

**EFL Students' Perceptions of Online Education for
Upskilling and Reskilling: A Post-COVID-19 Study at the
University of Bejaia**



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Summary:

The rapid pace of career development and the existence of intense competition among students in searching for jobs: online or at workplace, led students to feel the need to extend their skills, either in their field of study or unrelated. Consequently, online education might provide a set of opportunities to the students to be enrolled in a variety of e-courses which might help them develop new skills and upgrade their already acquired ones. As no studies addressed this issue in the Algerian EFL context, this study tries to address the gap in research in this area through describing the role of online education can take in order to lead students to upskilling and reskilling. To achieve this aim, a descriptive design is followed, with a questionnaire is administered to 55 randomly selected students of English from different levels at University of Bejaia. The study, then, revealed that online education provided the students with spare time to take on different part-time jobs and develop their competencies in English and in other fields. Some students revealed that they have discovered new free platforms where they could learn what they like such as fine art, other foreign languages and even subjects like marketing and e-business.

Keywords: Reskilling, Upskilling, Online education, Higher Education, Post-COVID Era, EFL students.

INTRODUCTION

The day-to-day lives of autistic children and their families in Algeria provide a one-of-a-kind mix of problems and experiences, notably in the city of Tiaret (Algeria). It is common for people to misunderstand autism spectrum disorder (henceforth ASD), which can result in stigmatization and social isolation for families whose children are impacted by this neuro-

In light of the rapid scientific and technological development, the information transmission and the widespread use of the electronic network that the world is witnessing nowadays in various fields, led to the emergence of a new type of education, namely, online education. This type of education, which relies on the Internet, modern technological and digital means, was necessary for the Algerian university to keep pace with the development in the Higher Education, especially during the global COVID-19 pandemic (Dallaa & Belhaoues, 2024).

In addition to its easy access for everyone anywhere and at any time, this type of education offers complete freedom for students to learn at their own pace and convenience. This allows them to save time and be able to do different activities, and to practice a variety of tasks using the fast-evolving technologies that the world is witnessing nowadays (Sadiku, et al., 2018; Datu, 2021). In such a dynamic world, it becomes necessary to upskill and/or reskill oneself to stay updated and keep up with the current world events and developments; and to have the ability to build one's professional life and career (Goel et al., 2022). However, little research have investigated the benefits of online education during the post COVID-19 era, and no studies have examined the upskilling and the reskilling processes in relation to Online Education (OE) in the EFL context, particularly in the Algerian context. That is to say, despite being examined in certain contexts, upskilling and reskilling with regards to online education remains an underexplored subject. Lang & Triantoro (2022) worked on upskilling and reskilling for the future of work by proposing a typology of digital skills initiatives which was developed based on the analysis of over 300 initiatives listed in the European Commission's repository of best digital skills initiatives. In another context, Arini and Respatiningsih (2024) analysed upskilling and reskilling in improving the competence of competitive human resources in the era of digital economy especially in micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia. Likewise, Mahdia (2024) conducted a study about the importance of reskilling and upskilling for employees examining the relationship between upskilling/reskilling and labor market in different countries. Accordingly; the present study is an attempt to fill the gap in literature about upskilling and reskilling with regards to online education, particularly in the Algerian EFL context, since to the researchers' best knowledge, no study has examined the role of online education on EFL students' upskilling and reskilling. This study is, then, significant since it seeks to contribute to the growing body of research about upskilling and reskilling in online education, and particularly it expands our knowledge about this phenomenon in the Algerian EFL context.

Consequently, the present work tries to address this research gap by describing the role that online education plays in helping students upskill and/or reskill themselves during the post COVID-19 era. The study targets the students enrolled in different EFL degrees at the department of English at the University of

Bejaia during the 2024-2025 academic year. This sample was selected because as EFL students, they possess the potential to engage in online professional or educational activities and/or courses. Their proficiency in English allows their access to a wide range of international courses and work opportunities both locally and abroad. This makes them convenient for this research which seeks to investigate their attitudes towards the role of online education in upskilling and reskilling.

2. Research Questions

In the light of the above discussed issues, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) Since online education allowed the students to avoid a full-time program, did this flexibility help them have more time and gain access to more resources to consider of other priorities?
- 2) With the implementation of online education, did students improve their existing skills related to their current field of study/job?
- 3) Did the implementation of online education help students acquire new skills unrelated to their current field of study/job?

3. Research Aim

The present study aims to describe the role of online education in guiding EFL students toward upskilling and reskilling. More specifically, it seeks to determine whether the implementation of online education in the EFL context has helped students improve their already acquired skills (reskilling) and/or acquire new skills—whether related or unrelated to their current field of study or job (upskilling).

