Flexible Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Experiences and Challenges of Undergraduate Psychology Students in the University of Bamenda

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Abstract: Flexible Learning is a pedagogical approach that provides learners with a multitude of choices ranging from when, where and how learning occurs. This study aimed at examining flexible learning during the Covid 19 Pandemic. More specifically, it investigated the experiences and challenges of online learning of first, second and third year undergraduate Psychology Students of the University of Bamenda during the Covid 19 pandemic. Vygotsky’s (1978) Theory of social constructivism provided the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The study made use of a Sequential explanatory design whereby fifty (50) male and female first, second and third year undergraduate Psychology students responded to both structured and unstructured questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured on a four point Likert scale format. Data analysis made use of frequencies and percentages, as well as thematic analysis for the open ended items. Findings indicate that the communication infrastructures put in place for online learning are very bad and unreliable to sustain online learning. The study also concluded that the online learning resources at the disposal of students are not suitable enough. Based on the findings, recommendations were made to the government, as well as educational authorities in the University of Bamenda to put in place structures and facilities to promote online learning.

Keywords: Flexible Learning, Covid 19 Pandemic

Introduction

The outbreak of the Corona virus pandemic in December, 2019, caused the World Health Organization and nations around the globe to institute measures to contain its spread. The educational sector was one of the most affected sectors. As the social distancing rule was being preached, school closure, or better still, prohibiting the physical presence of teachers and students on campus became inevitable. With the suspension of physical learning on campus, flexible learning or better still alternative learning using information and communication technologies became the new norm. According to Huang, Liu, Tlili, Yang, Wang, et al. (2020, p.1) UNESCO says that in crisis situation, countries should “provide alternative modes of learning and education for children and adolescents who are not in school at both the primary and secondary levels, and put in place equivalency and bridging programs, recognized and accredited by the state, to ensure flexible learning in both formal and non-formal settings, including in emergency situations”.

According to Lee and McLoughlin (2010) flexible learning has been defined as a set of educational approaches and systems involved with the provision of increase learner choice, convenience and personalization to suit their needs. In this regard, flexible learning thus provides learners with a multitude of choices ranging from when, where and how learning occurs. Such learning makes use of a variety of technologies to aid the teaching and learning process. As far
as Collis, Vingerhoets, & Moonen (1997); Goode, Willis, Wolf, & Harris (2007) are concerned, flexible learning not only offers a myriad of choices in the educational environment, but customizes learning to meet the needs of learners. Learners must thus be given the latitude to make choices in the teaching and learning environment. Learner choices can range from class time, learning resources, teaching approaches, technology use, course content and location (Goode, Willis, Wolf, & Harris, 2007). Huang, Chen, Yang, & Loewen (2013) on their part, maintain that technology enhanced learning gives students the latitude to make choices with regard to time, place and space, as well as emphasizes different learning styles.

**Review of Related Literature**

Nikolova & Collis (1998) opine that the concept flexible learning has been in existence in professional training and higher education for over two decades. Flexible learning, according to Wilkinson, Forbes, Bloomfield, & Gee (2004) is learning that is incorporated into several facets of higher education like course delivery, pedagogies, time, entry requirements, locations, course content, logistics, learning outcomes and assessment. Most of the definitions of flexible learning look at it from the point of view of its learner centered nature. Van den Brande (1993, p.2), for example, defines Flexible learning as learning that gives learners the latitude to “learn when they want (frequency, timing, duration), how they want (modes of learning), and what they want (that is learners can define what constitutes learning to them)”.

Khan (2007), on his part sees flexible learning to be not only learner-centered but has an interactive characteristic in the environment as it makes use of information and communication technologies and other instructional designs. For Khan (2007, p, 1), flexibility in this context has to do with “on-demand, anytime/anywhere, high quality learning environments with good support services.” Luckin et al, (2010) limited their definition of flexible learning to mobile technology as they explored how technology-based learning environment could affect learning. Dorrian & Wache (2009) claim that flexible learning bestow a number of benefits to students like helping them to become autonomous learners and achieving learning outcomes. Adding his voice to an a learning experience that empowers the learners to take ownership of their own learning, Karna (2006) opines that there is need to overcome the barriers to physical space to enable teaching and learning to be effective.

