



## Digital Interconnectivity and the Emergence of Integrated University Governance at the University of Yaoundé I

Brikissou YOUMDINGOUOTMOUN<sup>1</sup>, Marcelline DJEUMENI TCHAMABE<sup>2</sup>, Oibrillant DAMUS<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doctoral candidate, University of Yaoundé I (Cameroon)

<sup>2</sup>Professor, University of Yaoundé I (Cameroon)

<sup>3</sup>Professor, University of Sherbrooke (Canada)

**ABSTRACT:** Cameroonian higher education is undergoing a gradual transformation driven by the e-National Higher Education Network project, as part of Cameroon's Digital 2020 Strategy. It is within this context that this study analyzes the impact of network interconnectivity on the emergence of integrated digital governance. This study examines the capacity of the networking of services and faculties to transform institutional management at the University of Yaoundé I of the networking of services and faculties to transform institutional management. Based on a systemic approach and rhizome theory, the research posits that organized two-way communication fosters more fluid governance. It adopts a constructivist, dynamic approach and a mixed methodology (explanatory and correlational), combining a quantitative survey (n=429) of students, teachers and administrative staff from six institutions within the University of Yaoundé I, seven semi-structured interviews, and a document analysis. The results indicate a partial development of interconnectivity. Statistical analyses reveal strong correlations between interconnectivity and ease of use, but a weak predictive effect on the overall adoption of digitalization ( $\beta = 0.072$ ,  $p = 0.233$ ). Qualitatively, collaborative practices often remain informal, hampered by hierarchical rigidities and infrastructural gaps. In conclusion, the study confirms that interconnectivity is a lever for integrated governance, while highlighting the need to address/remove key structural barriers. It recommends that authorities accelerate the integration of systems and the formalization of protocols to build a truly high-performing digital ecosystem.

**KEYWORDS:** Interconnectivity, Governance, Digital Technology, Higher Education, University of Yaoundé I.

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*\*Corresponding Author:* Brikissou YOUMDINGOUOTMOUN

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In a global context marked by digital transformation, African universities face significant challenges related to technology integration. The interconnectivity of systems is emerging as a strategic lever for improving institutional coordination. In Cameroon, despite national initiatives, digitalization remains incomplete. Specifically, within the context of the structural changes in Cameroonian higher education, driven by the Digital Cameroon 2020 Strategy and the e-National Higher Education Network project, the digitalization of public higher education institutions (HEIs) continues to face a low level of digital development. This low level is characterized by a limited online presence and limited management efficiency. Yet, the interconnectivity of networks between services, faculties, and higher education institutions is emerging as a strategic lever for integrated digital governance. This interconnectivity enables the holistic management of the university ecosystem (Adam, 2016). This often underestimated dimension (Imhoff, Card, & Lefebvre, 2007) has proved essential during the health crisis (Ogier, 2020) and is part of a systemic and rhizomatic approach where horizontal connections replace traditional hierarchical structures (Jollivet & Vallet, 2015). The aim of this analysis is to understand how this interconnectivity can foster the emergence of integrated digital governance, capable of improving the digital efficiency of management and the sustainable online visibility of Cameroonian universities.

Interconnectivity at the university level refers to the digital networking of services, faculties and higher education institutions to ensure the fluidity of exchanges (Mocquet, 2024). In the context of this study, digital interconnectivity refers to the ability of a university's services, faculties, schools, and campuses to communicate, collaborate, and share information online, in real time or

## Digital Interconnectivity and the Emergence of an Integrated University Governance at The University of Yaoundé I

asynchronously, via shared digital devices. It goes beyond mere online presence by enabling functional, bidirectional, and institutionally supported interactions. (Bruillard & Khaneboubi, 2022). It is useful for the digital management or governance of structures such as universities through cross-functional coordination of stakeholders and process optimization (Mocquet, 2024). The scientific literature, notably the work of Peraya & Fiévez (2022), illustrates success stories in this area such as the universities of Laval, Geneva, Louvain, Lille, Aberystwyth, and Ulster. These institutions have a strong practice of interconnectivity as a pillar of governance.