This research also examines whether online education, as implemented at the department of English, University of Bejaia, enabled students to manage their time more effectively and focus on other life priorities, such as job hunting and career development. Unlike traditional full-time programs that tie students to a fixed schedule and location, online education provides greater flexibility, more spare time, and increased access to resources. These affordances allow students to pursue personal interests and, more importantly, to develop the essential skills required in the 21st century. Accordingly, this study explores students' opinions on these issues, drawing on their experiences of engaging with online education for more than three years.

4. Background of the study

4.1 Online Education (OE) VS Traditional Education (TE)

In the attempt to achieve a good life and to attain people's goals, education appears to be an important element in this process. Since education is "the process of transferring knowledge, values, methods, skills, and beliefs from one individual

to another” (Sadiku, Adebo & Musa, 2018; p.73), the transmission methods are increasingly developing through time. The development of Information Technology (IT) has led to its invasion of all domains, including the educational sector. From the late 1960s to 1990s, the world witnessed the birth of the electronic educational systems which started with a “Digital storage of the first experimental text in computer” (as cited in Sadeghi & Moslehpour, 2007, p.129); in 1990, Sony Corporation launched the first electronic reading device and earlier in the same year, there was the first experiment with an online classroom at Michigan University. In 1997, they launched the first virtual university; and in 1999, the educational system included both traditional and online education (cited in Sadeghi & Moslehpour, 2007, p.130).

The value of online education has increased with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, during that period of time, schools and institutions were closed for safety purposes, and the governments opted for virtual schools and online teaching and learning. Therefore, all schools and higher education institutions were obliged to shift from classical teaching to web-based teaching. The huge changes brought by web-based education led many researchers to rethink the role of traditional education and base their research on the benefits of online education in favour of the classical one. Therefore, more research has been undertaken to search for the strategies that can develop online education. In Radović-Marković’s (2010) study, the author expected that online education would be dominant and that different communication methods between professors and students would continuously develop as well; this would contribute to the improvement of online education quality.

Perspectives on the difference between OE and TE vary from one person to another. Although there are different advantages of web-based education, many students and teachers still prefer within-the-walls education. According to Hong et al. (2020), OE faces many challenges that impede its proper implementation. The authors reported some of the problems, such as “the absence of student attendance, the teacher’s self-talk, and the lack of teacher-student interaction” (p.10). Online education does not oblige students to attend courses at a specific time, and if mandatory sessions are scheduled, few punishment techniques and disciplinary measures can be applied. Other students can record the sessions and watch them at any time. Sometimes punishment cannot be applied because students may face uncontrollable situations that prevent them from attending the session; all of this leads to a low attendance rate. In some other cases, where the session is broadcast live, students might be online and participating in the session, but they are busy doing other things, and only few of them pay attention to the teacher’s lecture and instructions. In addition, one of the major challenges OE faces is the lack of interaction between teachers and students, and among students themselves; and because interaction is very important in students’ learning (as cited

in Kumar, Saxena & Baber, 2021), the lack of interaction in OE is seen as one of the most notable problems of web-based education. Regarding this importance, there have been many attempts to create techniques that help with interaction; among these techniques, chat boxes, forums, and discussion spaces are adopted. According to Truhlar et al. (2018) and Wise and Chiu (2014), when assigning roles in chat boxes and group discussions during online education, students' attention and engagement will be increase and their listening behaviour will improve (as cited in Kumar, Saxena & Baber, 2021).

In the Algerian context, similar results are concluded from different research works. The introduction of the eLearning into the Algerian universities aimed at bringing many benefits and cope up with the new era; however, many challenges have been faced by both students and teachers. Most of the challenges are share with the previous one cited above, manly; the weak flow of Internet, the absence of teachers trainings for using modern e - learning systems, and the absence of a clear policy concerning its' future use in Algerian universities (Bellatrache & Aloutti, 2020). Additionally, the students suffer from the lack of materials that enable them to fully participate in the online educational activities; add to this the low internet flow, and the application of the online education at the Algerian universities seem demotivating to the students as they just rely on typing lectures and sending them via MOODLE platforms (Fehaima, 2022).

