde I

stakeholders to effectively adopt the new normal educational approach.

Pedagogical mode(s) in the COVID-19 pandemic era

The COVID-19 pandemic period has brought about a veritable change in the way courses are delivered as well as in the way students learn in the University of Yaounde I. This assertion was confirmed by our informants (lecturers and students) as all of them (100% were unanimous on the fact that two major pedagogical systems emerged during the said period. This has to do with the traditional face-to-face (onsite) and the online teaching-learning systems. A blend of these two modes as well as other self-directed modes is what Kibinkiri (2019) refers to as blended learning. It can otherwise be termed bi-modal or hybrid education (Mukum & Matsida, 2021).

What is peculiar with this teaching-learning approach in the University of Yaounde I however is that the manner in which it is applied is not uniform. Disparities emerge at the level of faculties, attached institutions and even departments. While some faculties, attached institutions and/or departments alternate between the two pedagogical approaches, others simply merge the two as confirmed by our informants. As for the former (alternation), lectures are programmed to take place onsite after every week while online lectures take place after every week too. This is really an expression of *bi-modality in bi-modality*. Such is the case with the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences. As for the other faculties, the hybridity is continuous in the sense that it is all round; that is, both onsite and online.

Whatever the modes of operation, lecturers are called upon to put at least notes at the disposal of students online. The question on whether explanations are to be made or not was not a call for concern from the onset. This explains why while some lecturers were simply dropping their course outlines online, others went ahead to deposit complete notes and even proceed with audio/video lectures/exchanges with the students. This invariably implies that the exercise was not coordinated from the onset. Indeed, it is every lecturer that decided on which platform to use and how to proceed. While a majority of them were using Whatsap groups, others were using platforms like Google Classroom, Zoom, Telegram, Moodle and even *Group School* as it is the case with the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

It is recently that things are being coordinated. To that effect, lecturers as well as students have been attributed institutional email addresses by the University's computer department/center and lecturers have been instructed to use such institutional addresses to access Google Classroom platforms created and managed by the said center. This ensures traceability and visibility. Given that the University of Yaounde I has decided to compensate for this additional pedagogic task (online teaching), a number of guidelines have been given for every lecturer to follow. Some of which

include the necessity for all courses to be put online and the need for interactions/exchanges to be made between lecturers and students.

Level of lecturers' and students' preparedness to adopt the pedagogical 'new normal'

It is usually said that when you fail to plan, then you are planning to fail. This may not be the exact situation as far as the blended learning system is concern in the University of Yaounde I; but findings from the field show that the situation is not very much different. Indeed when asked whether informants (lecturers and students) were prepared to teach or learn this way, only one person (a lecturer) indicated that he was 100% prepared. When we looked at his background, we got to realize that he undertook his Doctoral and Post-Doctoral studies out of Cameroon; an environment whose educational technological reality is more favourable than that of Cameroon. The question that arises is, how have the other 35 persons (lecturers and students alike) interviewed been coping? Their responses were diverse, yet tilted towards the same direction which is the struggle to adapt.

Indeed, the bi-modal teaching-learning system took most people by surprise. Prior to this period, face-to-face instruction has been the *cherished normal*; in which case acquiring techno-pedagogical skills for lecturers was considered as a luxury. Moreover, most lecturers and students do not possess basic information and communication technology skills and when they were now expected to teach or take courses online, it became a nightmare for most of them. From the onset, most lecturers as well as students were reticent and while others later participated in pedagogic seminars or took training courses relating thereto, others strive to thrive via a *do it on your own* bases. Today, teaching and learning online has become a *new experience* as one of the informants put it. Whether one is equipped with technological skills or not, is not more anybody's business. The *new normal* (blended, bi-modal or hybrid education) is here and has surely come to stay.

Strengths and weaknesses of the pedagogical 'new normal'

The COVID-19 pandemic period has been termed a *curse* and at the same time a blessing to the University of Yaounde I's teaching staff as well as to students. This is so because of the repercussions it has inflicted on the teaching-learning process and the benefits that it has brought to the said process as well. Given that this pandemic is an unexpected visitor, it is worthwhile commencing with the weaknesses that it brought to the University of Yaounde I's community.

Weaknesses.

The dual system of course delivery that came with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic that has become the new normal way of educating students in the University of Yaounde I is pregnant with inconveniences. Our informants were very categorical on this as they indicated that this system is prevailing at a time when most, if not all lecturers and students in Cameroon in general and those of the University of Yaounde I in particular are not trained to teach and learn respectively via this approach. Even though most lecturers later took training courses relating thereto via pedagogical seminars and workshops, which has not been an easy task given that some of them are reticent, such has not been the case with students. Students are left at the mercy of doing it the way they can do or are expected to be drilled by their lecturers who on their part are yet to have a good mastery of the whole process.