In Cameroon, local studies (Agbor & Tchamabe, 2025; Woundi, 2019) highlight the underutilization of online collaboration tools in university teaching. However, to our knowledge, no study analyzes the issue of interconnectivity within the country's state universities. Therefore, this study poses the following central question: to what extent does network interconnectivity between services and faculties foster the emergence of integrated digital governance within public higher education institutions, specifically at the University of Yaoundé I? The hypothesis is that the interconnectivity of networks between services and faculties promotes the emergence of integrated digital governance. This research aims to understand how interconnectivity can foster integrated digital governance.

The theoretical premise underlying this analysis is the systemic approach, which considers the university as a set of interdependent and rhizomatic elements (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), emphasizing horizontal, non-hierarchical, and dynamic structures. These frameworks allow us to analyze the organizational transformations brought about by digital technology. Here, interconnectivity is viewed as a rhizome—that is, a horizontal, decentralized, and scalable structure. It promotes integrated digital governance through multiple and non-linear connections between actors. This structure contrasts with the classic pyramidal hierarchy.

This article is structured as follows: a methodological framework, results, and a discussion.

### 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm. It recognizes that reality is socially constructed by the actions and thoughts of individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The stance is moderately constructivist. The objective is to understand and interpret the meanings of human behavior (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The type of research is exploratory and correlational. University of Yaoundé I is the study site. As a pioneering institution within the Cameroonian university system, this institution brings together a diverse range of faculties and major institutions whose interconnectivity needs are critical for managing academic and administrative data. Its central location exacerbates the challenges of the digital transition, particularly the need to break down information silos between central services and faculties. Studying this site therefore allows us to grasp the real tensions between the existing technological infrastructure and the political will to implement integrated governance. The six institutions targeted by the study are mainly the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Human Sciences (FALSH), the Faculty of Sciences (FS), the Faculty of Educational Sciences (FSE), the Faculty of Bio-Medical Sciences (FSBM), the Higher Normal School (ENS) and the National Higher Polytechnic School (ENSP).

The population consists of all staff members of these university institutions. However, using simple random sampling, we arrived at a sample of 429 individuals from the University of Yaoundé I (administrators, teachers, and students) to whom a questionnaire was administered. This questionnaire, based on seven items formulated using a Likert scale, provides a rigorous metric basis for quantifying perceptions and transforming individual responses into indicators of organizational performance. The seven themes addressed by the items are: the digitalisation of the mail service; Automation of administrative management processes; Shared access to digital databases; Use of institutional digital applications; Online professional collaboration protocols; Access to video conferencing tools; and the digitization of administrative procedures.

In order to cross-reference information, seven (7) semi-structured interviews, based on the same seven themes, were conducted with educational leaders. Data triangulation was supplemented through document analysis, particularly of official texts from the e-National Higher Education Network project. Data analysis differed between qualitative and quantitative data. The analysis and the data processing from the questionnaire relies on a descriptive and inferential statistical approach. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations are used to measure the strength of the relationships between the variables of the digital network. Multiple regression, supported by ANOVA testing, is employed to determine the predictive value of service interconnectivity on the emergence of integrated governance. This procedure allows for the isolation of the specific contribution of technical items and the evaluation of the overall model's statistical validity. In addition, the data from the seven semi-structured interviews and the document review underwent a thematic content analysis. The verbatims are coded (ADME1 to ADME5 and ADM1, ADM2) and conceptualized into key dimensions.

This coding allowed us to identify the units of meaning linked to the mechanisms of digitization and the dynamics of collaboration between faculties. This qualitative phase is essential for grasping the strategic nuances that statistics alone cannot capture. Finally, data triangulation ensures the convergence of sources. It compares the results of the regression with the

## Digital Interconnectivity and the Emergence of an Integrated University Governance at The University of Yaoundé I

statements of those in charge and official documents. This guarantees the internal validity of the study and allows us to interpret the development of digitization at the University of Yaoundé I as a rhizomatic and integrated ecosystem.