In spite of the different disadvantages of OE, it is still seen well than the traditional education (Al Rawashdeh, et al., 2021). It is profitable in terms of student-teacher communication and in developing the students' skills (Al Rawashdeh, et al., 2021); this means that it is easier for the students to contact the teachers anytime. Besides, the students who are introverts or are afraid of speaking face to face to teachers might find the OE helpful. In addition, Distance Learning has been proven to be beneficial in developing the students' skills as it provides them with enough time and resources for personal development; in this regard, Bušelić (2012) claimed that it "provides increased opportunities for updating, retraining and personal enrichment, improves cost effectiveness of educational resources, supports the quality and variety of existing educational structures, enhances and consolidates capacity" (pp.25-26). Similarly, the Algerian researchers, claimed that due to digital learning, higher education received unprecedented opportunities for innovation; the students will have more educational opportunities through enabling them to reach online materials and lessons anytime and anywhere (Dallaa & Belhaoues, 2024; Chiheb & Fennour, 2024). This demonstrates that online education can be a tool for self-refinement and skill development and a way towards autonomous learning.

4.2 Upskilling and Reskilling

The world is developing and this growth leads to many changes in different

sectors. The rapid evolution of the employability world, business and entrepreneurship led to an intense competition regarding job hunting. In order to be selected, the applicants should have a wide range of competencies, a variety of skills, and most importantly, updated ones. Consequently, due to this change, the concepts of upskilling and reskilling appeared in many work-related discussions and research. A skill is crucial in anything a person does; it is defined as an ability of doing anything or somethings in effectively; the skillfulness is related to a person's ability to learn and gain experience in different things in order to acquire this skill (Radonjic, 2021). According to the author, the skill is different from talent because this latter is an aptitude a person is born with whereas a skill is an ability they learn especially with practice. That is why the processes of reskilling and upskilling require a variety and innovative strategies and techniques to help people learn new skills and improve the existing ones. According to Cambridge Dictionary, upskilling is “the process of learning new skills or of teaching workers new skills”, while reskilling is the process of learning new skills so that one can do a different job, or of training people to do a different job” (as cited in Padmaja and Mukul, 2022, p. 261). Simply put, when engaged in workplace, people should look to update the skills they have already acquired and also develop new ones.

Dillon (2020) stated that upskilling and reskilling are strategies that will be required in post COVID-19 era. Upskilling will be required when the employee or the company wants to fill a skill gap they have especially when the employee is having a low job performance or needs the performance to be developed. Finally the upskilling is necessary when there is a change in the situation in the workplace, and the employee needs to adapt to this new situation (Dillon, 2020); this is also the case when the new technologies appeared or when the COVID-19 widespread and caused many changes that pushed workers to try to adapt to the new circumstances.

When the employee tries to reskill, they mainly seek to change their career and find another different job. Sometimes, the employees need reskilling because they are going to get a promotion where they will take on more responsibilities (Dillon, 2020). The author defined reskilling as “providing training to help a person shift into a new role or adjust to significant changes in their current job” (Dillon, 2020, Reskilling Section). Therefore, being part of the workforce, or preparing to be one in the future, reskilling and upskilling are very important.

According to Radonjic (2021), skill development is directly related to setting goals because when setting the objective, the employees will determine the gaps they need to fill in; and thus; the decision about reskilling or upskilling will come eventually. For this reason, universities should help the students to clear up their minds about the professional future they intend to pursue in order to know the necessary skills to develop. Padmaja and Mukul (2022) explained that higher

education institutions should alter their focus on the 'lower order thinking skills' in their curricula towards the 'higher order thinking skills'. The former involves the first three skills in Bloom's Taxonomy; namely, remember, understand and apply; while the latter includes the other three skills which are: analyse, evaluate and create. These higher-order thinking abilities would be very useful in the modern period, particularly with the new technology advancement and the various changes the globe is undergoing.

In Algeria, research on upskilling and reskilling is limited, and studies investigating the relation between online education and these two processes in the EFL context is even scarcer, especially in the post COVID era, during which online education has assumed an increasingly supporting role.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Sample & Population

The population of the current study consists of EFL students in the Department of English at the University of Bejaia, enrolled in the BA, Master, and PhD levels. After being engaged into online education since 2019-2020, different research works have been undertaken at this department to evaluate both advantages and disadvantages of learning online, however, none of the studies investigated the potential of OE in preparing the EFL students to their professional life and that helps them in developing their own skills and other skills needed for future jobs.

A sample of 55 students is selected for the study; the sample was selected following the voluntary sampling technique which follows the non-probability sampling principles (Murairwa, 2015); the students were called on their social media groups to participate in the study. It includes both males (10.9%) and females (87.3%). Among the participants, 81.1% are between 21 and 25 years old, 5.5% are over 30, and 1.8% are between 26 and 30. Concerning their educational level, 90.9% are Master students, 5.5% are PhD students, and 3.6% are BA students. Despite the limited sample size restricting the generalizability of the findings, the results provided are significant as they demonstrate that among the many students at the department of English, there are those who are actively willing to pursue continuous development of their own skills through the online education.