Equally important is the fact that access to technological devices on the University of Yaounde I campus remains a nightmare (Apongnde, 2019a). Even though most lecturers, just like students have android phones and notebook computers (recently offered to students by the Head of State) that are even said to be ill-adapted to studies and are of very low capacity, it is no news that the level of internet connectivity is very poor. Indeed, as some Chinese companies are still struggling to ensure that a greater part of the campus is connected to the internet, only very few spots have WiFi connection that is itself irregular and protected. In effect, lecturers and students are obliged to afford for internet data from their private pockets whether on campus or out of campus. Acquiring the said internet data in Cameroon today is still very costly and even when one is connected, it is either slow, congested, short-lived or irregular due to frequent blackout. This leads to a bigger problem which is that of inadequate technological infrastructure on and off campus.

According to SDG N° 09 (2015), about 2.6 billion people in the developing World are facing difficulties in accessing electricity full time. In Cameroun, only about 56.8% of the entire population has access to electricity among which most of them are settled in urban areas where about 86.51% of the urban population has access to electricity (NIS, 2014). Mbodiam (2019) agrees with this point of view by stating that more than 45% of Cameroonians do not have access to electricity. To Andrianarison and Nguem (2020), electricity deficits have exacerbated educational exclusion and inequality in the age of COVID-19. The question about electricity supply in Cameroon is therefore a serious issue. This notwithstanding, it is out of place to imagine a 21st Century University without electrical energy. Apart from the Central African Virtual University that is hosted by the University of Yaounde I (Cameroon) that has a back-up system for its electricity supply, there are times when classes end unexpectedly in other campuses just because of a blackout. To this effect, one of the informants indicated that they have the problem of irregularity in electricity supply. Even though the University of Yaounde I is endowed with electricity, the serious issue is that most amphi theatres and all open-air studying spaces are not equipped with sockets that can contain its escalating population.

Moreover, informants were unanimous on the fact that the online system that has come to accompany the face-to-face system is plagued with a lot of drawbacks; a situation that makes some informants to ponder on the necessity of a dual pedagogical mode at a time when COVID-19 barrier measures are relaxed. It is said to have led to double work as what is done online is still done onsite. This increase in work load in effect leads to insufficient coverage of course content materials. Informants also complain of the inability to interact with instructors. Not all learners are usually connected at a given time and even when they are connected, there is sidetracking as most students quickly get distracted by other activities when they are working online. Most of them do not even take down notes. One of the students declared in her own words that:

> Online studies are very discouraging because I don't usually have internet data; and when I manage to get myself connected, I usually meet a long list of messages that the lecturer and my classmates have been exchanging and it usually makes me to feel discouraged.

Still, students are not able to receive explanations directly from the instructor or pose questions and get prompt responses and vice versa. At the same time, they are unable to see lecturers' gestures/signs and interpret them. There is thus the absence of feedback or retroaction and in effect, the teaching-learning process becomes tedious. Lecturers on their part find it very difficult to control learners or the class through this forum. This explains why evaluations via the said forum are said to be incredible, given that students can connive with others or work together when writing a test or an exam online. This system encourages laziness among students as they do not have learning time and are aware of the fact that what is being taught online will still be taught onsite.

Strengths.

Despite the weaknesses of the new bi-model pedagogical model in the University of Yaounde I, there are a number of benefits that are already being reaped from the system. They are both economic and technical. On the economic note, this system has been appraised for being an approach that is rapid and income-serving as learners as well as instructors given the current economic situation of the country can remain in their comfort zones (homes), yet receive or offer courses respectively. In that light, they are able to engage themselves in other activities that can yield them income. In such a situation, ubiquitous and flipped classroom learning is possible. In the former case, there is no room for displacements to be made or expenditures to be incurred and in the latter case, the lecturer simply comes to class to explain what was already dished out to students online.

On the technical note, there is a possibility of the concerned to familiarize themselves with educational digitalization techniques and other activities that go with modern technologies. That is to say, get to know more about Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as used in the domain of education. This bi-modal approach also makes the different stakeholders to align with technology in pedagogy or what Djeumeni Tchamambé (2010) and Apongnde (2019b) terms *techno-pedagogy*. Techno-pedagogy here simply has to do with the integration of technological innovations in the teaching-learning process. Informants also indicated that hybrid education has brought about dynamics in evaluation and administrative techniques as well as open them to the outside world. This directly falls in line with one of the key resolutions of the famous National Education Forum that took place in Cameroon in 1995, which is to train citizens enshrined in their cultures, yet open to the outside World.

Hybrid and life-long education as a 'new normal': which way out for the University of Yaounde I?

Even though hybrid and life-long education has dictated its place in the teaching-learning sphere of the University of Yaounde I as a new normal, a majority of people is yet to adhere to it. While some are making frantic efforts to side with the new dawn, others are still reticent and adamant to change. If hybrid education must prevail in the said university however, there is the need for a number of measures to be taken. The principal plea is that there should be broad band internet connection and access to it should be free. Without the provision of this service and on regular bases, there is no way online education can be effective. The availability of such internet connection in amphi theatres, and open air studying spaces will permit those who cannot afford for internet data at home to move to the campus to get themselves connected and participate in online studies. At the same time, students are calling on the agency in charge of the regulation of telecommunications in Cameroon, known in its French acronym as ART (*Agence de Regulation de la Telecommunication*) to regulate the sector and the State to subsidize students' data via companies providing internet connection; given that the cost of this product is still very exorbitant in Cameroon.