### 3. STUDY RESULTS

#### 3.1. Descriptive analysis of the development of interconnectivity between services, faculties and higher education institutions at the University of Yaoundé I

The descriptive analysis of the interconnectivity variable (DISFG) among the 429 respondents reveals a contrasting landscape of the seven indicators measured, where both lines of strength and areas of fragility emerge within the digital university system of the University of Yaoundé I.

**Table 1: Analysis of the level of satisfaction and deployment of digital tools at the University of Yaoundé I**

Indicator	Satisfied/T. Satisfied	Average (M)	Standard deviation
Digitization of the mail service	68.0%	M = 3.79	SD = 1.26
Administrative process automation	44.0%	Moderate	-
Shared access to databases	Moderate	Moderate	-
Institutional digital applications	Moderate	Moderate	-
Online collaboration protocol	37.0%	M = 3.02	SD = 1.23
Video conference	56.5%	M = 3.54	SD = 0.99
Digitization of administrative procedures	46.6%	M = 3.14	SD = 1.29

**Source:** Field survey, 2025

According to these results, the digitization of the mail service shows the highest satisfaction rate (68.0%), with a mean of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 1.26. Access to videoconferencing tools follows with 56.5% satisfaction (M = 3.54; SD = 0.99). From a systemic perspective, these two indicators reflect an existing functional interdependence between the network components. Thus, digitized mail and videoconferencing act as connection nodes that ensure the continuous flow of information between departments and faculties, forming a coherent whole where each element reinforces the overall system. Conversely, the automation of administrative management processes only reaches 44.0% satisfaction, shared access to databases and the use of institutional digital applications remain at a moderate level, the online professional collaboration protocol only receives 37.0% (M = 3.02; SD = 1.23) and the dematerialization of administrative procedures remains limited to 46.6% (M = 3.14; SD = 1.29).

Overall, the development of institutional interconnectivity appears to be underway, but still incomplete. Synchronous communication tools and the digitization of mail constitute already thriving rhizomes that foster the emergence of integrated digital governance. Meanwhile, weaknesses in automation, data sharing, and collaborative protocols reveal the systemic limitations of a network undergoing deterritorialization. From a rhizomatic perspective (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980), these results show that interconnectivity is not simply an addition of tools, but rather a dynamic process of multiple and unpredictable connections, capable of transforming the university into an open ecosystem where each node can connect to all others without any predetermined order. Even so, organizational segmentation continues to hinder this full realization. These shortcomings persist precisely because these dimensions remain confined within vertical, tree-like structures, where hierarchical centralization and traditional silos prevent the deployment of a true digital rhizome.

#### 3.2. Correlational analysis of the development of interconnectivity between services, faculties and higher education institutions at the University of Yaoundé I

According to our results, Technical connectivity facilitates the implementation of measures that promote digital adoption and improve online services. However, interconnection alone is not enough to foster digital appropriation or the transformation of stakeholders. The analysis of Pearson correlations carried out on the sample of 429 respondents from the six establishments of the University of Yaoundé I highlights differentiated relationships between the inter-connectivity variable and the other dimensions of digital governance.

**Table 2: Pearson correlation matrix of interconnectivity**

Dimensions of digital governance	r	p-value	Intensity
Conditions for facilitating digital use	0.600	< 0.001	Strong
Adoption of digital strategic management	0.390	< 0.001	Moderate
Improvement of online service offerings	0.389	< 0.001	Moderate
Appropriation of digitalization	0.225	< 0.001	Moderate

## Digital Interconnectivity and the Emergence of an Integrated University Governance at The University of Yaoundé I

Digital transformation of stakeholders	0.050	Ns	Very low
Developing access to digital resources	0.016	0.748	None

Source: Field survey, 2025

Overall, the results indicate that Pearson correlations confirm that network interconnectivity between services and faculties is a key driver of integrated digital governance at the University of Yaoundé I. However, they also highlight that this rhizomatic development remains incomplete. Strong or moderate relationships with appropriation, strategy, enabling conditions, and service provision illustrate the systemic dynamics and potential for cross-functional connections, while weak links with stakeholder transformation and access to resources signal points of resistance and lines of segmentation that still hinder the emergence of a truly open and deterritorialized digital ecosystem across the six institutions.