5.2 Research Design: Instruments and Procedures

The present study seeks to explore the role that online education plays in students' upskilling and reskilling. Therefore, to investigate the above-mentioned issue, the study relied on a descriptive design to gather information. Accordingly, to attain our aims, we adopted a quantitative methodology to analyse the obtained data.

To achieve this aim, we used the questionnaire as a research instrument to collect quantitative data. The objective behind choosing the quantitative instrument in this investigation is to collect valid and reliable data in order to empower the authenticity of the findings. The questionnaire consists of fourteen (14) questions divided into two sections: where the first explores the respondents' characteristics (like age, gender, educational level, and hobbies), and the second section investigates the major/specialty of the students and the other specialties they would like to pursue online if they have the chance to do it. Additionally, the questionnaire addresses questions about the students' already acquired skills, and further skills they would like to develop in the future and that are not targeted in the classroom. Besides, the questionnaire investigates about the strategies students are currently using to upskill and reskill; the research instrument also provided the respondents with a scale that measures their level of agreement with the statements regarding the role of online education in upskilling and reskilling. Finally, the questionnaire focuses on investigating the participants' life skills developed after the introduction of OE, the type of OE that helped them most in the upskilling and reskilling processes. It concludes with a further comment section that gives space to the participants to provide further suggestions, comments and thoughts.

The data obtained from the questionnaire are analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 2025 software. Because the study is descriptive without any hypothesis to prove, the descriptive statistics method is employed to summarize and present the data. Frequencies (symbolized as 'F' in tables and figures) represent the raw data as provided by the respondents, while the percentage (symbolized as %) which represents the proportion of the data that each piece of data represents.

6. Results of the study

The results of the questionnaire are summarized in this section. See that the data related to the characteristics of the respondents are presented in the sample and population section above.

- *Other specialties or other majors the respondents want to study in addition to English major:*

The results revealed that the majority of the students (78.2%) have other specialties that they want to study in addition to studying English. The other 20% of the respondents do not have another major they want to study besides their current one. Having another major requires more effort and ambition, especially if they choose to study it online. Then, the students were asked to list these specialties, and their responses were categorized into the following categories :

Table 1: list of extra majors students want to study

Domains	Specialties
A. Business related majors	• Business, management • Digital marketing, trade management.
B. Languages related majors	• European languages (French, German, Italian, Spanish) • Asian Languages (Chinese, Korean, Japanese) • Arabic language
C. Scientific disciplines	• Mathematics, computing Science & Physics • Information Science • Architecture
D. Human and Social Sciences	• Law (Divorce Lawyer) • Psychology and Speech Therapy • Arts like Cake designer, pastry, the artistic field or in interior design. Fashion and Design • Tourism (Flight Attendants).

As it is clear in the above table, all the majors are related to jobs that are trendy these days and can be studied online. This means that they can reskill and upskill their competencies using a variety of online platforms .

– ***The Respondents' actual professional status:***

This question is asked because knowing whether the students are engaged in professional life and/or have set their minds on a specific area or an established objectives is very important to determine which skills need to be developed.

Table 2: Respondents' actual professional status

	F	%
They have a job/ or doing internship related to their field of study (teachers, translators)	20	36.36
They have a job unrelated to their field of study (saleswomen, cashier, ecommerce)	7	12.72
They do not have any job, but they wish to have one related to their field	21	38.18
They do not have any job, but they wish to have one which is not related to their field	8	14.54

The above table shows that 38.18% of the respondents do not currently have a job but still wish to have one related to their field. With approximately a similar percentage (36.36%), the respondents expressed that they have a job at present or are doing internships related to their field of study. Moreover, 14.54% claim that they do not have a job at the moment but wish to have one that is not related to their field of study. Finally, 12.72% have a job that is not related to their fields of study. This demonstrates their interest in professional life and shows that they have started thinking about the occupations and jobs they may want to pursue in the future.

- ***Respondents' attitudes towards the usefulness of Classical Education in developing the required skills to their jobs or other skills:***

The responses to the above question revealed that the majority (74.5%) of the respondents believe that traditional education is not enough for developing the skills required in their jobs or other skills they might need, while only 21.8% believe that traditional education is sufficient to acquire these competencies. A follow-up question ("Please justify!") was asked to obtain more details about this point. The reasons provided by the learners are cited below:

- The content, curriculum, and/or syllabi are all related to academic purposes; little is explained or taught for professional purposes. (Students think that what they have learned can be used in exams or thesis writing, but not for any professional purposes).
- The professions they want to pursue or the occupations they are currently engaged in are not related to what they are studying in the classroom; therefore, they rely on themselves to develop their own skills. Classrooms can provide basic skills, but these are not enough.
- Classrooms provide more theory than practice; what students need is experience, and that is something they cannot acquire in the classroom.
- There is a lack of professional life culture in the classroom.
- Time is not sufficient to develop communication skills because of the large number of students in the classroom.
- There is a lack of problem-solving tasks and activities, especially those related to the students' future jobs.