According to Roberts, Jones & Romm (2000) flexible learning, in the simplest sense of the word is learning which bestows to the students the latitude to make choices viz-a-viz study mode. This could mean studying from a distance using printed materials or information and communication technologies. These authors further maintain that the term flexible learning has recently been used to label almost any program or course which makes use of information and communication technologies in learning. According to Roberts, Jones & Romm (2000) there are four models of flexible learning, the first being the naïve model, also considered face to face, whereby lecture notes are placed online. The only reason why this model is considered flexible is that it permits distance students to have access to both printed materials and online lecture notes. Unfortunately, as Ozdemir and Bonk (2017) maintain, it is a herculean task for students to search and locate high quality instructional materials online. There is therefore, need for the teachers to regularly make quality instructional materials available to students online. The other three models are the standard model, the evolutionary model, and the radical model. These models, according to Roberts, Jones & Romm (2000) can only be recognized to be flexible based on the fact that students who cannot physically attend lectures and tutorials on campus are often made available with a variety of web-based facilities and email-based discussion groups to help them learn and to make it possible for them to interact with the teacher and other students.

Goode et al., (2007) posit that flexible learning has a number of dimensions or characteristics. The first is that it gives learners a multitude of choices to choose from. Secondly, flexible learning incorporates the learner-centered constructivists philosophical view point in the teaching/learning process whereby emphasis on learning has moved from the teacher to the student who is now expected to take more and more responsibility in the teaching and learning.
process. In this regard, the learner is expected to take more control and ownership of their own learning as they are seen as active participants involved in co-constructing knowledge through the guidance of the teacher. The last characteristic/dimension of flexible learning as proposed by Goode et al. (2007) is that the learner has a variety of choices from which to choose from, and they are expected to take more and more responsibility for their own learning. In this regard, Collis (1998) says that this type of learning imbibes learners with self-regulated learning skills especially with regard to goal setting, self-monitoring and adjustment to learning.

Huang, Chen, Yang, & Loewen (2013) holds the view that flexible learning is facilitated via the use of technology whereby technology enhanced learning leverages technology to maximize learning opportunities in learning contexts. For technology to be effectively applied in flexible learning situations, five laws must be strictly followed (Huang, Chen, Yang, & Loewen, 2013). These laws have to do with access to e-learning resources, effectively and efficiently managing the virtual learning environments/communities, learning management systems, system design and learners asking for help. Due to the scope of this study, only the first two of these laws will be explained here.

Looking at the law on e-learning resources, Huang, Chen, Yang, & Loewen (2013) hold that these resources must satisfy learners’ interest and the content should not be beyond learner’s comprehension so as to prevent cognitive overload. Moreover, the content must be clear and simple, and well designed to prevent visual strain. As far as the law on virtual learning environment is concerned, it is important that a trustful learning environment is built whereby learners are continuously encouraged and motivated and they also feel a sense of belonging as vital and participatory members of this earning environment. Such a learning environment should be one that is welcoming, with agents and teachers providing regular and timely feedback to learners, and further gives learners the latitude to have a sense of emotional identification with their quest for achievement and performance (Huang, Chen, Yang, & Loewen, 2013).

Lewis & Spenser (1986) maintain that the learner-centered philosophy serves as an underpinning theory for this flexibility dominated educational practice. In this regard, this study will project the social constructivism theory of Lev Vygotsky to provide a starting point and offer more clarity to this study. According to Lundin (1999), such flexible learning context, whereby barriers are removed, empower both the teachers (facilitator) and learners to co-construct knowledge as they exchange information in a two way manner. Adding their voices to the student-centered paradigm, Estes (2004); Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991); Wright, Bittnor, and Zeithaml (1994) emphasize that such learner centered pedagogy gives the learners the freedom to be active, participatory and to experience experiential and cooperative learning whereby both students and teachers co-create their learning experiences. This paradigm shift from teacher centered to student-centered, and from passive to active learning has further renewed interest in the effect of space on learning behaviours and instruction (Leung and Fung 2005; Scott-Webber 2004). Hence pedagogical innovations that permit flexible learning should emphasize exploration by both learners and teachers and make provision for multiple modes of instruction and learning. In this regard, focus should be on pedagogical, physical design, and information and communication technology related issues.