### 3.3. The multiple regression to analyze the development of interconnectivity between services, faculties and higher education institutions at the University of Yaoundé I

The multiple regression model, using digital adoption as the dependent variable, shows a multiple correlation coefficient of  $R = 0.374$ , explaining 14% of the total variance ( $R^2 = 0.140$ ; adjusted  $R^2 = 0.127$ ). This overall model is statistically significant ( $F = 11.408$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). It indicates that all six predictive variables jointly contribute to explaining the appropriation of digitalization within the six establishments of the University of Yaoundé I. In the hierarchical classification of predictive contributions, the improvement of the online service offering comes first with 35.8% weight, followed by the development of access to digital resources at 13%, the digital transformation of actors at 12.2%, the development of interconnectivity in fourth place with only 7.2%, the conditions facilitating digital use at 2.6% and finally, the adoption of strategic digital management at 1.5%.

In this context, the development of interconnectivity shows an unstandardized coefficient of  $B = 0.049$  and a standardized coefficient  $Beta = 0.072$ , with a t-value of 1.194 and a p-value of 0.233. This result reflects a positive but not individually significant effect. This means that, taken in isolation, the level of interconnectivity of networks between services and faculties does not have a statistically decisive influence on the adoption of digitalization, despite its overall contribution to the model. From a systems perspective, these results illustrate that interconnectivity is indeed a component of the overall digital governance system within the six institutions studied, where interactions between faculties and schools produce significant overall effects, even if no single factor dominates.

From a rhizomatic perspective (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), interconnectivity does not appear as a central or tree-like axis, but rather as a decentralized and heterogeneous rhizome. Its multiple and non-hierarchical connections between the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences (FALSH), Faculty of Sciences (FS), Faculty of Educational Sciences (FSE), Faculty of Biology and Medicine (FSBM), the Higher Normal School (ENS), and National Higher Polytechnic School (ENSP) allow for unforeseen combinations and lines of flight that defy any single linear causality. Thus, the low individual predictability of interconnectivity reveals that integrated digital governance emerges less from a structured technical interconnection than from a multiplicity of transversal and unpredictable relationships between these institutions with their highly diverse disciplinary profiles, where improvements in online services and access to resources constitute privileged entry points for non-linear and deterritorialized transformations.

### 3.4. Qualitative analysis of the development of interconnectivity between services, faculties and higher education institutions at the University of Yaoundé I

The thematic analysis of seven semi-structured interviews conducted with stakeholders from the six institutions of the University of Yaoundé I confirms the results of the previous quantitative analysis. These results reveal a constant tension between the official aspirations of the E-National Higher Education Network program and actual practices on the ground. This program, the first phase in the development of Cameroon's digital university, explicitly aims, according to official documents from the Ministry of Higher Education, at "the establishment in state universities of high-performing physical (computer and telecommunications networks, data centers) and intangible (e-administration and e-learning) infrastructures" as well as "the digital interconnection of the Ministry of Higher Education and state universities" in order to promote integrated digital governance. However, the accounts of stakeholders reveal with partial progress and structural obstacles, demonstrating that interconnectivity is not simply a linear infrastructure but emerges from heterogeneous and unpredictable combinations.

At the heart of these tensions, the digitization of administrative and academic processes, perceived as a real technical possibility thanks to management software, remains poorly structured and underutilized. This is illustrated by the verbatim statement of one stakeholder: "Interconnectivity facilitates the digitization or automation of administrative procedures and processes with the use of management software. However, the use of digital tools remains limited within this interconnection, which seems neither structured nor well-organized" (ADM1, 2025). This observation directly intersects with the organizational constraints of a still-predominant top-down hierarchy: "This is not yet the reality here. We work in accordance with the

## Digital Interconnectivity and the Emergence of an Integrated University Governance at The University of Yaoundé I

instructions or directives of the hierarchy and the traditional administrative approach" (ADM2, 2025). These interactions between partial dematerialization and hierarchical rigidity produce emergent effects where the overall digital governance system of the University of Yaoundé I is not simply the sum of its parts, but reveals a fragile overall dynamic. They constitute territorializations that hinder potential escape routes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), preventing interconnectivity from becoming a decentralized and multiplicative network between the institutions and schools of this university.