- ***The techniques/ strategies they use in order to develop the required skills/competencies for their studies or the jobs they wish to work in:***

Since the respondents already have an interest in certain professions, this means that they have already set their minds on specific skills and competencies.

Therefore, this question seeks to understand the ways these participants use to develop these skills.

Table 3: Techniques used to develop the required skills for their careers or acquiring additional skills.

	F	%
Online trainings, watching YouTube professional videos, and English based videos and using other techno tools, good use of social media and learning from specialists online, attending to conferences made by professional coaches.	28	45.16
Field questioning: asking people in the fields about what is needed and how to do it (teachers or workers in similar jobs).	5	8.06
Reading (online or in libraries) and making extensive research	11	17.74
Using internet to speak and communicate with foreign people to improve both knowledge and English related skills and asking advice from everyone who is specialized in their area of interest.	7	11.29
Professional training and Searching for internships or works with even low salaries just to gain profession-related experiences like how to deal with colleagues and how to work in general.	7	11.29
Doing action research with colleagues to excel in their skills.	2	3.22
Pay more attention in the classroom, taking notes	2	3.22

In order to acquire the required skills—since TE is not sufficient in the opinion of the majority of students—we asked the respondents about the strategies they use to acquire the skills they need. The responses were based mainly on the use of the Internet. As the table shows, 45.16% of the respondents rely on online training, watching professional YouTube videos and English-based videos, using other technological tools, making good use of social media, learning from specialists online, and attending conferences conducted by professional coaches. In addition, 17.74% reported reading (online or in libraries) and conducting extensive research.

Furthermore, with a similar percentage (11.29% for each), the students testified about the use of the internet to speak and communicate with foreign people to improve both knowledge and English related skills and to seek advice from everyone who is specialized in their area of interest; and relying on professional training and searching for internships or works even with low salaries just to gain profession related experiences (like how to deal with colleagues and how to work in general). Finally 3.11% (for each of the other suggestions) mentioned the use of doing action research with colleagues to excel in their skills and paying more attention in the classroom, taking notes.

- *The participants' attitudes towards whether online education is beneficial in helping to develop the skills related to the respondents' career, or acquire other skills that are not related to their career, but may help in their future professional life*

Table 4: Respondents' attitudes towards whether OE is beneficial in upskilling and Reskilling

	F	%
Yes	33	60
No	18	32.72
No answer	4	7.27
Total	55	100

The question aimed to determine whether the students think that OE helps them improve their already acquired skills and acquire new ones. The results demonstrate that 60% agreed that it is helpful, while 32.72% did not agree.

In an attempt to obtain further details, the respondents were asked to justify their answers to the above table. Generally, their answers are summarized in the following section:

► **For those who said yes:**

- E-learning is an opportunity for students to develop their technology skills and practice for communication.
- It helps in developing a lot of skills like: working on any type of document, knowing how to manage time to do many things, knowing how to properly write emails...and so on.
- It makes the learning process enjoyable.
- Since there exist websites or online applications where to interact with others, so they could develop social interaction, communication skills, and the way they argument. In the other hand, when watching videos online, they develop both listening and speaking skills, and even vocabulary.
- It allowed them to stay up-to-date despite living in a rural area.
- Online education is very useful for developing skills related to their careers, it pushes them to think more critically and creatively.
- Because online education appeared maybe before or just a little bit after online jobs, so it allows them to learn and get online part time jobs.
- the videos of both teachers and students explaining Lessons helped them learn new words and be fluent in speaking

- Because online marketing is based on communicating with people online so online education will help in learning new things and how to access to those online platforms.
- It helps in improving the use of technology in a professional way.
- Online education helps in developing self-learning which is absolutely needed because none can learn enough with traditional type of education which is basic and theoretical, with a limited time and a limited program to teach.

► **For those who said no:**

- It includes the possibility of being exposed to different web pages, conferences, articles (research) that will enrich their knowledge, but sometimes it is of no help if what is meant by "online learning" is the copy paste of what was supposed to be done in class on eLearning platforms. It is up to how the students use online education opportunities.
- The problem is that online education in in Algeria is only made by posting the lectures on e-learning, there is not much of web-conferencing, zoom meetings. It is similar to lectures in class.