Vygotsky’s (1978) Theory of social constructivism maintains that learning takes place through mediation when students interact with their environment or context. Students, in this regard must interact with significant others like more knowledgeable peers, teachers, parents who scaffold them and help them to go beyond their zone of proximal development. Vygotsky maintains that there are some problems that students can independently solve and others that they cannot solve without adult assistance. The Zone of proximal Development is the distance between problems children can independently solve and what they can only solve with assistance from an adult or mentor. In this regard, one realizes that through their mobile phones or other technology related devices, as they are connected to other social media cites, Google or other online learning platforms, students are able to access information or learning materials that can guide them understand certain learning concepts better. Moreover, students can share information in social
media sites or can ask questions about concepts they do not understand so that via social media, or other online learning platforms more knowledgeable peers, tutors or significant others can clarify them on issues they don’t understand as they seek to understand learning materials.

Vygotsky posits that students learn effectively in social groups. The students construct their meaning from social communities in their own perspectives. In the context of flexible learning using information and communication technologies, the social communities can be social media whereby students join different groups and share ideas. Moreover, he believed that as students interact in this virtual community they are able to make meaning out of their experiences rather than from memorizing facts. In his view, the social media world gives students the latitude to be active in the construction of meaning as they constantly debate issues, contribute ideas, agree and disagree on certain topics. Additionally, he developed a model for learning which makes the teachers and learners to be active as they co-construct knowledge. Most importantly, the teacher in this instance scaffolds or guides the learners to discover knowledge based on their thoughts.

**Statement of the Problem**

The Covid – 19 pandemic that affected the world in general and Cameroon in particular was an impromptu event that took many by surprise. It changed the way society operates, especially with regard to social interaction and schooling. Education was one of the most affected sectors in Cameroon as measures to combat the spread of the pandemic required that social distancing laws be respected to the letter. By implication, physical presence of students in schools was restricted as flexible and alternative learning methods were proposed as the panacea to such a dilemma. As schools were physically closed, students and teachers had to resort to flexible learning using information and communication technologies. Learning through the internet from whatever corner of the country students found themselves became the norm and the way to go.

Unfortunately, such flexible learning via the internet was being proposed and put in place at a time when the internet infrastructure in the country leaves much to be desired with slow network connectivity that makes it impossible to download materials and sustain long hours online. Moreover, the University of Bamenda is located in a city that for the past two years have been witnessing frequent power problems that has necessitated electricity to be rationed. Thus with frequent power cuts, flexible learning by students in the University of Bamenda was bound to suffer. In addition, flexible learning using information and communication technologies requires that both students and teachers be equipped with important gadgets like android phones, laptop computers, printers and internet. Unfortunately, in a poverty stricken country like Cameroon very few students have the means to afford such gadgets which further makes it difficult for flexible learning to go smoothly. With this problem in view, this study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

1) How reliable are communication infrastructures to permit flexible learning to take place?
2) How suitable are digital learning resources to enhance flexible learning?
3) What are some of the challenges involved with the implementation of flexible learning via information and communication technologies?

**Methodology**

A Sequential explanatory design was deemed necessary for this study. Explanatory designs are described as a two stage design which sees quantitative data being used as the basis on which to build and explain qualitative data. The quantitative data informs the qualitative data selection process which is a great strength in that it enables researchers to specifically pinpoint data that is relevant to specific research project. Allan (n.d.) points out that this design is commonly used in educational research, being referred to as a participant selection model. This design thus necessitated the researcher to design both structured (for quantitative purpose) and unstructured (for qualitative purpose) questionnaire items to seek answers to the research questions under investigation. The participants of the study were fifty (50) male and female levels 200, 300 and
400 Educational Psychology students from the University of Bamenda, Cameroon. These students were being taught by this researcher during the second semester before the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted classes in March, 2020. As a result, of social distancing laws, the researcher had to migrate from physically teaching the students to providing online classes. So the responses provided by these students in the questionnaire were based on their online learning experiences not only with this researcher as their lecturer but with other colleagues of the researcher in the University of Bamenda. The participants were randomly selected for this study.