In parallel, interinstitutional digital communication and collaboration via platforms (Zoom, Skype, Teams, Google Meet, Telegram, WhatsApp, Jitsi Meet) facilitate exchanges and enable informal data sharing. This is evident in the verbatim comments of the participants: "Interconnection streamlines official correspondence and allows us to maintain good relationships with other partner institutions, although there is still room for improvement" (ADME2, 2025). However, this fluidity remains largely informal due to the complete absence of formal protocols: "There are no protocols here for this online collaboration" (ADM1, 2025). The technical infrastructure itself, far from meeting the ambitious objectives of the E-National Higher Education Network program, which provides for "very high-speed access" and a "virtual network for interconnection," is perceived as insufficient. "The digital management system is not interconnected and the quality of this Internet network is not at all very suitable in our offices and classrooms" (ADME5, 2025).

These combined elements show that the interconnected digital ecosystem, though presented as a necessary condition by stakeholders, remains a rhizome in development. From this systemic and rhizomatic perspective, interconnectivity within the six institutions does not appear as a tree-like axis imposed by the national program, but rather as a multiplicity of heterogeneous relationships where improvements in synchronous communication and attempts at dematerialization create potential pathways towards integrated digital governance, while simultaneously encountering organizational and infrastructural constraints that limit their intensity. The analysis thus highlights that the actual digital transformation emerges less from centralized planning than from a deterritorializing rhizomatic dynamic, where unforeseen interactions between services, faculties, and graduate schools gradually weave, despite their fragility, a digital ecosystem specific to the University of Yaoundé I.

Therefore, the results show that some digital tools are operational, notably email and videoconferencing. However, the automation of administrative processes remains limited. The correlations indicate a significant relationship between interconnectivity and ease of use. These results reflect an incomplete transformation of the university system. While it improves this ease of use, its predictive effect on adoption remains weak. In summary, considering these quantitative and qualitative results, we can safely say that the hypothesis of this study is confirmed. Indeed, the interconnectivity of networks between services and faculties or institutions promotes the emergence of integrated digital governance. However, this confirmation is qualified by the statistical results. The predictive coefficient of 7.2% places interconnectivity fourth among the determinants, and its regression coefficient ( $B = 0.049$ ,  $p = 0.233$ ) is not individually significant, which raises some questions.

### 4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our results show efforts to improve interconnectivity within the university. These efforts aim to foster integrated digital governance. However, its impact remains moderate due to still fragmented implementation: limited automation of processes and collaboration protocols. This aligns with the findings of Charlier (2022), Brangier and Hammes (2007). They demonstrated that from the moment humans, technologies and organizational spaces work together in an organization, coherent and inseparable units are formed. Peraya & Fiévez (2022) show that interconnectivity is a pillar of successful governance within international universities. The DESIR Collective (2022) emphasizes that teaching practices cannot evolve if the institution (its administration, organization, governance, and values) does not transform. Meanwhile, Rodney and Cafolla (2016) stress the importance of collaboration.

In an African context, studies by Maïdakouale (2023) and Ngwa (2023) show African context (Maïdakouale (2023) and Cameroonian (Ngwa, 2023) studies show that synchronous communication tools (video conferencing, messaging) are progressing rapidly, while administrative automation, database sharing, and protocol formalization remain very weak due to persistent infrastructural and organizational constraints. Therefore, within Cameroonian universities, technical interconnectivity fosters positive correlations with facilitating conditions and improving online services. However, it remains insufficient to generate profound transformation without a comprehensive strategy. While the results confirm that interconnectivity is a necessary lever, it is insufficient given that organizational constraints limit its impact. Effective transformation requires a comprehensive approach integrating technologies, stakeholders, and structures. The results are consistent with several international studies.