- **Students' Perspective on the benefits of Online education**

This question was asked to explore the students' perspectives on the advantages of online education in relation to the upskilling and reskilling processes. The following three figures (Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3) represent the respondents' views on the benefits of online education.

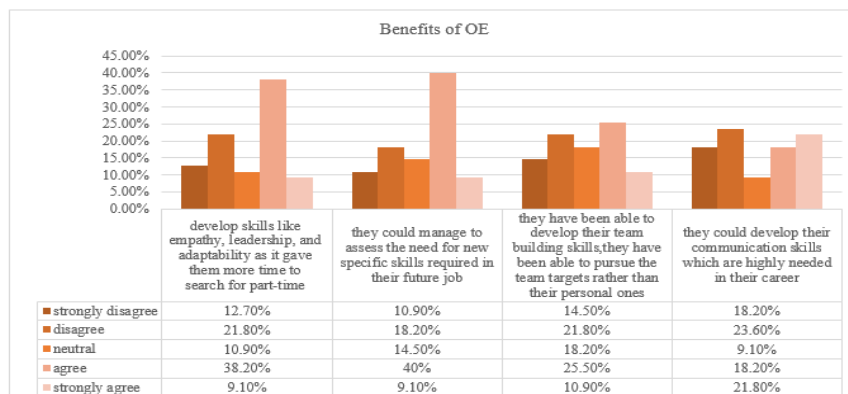


Fig.1. Students' Level of Agreement towards the role of online education in upskilling and reskilling (part 1)

This first figure presents four main benefits. As can be seen, the majority of the students (38.20%) agreed that OE develops skills such as empathy, leadership, and adaptability because it gives them more time to search for part-time jobs. Additionally, 40% also agreed that OE helped them assess the need for new specific skills required in their future jobs. Furthermore, regarding the third benefit, the results show that students were divided: 35% (if we add up the percentages of closely related scale options) expressed agreement or strong agreement (positive perspective), while another 35% expressed disagreement or strong disagreement (negative view). Therefore, the students' opinions were equally divided on this statement. Concerning the respondents' level of agreement with the development of communication skills, the majority (23.6%) disagreed with the statement, while only 18.2% agreed with it. Likewise, the rate of negative opinions (41% between disagree and strongly disagree) was higher than the positive ones (39%).

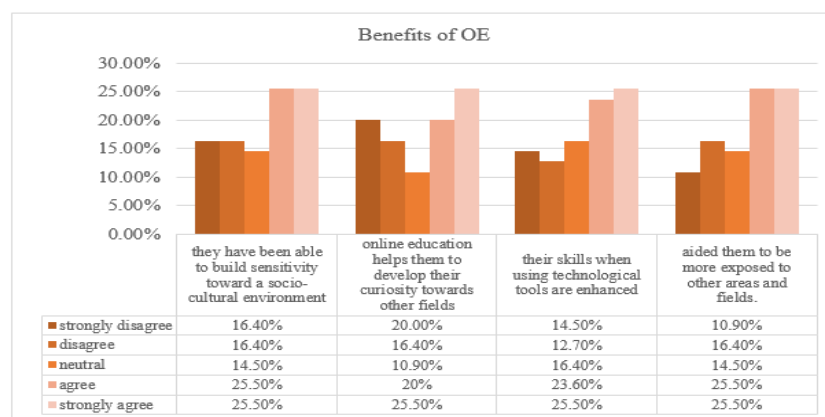


Fig. 2. Students' Level of Agreement towards the role of online education in upskilling and reskilling (part 2)

Figure 2 also demonstrates the students' perspectives on the benefits of online education (OE) in relation to upskilling and reskilling. As can be seen, the majority, 50% (between strongly agree and agree) of the students hold positive views concerning the idea that online education helped them build sensitivity towards a socio-cultural environment, while 32.8% hold negative perspectives (between strongly disagree and disagree). In addition, the majority of the respondents are between totally agree and agree regarding the idea that OE helps them develop curiosity towards other fields, while 36.4% were between strongly disagree and disagree. Similarly, 49.1% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that OE developed their technological skills, while 27.2% totally disagreed

or disagreed. Finally, the majority of the students (51%) agreed or strongly agreed that OE helped them gain more exposure to other fields in addition to their own field of study, while 27.3% totally disagreed or disagreed with the statement.