Findings

Data were analyzed using simple frequencies and percentages. Each research question was analyzed on a separate table. It is important to recall that this study sought to provide answers to three research questions namely: 1) How reliable are communication infrastructures to permit flexible learning to take place?; 2) How suitable are digital learning resources to enhance flexible learning?; 3) What are some of the challenges involved with the implementation of flexible learning via information and communication technologies? These research questions are analyzed on tables, followed by brief explanations as seen below. On the table Strongly Agree is presented as (SA), Agree = A, Disagree = D and Strongly Disagree = SD

Table 1: Reliability of Communication Infrastructures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>% of SA &amp; A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>% of D &amp; SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I love online learning because I can follow lectures from anywhere</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>There is frequent electricity failure during learning hours</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>My location doesn’t have network for me to effectively learn online</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>My phone battery doesn’t last for long to sustain long periods of online learning</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Poor internet connectivity often disrupts learning</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL AVERAGE</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 1 above, it is quite glaring that 80% of the respondents overwhelmingly strongly agreed (SA) and agreed (A) that they love online learning because it permits them to follow lectures from anywhere. Only 20% Disagreed (D) and strongly disagreed with this view. On the other hand, 84% of the respondents were of the view that there is frequent electricity failure during learning hours. Only 16% disagreed with this view. Moreover, 60% of the students agreed that where they are doesn’t have good network to effectively learn. Looking at the item on whether phone battery last for long to sustain long period of online learning, 70% of the participants agreed that their phone battery doesn’t last for long to sustain long periods of online class. Finally, 78.4% of the respondents agreed that poor internet connectivity disrupts online learning.

In summary, therefore, as far as communication infrastructure is concerned, 78.4% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the communication infrastructures put in place for online learning are very bad and unreliable to sustain online learning. Only 21.6% of the respondents claim the infrastructure is in good condition.
A closer look at Table 2 reveals that during online learning teachers allow students to search for information on their own as indicated by 76% of respondents agreeing to this item. On the other hand, 62% of respondents claim they often have problems accessing resources online. As far as downloading online materials like notes and assignments are concerned half of the respondents (50%) claimed to be having problems in this regard. 58% of the respondents equally expressed the view that they often encounter problems downloading videos and audio recordings online. 68% of respondents accepted that the teachers offer guidance as to what resources can be downloaded. Moreover, 74% of the respondents agreed to having difficulties finding and downloading suitable materials for learning. As concerns the interactive nature of online learning, 52% of the participants agreed that the online resources put in place are not interactive. As to the types of documents and other online resources made available to the learners, the respondents expressed the view (66%) that online learning resources are often limited to pdf files and Microsoft word documents. Finally, as concerns the content and comprehensible nature of online learning resources, 62% of the participants expressed the view that they have difficulties understanding the online learning resources.

In summary, therefore, looking at the suitability of online learning resources, 63.1% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the online learning resources at their disposal are not suitable enough. Only 36.9% of these respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with this view.

**QUALITATIVE DATA**

This section analyses qualitative data whereby recurring themes emerged from respondents responses to the items. The qualitative data focused more on the types of gadgets used by students to learn during alternative or flexible learning, problems encountered during online learning and possible solutions to ensure a better online learning experience.

**Types of Gadgets Used**

Majority of the students, well, over 90% expressed the view that the only gadgets available for them to use during online learning is their mobile phone. None of the respondents did agree that they were in possession of a laptop or computer for learning. This thus begs to answer the

**Table 2: Suitability of Digital Learning Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>% of SA &amp; A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>% of D &amp; SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>During online learning, the teacher allows me to search for information on my own</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I often have problems accessing resources online</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I often have problems downloading materials (e.g. notes and assignments) online</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I often have problems downloading videos or audio recordings online</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My teacher guides me as to what resources I can download online</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I often have difficulties downloading suitable resources for my courses</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The resources we use online are not often interactive</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Our online resources are limited to PDF files and Microsoft word documents</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I often have difficulties understanding the online resources</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL AVERAGE**

|                                       | 10  | 21.6 | 63.1 | 14.6 | 3.8 | 36.9 |