Students just like lecturers prefer more interactive teaching-learning platforms. While lecturers are for the putting in place of video lecture rooms where they can deliver courses live, students on their part prefer learning through *Zoom*; for, it gives them the opportunity to directly pose questions to lecturers and get spontaneous responses and through which videos can easily be shared. There is also a general clamour for the putting in place of a National Policy on *Technology in Education*; a policy that will govern the activity in a way that it is not more every university, faculty or department that will be integrating technology in education at its convenience or pace. Partnerships too should be established with other technologically-advanced universities around the world through which experiences can be shared and best practices emulated.

Moreover, lecturers as well as learners should be drilled on online teaching and learning respectively. This plea is coming up because ever since the new dawn was implemented, only lecturers have been taken into consideration whereas learners are of the majority population. Intriguing is the fact that a majority of the informants (students and lecturers as well) are for the point that online studies should be forgone; since the COVID-19 pandemic is not more intensive. They prefer that room should rather be given for classes to be split into manageable groups that can be taught in strict respect of barrier measures.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Regarding the results of this study, there is a lot of debate that looms. This is so because the question as to how sustainable this new pedagogical approach is remains unanswered. But when one looks at the current trends, he will realize that adopting this system is not more a matter of choice; for it is here to stay. According to Noe (2002) as cited by Kibinkiri (2019), many institutions across the world are moving to a hybrid approach because of the limitations of online learning related to insufficient bandwidth, learners' preference for face-to-face contact with instructors and other learners. To Kibinkiri (2019) himself, even though students are more comfortable with the face-to-face learning mode as compared to the online learning mode, the bi-modal teaching-learning system influences university students' professional development; hence, should be adopted. His declaration and plea are legitimate; given the present dispositions. But the question is, is the University of Yaounde I prepared to cope with the new normal?

Certainly not; reading from informants' points of view. This is one of the reasons that made Gnimassoun and Tapsoba (2020) to indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the structural weaknesses of African states, especially in the areas of economy, health and education. To them, these weaknesses include the absence of an e-learning policy, the presence of social inequalities, and the inadequate techno-pedagogical equipment of institutions, instructors and learners. Such inequalities have their habitats in the University of Yaounde I; hence creating a situation of digital divide between males and females, the old and the young as well as between the economically more viable and the disadvantaged students (Bacher-Hicks, Goodman, & Mulhern, 2020).

To Naginder and Manroshan (2020), the divide is deeply rooted in income inequality, as students from lower income families are disproportionately affected by the transition to virtual learning that requires a technological device, Internet connection as well as a conducive learning environment at home. The new mode of course delivery is thus relocating and repositioning learners' learning, raising questions around how adaptations are managed, and timely practices recreated and resumed (Moorhouse, 2020).

If we go by Kurt Lewin (1990)'s Theory of Change, we will understand that change is always a difficult thing to manage, especially when not well planned. This is because there are always intervening factors that can affect the outcome(s) of the change itself. Looking at education in the new normal COVID-19 era in the University of Yaounde I, one can say that the change was and is still not adequately planned in a way that the institution in question will be able to obtain the expected outcome, which is quality bi-modal education; bi-modality or *hybridity* being *mixity*, doubling, or dissembling of images, et cetera (Homi Bhabha, 1994). The hybridity here is materialized in the new onsite and online pedagogical systems in the University of Yaounde I. The question is, is it necessary for *change* to be enhanced through hybridity in an environment that is not yet adequately prepared to accommodate that form of change?

VI. CONCLUSION

Education is the pillar of every successful society. Statistics have shown that countries with higher human capital index have the likelihood of being developed. That is why anything that can put the education of a country's citizens to jeopardy is always tackled with immediate effect. Such has been the case with the health crises orchestrated by the Corona virus that stroke the global community in late 2019. Its effects have been widespread; touching almost all of man's activities (education the most affected) as resorting to national school closures became a *global sport* that almost all countries around the world participated in.

As players in a game that they do not want to loss, palliative measures for pedagogical continuity were derived, amongst which were online or remote education. As barrier measures were relaxed, the said pedagogical mode, just as a resistant parasite stamped its authority in the higher education arena; hence, co-existing with the traditional onsite or face-to-face model. This has therefore been a new normal in most educational systems across the globe, specifically at the higher education arena (the University of Yaounde I inclusive). But what is paradoxical here is that the new normal pedagogical approach is being adopted in the said university at a time when ground works have not yet been done. Inadequate and inequitable access to technological devices and infrastructure, and insufficient technological training, are still the order of the day.

Despite these shortcomings and the weaknesses of online education, a number of benefits have accrued from the new normal, imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of which are the fact that it has *upskilled* users and open them to the outside world. The online learning process is also time and income serving. If the new normal bi-modal/hybrid/blended and lifelong education must continue to occupy its envisaged place in the University of Yaounde I however, suggestions given by informants as outlined above should be effectively implemented.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author hereby declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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