In light of the above, this study recommends that university authorities and the Ministry of Higher Education accelerate the effective implementation of the E-National Higher Education Network program. This includes prioritizing not only the strengthening of infrastructure but also... connectivity and the integration of information systems between departments and faculties, but above all the formalization of institutional protocols for online collaboration, the complete automation of administrative processes, and the development of a comprehensive strategic framework for digital governance. It is also necessary to implement continuing education programs for administrative and academic staff to promote the adoption of digitalization and

## Digital Interconnectivity and the Emergence of an Integrated University Governance at The University of Yaoundé I

reduce the rigidity of traditional hierarchical practices. Furthermore, it is essential to significantly improve the range of online services and access to digital resources, the integration of information systems and the development of a comprehensive digital governance strategy.

These actions, articulated in a systemic way, will make it possible to transform the current partial connections into a truly integrated digital ecosystem that takes into account structural, organizational and infrastructural barriers. These measures would transform interconnectivity from a marginal factor into a central lever of integrated and effective digital governance.

### 5. CONCLUSION

In the context of the Cameroon Digital 2020 Strategy and the e-National Higher Education Network project, this study aimed to analyze, within the University of Yaoundé I, the extent to which network interconnectivity between services, faculties, and graduate schools fosters the emergence of integrated digital governance. Grounded in a systemic and rhizomatic approach (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), it posited that this interconnectivity, understood as a capacity for bidirectional and institutionally organized online communication, collaboration, and information sharing, constitutes a strategic lever for overcoming information silos and improving the digital management efficiency and online visibility of Cameroonian public higher education institutions. The quantitative and qualitative results converge to confirm the main hypothesis while qualifying its scope. Interconnectivity is a key factor in digital transformation. However, its effectiveness depends on structural conditions. A systemic approach is essential for the successful digital transition of Cameroonian universities.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data. A questionnaire was administered to 429 university stakeholders. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlations, and multiple regression. A thematic analysis was performed on the qualitative data. Indeed, the descriptive analysis reveals a partial development of interconnectivity, with notable progress in the digitization of mail services and the use of videoconferencing tools. However, the automation of administrative processes, database sharing, formal online collaboration protocols, and the dematerialization of procedures remain fragile.

Pearson correlations and the multiple regression model show that interconnectivity has strong or moderate relationships with conditions facilitating digital use, the adoption of strategic management, and improvements in online service offerings, but has a limited individual predictive effect (Beta = 0.072;  $p = 0.233$ ) on the appropriation of digitalization. Thematic analysis of the interviews confirms these tensions. It indicates that informal collaborative practices coexist with insufficient infrastructure and the persistence of vertical hierarchical structures, limiting the full expression of a decentralized and deterritorialized digital rhizome.

These findings enrich the existing literature. They provide the first contextualized empirical analysis of interconnectivity dynamics within Cameroonian state universities. They highlight that, unlike the success stories observed in European or North American universities, interconnectivity does not automatically produce integrated digital governance. Rather, it emerges from heterogeneous, unpredictable, and often informal assemblages, the consolidation of which requires a systemic articulation between infrastructures, institutional protocols, and the cultural transformations of the actors. On a practical level, this research calls on the authorities of the University of Yaoundé I and the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) to accelerate the effective implementation of the e-national higher education network program by prioritizing the integration of information systems, the formalization of collaboration protocols, the complete automation of processes, and the ongoing training of staff. Such measures would make it possible to transform the current partial connections into a truly rhizomatic digital ecosystem—more fluid, cross-cutting, and efficient.

Finally, Although this study is limited to one university and a sample of 429 participants, it opens two main comparative perspectives. The first is a broadening of the analysis to include other Cameroonian or African universities. The second is a study based on longitudinal approaches aimed at assessing the real impact of infrastructural and organizational interventions on digital governance. Ultimately, network interconnectivity appears less as an isolated technical solution than as a relational and evolving process, the full realization of which is essential for the success of the digital transition in Cameroonian higher education.

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