A closer look at table 2 reveals that during online learning teachers allow students to search for information on their own as indicated by 76% of respondents agreeing to this item. On the other hand, 62% of respondents claim they often have problems accessing resources online. As far as downloading online materials like notes and assignments are concerned half of the respondents (50%) claimed to be having problems in this regard. 58% of the respondents equally expressed the view that they often encounter problems downloading videos and audio recordings online. 68% of respondents accepted that the teachers offer guidance as to what resources can be downloaded. Moreover, 74% of the respondents agreed to having difficulties finding and downloading suitable materials for learning. As concerns the interactive nature of online learning, 52% of the participants agreed that the online resources put in place are not interactive. As to the types of documents and other online resources made available to the learners, the respondents expressed the view (66%) that online learning resources are often limited to pdf files and Microsoft word documents. Finally, as concerns the content and comprehensible nature of online learning resources, 62% of the participants expressed the view that they have difficulties understanding the online learning resources.

In summary, therefore, looking at the suitability of online learning resources, 63.1% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the online learning resources at their disposal are not suitable enough. Only 36.9% of these respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with this view.

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This section analyses qualitative data whereby recurring themes emerged from respondents responses to the items. The qualitative data focused more on the types of gadgets used by students to learn during alternative or flexible learning, problems encountered during online learning and possible solutions to ensure a better online learning experience.

**Types of Gadgets Used**

Majority of the students, well, over 90% expressed the view that the only gadgets available for them to use during online learning is their mobile phone. None of the respondents did agree that they were in possession of a laptop or computer for learning. This thus begs to answer the
question to what extent their mobile phones can effectively and efficiently download materials and how do they go about typing assignments if they are not in possession of electronic gadgets like a computer or laptop?

Problems Encountered During Online learning

According to the students, the challenges they faced during online learning revolved around poor connectivity, Lack of electronic gadgets, constant power failure, battery problem, expensive data, limited Interaction, limited video applications, timing.

Internet Connection

Majority of the respondents (more than 90%) overwhelmingly claimed that the major stumbling block was poor internet connection. According to them, they cannot follow lectures consistently for more than one hour without network interruptions. Moreover, even when there is connectivity, the network is too slow such that it is difficult to download materials especially video. Some students’ responses arrive late when the class must have moved on to a different topic or idea. The students equally expressed the view that the expensive nature of data makes it difficult for them to follow all the lectures and be consistent. Some are forced to temporarily switch on their data just to find out what is happening in class before switching it back off.

Electricity Problem

All the respondents expressed the view that constant power cuts especially in the locality of Bambili where the University is located and lodges a good number of students frustrate their efforts towards following lectures online. The power cuts happens mostly during school hours as electricity supply is cut for up to about seven or eight hours during the day which often cause classes to be interrupted. Given that majority of the students use their phones to follow lectures, the battery often runs down and it becomes very difficult to charge the battery with such frequent power cuts. It is also a problem for students to do their assignment and submit on time given that without electricity they cannot go online, download much needed materials, type and print their assignments.

Expensive Data Bundles

The students overwhelmingly expressed the view that data bundles are too expensive for them. According to them, they did not begin the academic year with online classes in mind. Hence they did not budget for such spending whose impromptu nature in the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic meant that they had to squeeze their little resources to buy much needed internet bundle. Majority of the students said that they cannot attend classes every day of the week given that they cannot afford the internet bundle that is too expensive for the average student.

Limited Interaction

Majority of the students were of the opinion that over reliance on whatsapp chat for classes rather than incorporating other platforms that make use of video conferencing like zoom, google classroom, makes the classes less interactive as they cannot visually see the teacher or their classmates. Research in psychology has proven that one of the learning styles which majority of the students use for effective learning is visual learning. It is often easier to remember things when we hear and see them than remember them when we only hear them.