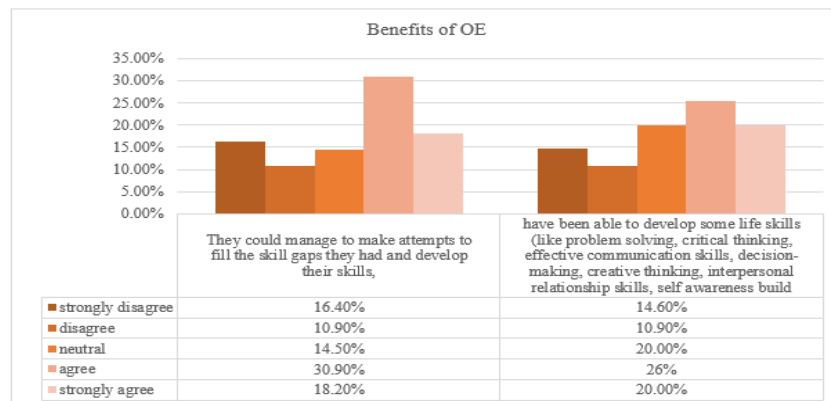


Fig. 3. Students' Level of Agreement towards the role of online education in upskilling and reskilling (part 3)

The last part of the scale shows the results of the two final statements. As can be seen, 49.1% agreed or strongly agreed that OE helped them address their skill gaps and develop their abilities, while 27.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Finally, regarding the last statement, the majority of the respondents (46%) agreed or strongly agreed that due to OE, they were able to develop certain life skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, decision-making, creative thinking, and self-awareness.

- Skills acquired via Online Education:

In order to determine the skills that OE helped the students acquire, this question 6 was asked:

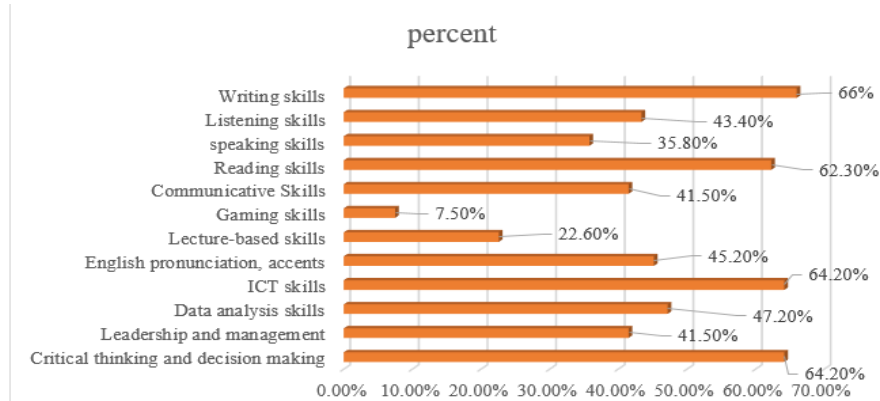


Fig. 4. The acquired skills via Online Education

From the above figure, it can be seen that the majority of the students reported that OE helped them most in developing writing skills (66%), followed by critical thinking (64.2%) and ICT skills (64.2%). In addition, reading skills were reported at 62.3%, data analysis skills at 47.2%, and English pronunciation and accent at 45.2%. Furthermore, 43.4% indicated improvement in listening skills, 41.5% in both communicative skills and leadership & management, 35.8% in speaking skills, and 22.6% in lecture-based skills. Finally, with the lowest percentage (7.5%), the students reported gaming skills.

- The form of online education that helped the respondents in developing the skills needed in your careers or other unrelated skills

Question 7 aimed to identify the type of online learning that students found most helpful in the processes of upskilling and reskilling. As shown in the figure, e-learning platforms were reported with the highest percentage (57.7%), followed by virtual learning (48.1%). Finally, flipped classrooms and blended learning were reported with the same percentage (42.3% each). The results are presented in the following figure:

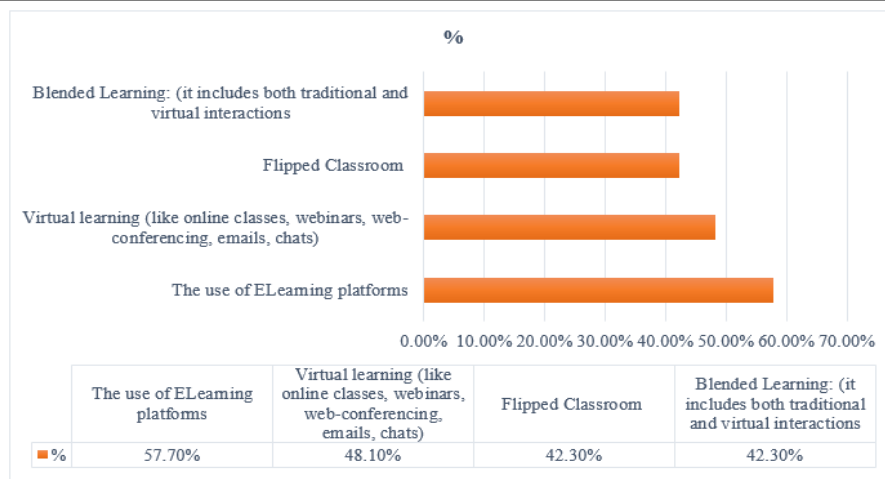


Fig. 5. The forms of Online Education which helped the students in the upskilling and the reskilling processes