Lack of Electronic Gadgets

An overwhelming majority of the students did say that they are not in possession of basic online learning devices like a computer and printer. A laptop or computer is a basic tool for students to follow classes online but their expensive nature means that very few students can afford such gadgets in a society where majority lives below the poverty line. Students are often forced to go to the cyber café to download materials and do assignments. Some of these places are not conducive for studies at all.
Timing

Timing was another problem identified by the respondents as a major stumbling block to their online learning experience. According to them, the lecturers seldom respect time for the classes as they often begin the class late and close late. It is made worse by the fact that their limited finances do not permit them to buy enough data bundle to stay online for long waiting for the class to start. Scheduling is also an issue. According to the respondents, lecturers schedule classes without taking into cognizance a number of factors like, when electricity is in supply, some students may be involved in other activities in the neighborhood, at work or in the market. The students thus decry the fact that sometimes classes are held haphazardly, at any time of the day, be it in the mornings, afternoons, evenings or night time.

Proposed Solutions

According to the students, there is need for the University of Bamenda to not limit teaching and learning activities on whatsapp chat but to make use of interactive learning platforms like Zoom and google classroom that make use of visual images. Moreover, the respondents suggested that good internet infrastructure be put in place such that the network will be fast to permit students download both audio and visual materials and to conveniently follow up classes online without interruptions. In addition, the constant power cuts should be looked upon such that during class hours power is supplied or the powers that be look for alternative source of power to permit students follow lectures online. It was further suggested that classes be well organized such that students program themselves for other activities rather than having classes during unexpected hours of the day. They also suggested that time for classes be respected so that they don’t wait for long to begin and the classes do not become too long. Lastly, students suggested that the state provides them free laptops and internet bundles to be able to follow up lectures online.

Discussion

It was evident that 78.4% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the communication infrastructures put in place for online learning are very bad and unreliable to sustain online learning. Moreover, as far as suitability of digital learning resources is concerned, 63.1% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the online learning resources at their disposal are not suitable enough. The findings of this study are in synergy with the one carried out by Ozdemir and Bonk (2017) who opined that probing and finding explicitly first-class educational resources, among thousands of publications, is a challenging, if not daunting task. However, the results obtained from the present study do not align with that of Khan who in a 2007 study concluded that Flexible Learning is a pedagogical approach which gives room for the flexibility of time, place, audience, as well as the use of technologies.

The absence of appropriate online pedagogical materials to suit the Cameroonian context was evident in the present study. it is highly imperative that as the University of Bamenda explores ways to better its online learning experience, attention should be given to the communication infrastructure, availability of gadgets for students, internet connectivity and most especially the necessary data to access online learning resources. Flexible learning space, it should be emphasized, has the possibility to increase student engagement, collaboration and learning. Karns (2006) posits that the traditional classroom is best suited for lectures. Online learning, provides teachers and students with a number of options and flexibility as far as teaching methods and techniques are concerned. Such online learning gives students the latitude to be actively engaged in their own learning, to take ownership of learning and to be co-constructors of knowledge with the teacher as the facilitator. Flexible learning environments ensure that barriers that could otherwise prevent students from physically attending a given educational contexts are eroded.

Conclusion

This study has been able to establish that the communication infrastructures are not reliably enough for flexible learning to take place in the University of Bamenda. Secondly, the study
established that digital learning resources are very unreliable. Problems encountered by students as they engage in online learning include, lack of appropriate electronic gadgets, poor internet connectivity, expensive data bundle, frequent power cuts.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings obtained from this study, the following recommendations were made: First of all, the Government of Cameroon should put in place the necessary communication infrastructure to permit students in Cameroon join other students the world over in the global village whereby they can access information and learning wherever and whenever from the comfort of their homes. Secondly, the authorities in the University of Bamenda should ensure that digital learning resources uploaded by lecturers and other facilitators of the teaching and learning process are suitable enough for the students to access and consume and suit the Cameroonian context, especially a context of slow internet connectivity, frequent power cuts. Finally, the government of Cameroon, and more specifically the authorities of the University of Bamenda should provide financial assistance to students to be able to secure the necessary electronic gadgets like laptops and android phones to facilitate online learning.

**References**