7. Discussion of the Results

The fast development of the world across all the sectors has led to different changes in how the world functions; thus, understanding how people react and cope with the pace of change in the world became the issue studied by many research works. According to Goel et al. (2022), upskilling, reskilling and forming students to develop the post COVID-19 era's skills are very important; the authors claimed: "The World Economic Forum estimates that more than half of all employees around the world need to upskill or reskill by 2025 to embrace the changing nature of jobs". The changes witnessed in these sectors –including education- are the consequence of the development and the expansion in the use of the technological tools like artificial intelligence, virtual reality, Internet of Reality and so on.

The students pursue their studies for the sake of finding a decent and profitable job, and in order to achieve this aim, they tend to make use of all the resources at their disposal with technology serving as one of these means. Yet, the fastest growth in the employment world, the number of the required skills and competencies at workplace is rising as well (Waddill, 2021). Because of this, many students question the value and the efficacy of the traditional education, and the role it plays in developing the necessary skills. Therefore, the shift from traditional to online education was seamless. Many students eventually accepted it after experiencing it despite initial obstacles. The benefits brought by online education and its limitations have been the issue of many research works especially during the COVID-19 era (Neshige et al., 2021; and Tsang et al.; 2021 and others); but it is still

under research in the Post- COVID era (as in Choubey & Bapat, 2020; Li, Zhou & He, 2023; Salman & Soliman, 2022 and so on) because of the opportunities OE provides in developing the educational sectors.

From the employment perspective, excelling in the skills already developed and acquiring new ones is a must. Yet, through traditional education, students are limited to the curricula and the syllabi as they must attend the sessions within the classroom walls. This situation only helps them to develop the skills scheduled in the curricula; however, if these curricula are not updated, the skills they might develop will be outdated as well, and are no more required in the jobs they currently have or those they will be hunting in the future. Therefore, online education seems to be the solution to this dilemma. This research, then, addresses questions about how online education can help the EFL learners (of all levels) at the University of Bejaia (especially the students who are working while studying) in developing the existing competencies (upskilling) and in acquiring new skills (reskilling).

7.1. The Flexibility of Online Education in Time Management and Resource Accessibility:

The respondents who participated in the study come from different levels (BA, Master and PhD students); where the majority (90.9%) are from the Master level. Master and PhD students already have a degree and are certified to work in their domain, where the BA students can work as part-timers. The results showed that 36.36% of the respondents already have a job or internship in their field of study. This gives them the opportunity to have experience in the workplace and become of the needed skills for this job. Besides, 12.72% have a job but it is not related to their field of study; this is also important as it helps in raising their awareness concerning the competencies and the skills required like empathy, teamwork, and technology-based skills. *Similarly*, the results of Nga (2020)'s study demonstrated that having part-time jobs or internships help them improve their skills, acquire new knowledge, cultivate communication skills, learn other foreign languages, develop self-confidence and give them the advantage to be selected when applying to full- time jobs (Nga,2020). For the sake of acquiring these skills, the students need to rely on themselves to improve their skills and develop new ones; this can be done through an appropriate use of the online resources.

Online education provides unlimited resources and different learning methods. Many premium or free courses are available online, and since 78.2% of the respondents have other majors they want to study along with the EFL major, online education can provide them with what they want. According to Sadiku, Adebo and Musa (2018), OE provides the necessary time and space to learn, the cost is effective, and it is flexible. The authors added "Online learning allows student to pursue an internationally recognized degree without the need to attend

classes on campus" (p.74). This is shown in the results of this study, 74.5% of the respondents claimed that the Traditional Education (TE) is not enough to help them acquire the different skills they need because the content taught is purely theoretical and that it is useful only for exams, not for the professional life. In addition, the respondents claimed that the "within-walls education" lacks the professional culture where the students are not taught about concerning their future occupations, and lacks problem solving tasks and activities especially those related to the future jobs. According to Datu (2021), online education provides the chance to the students to acquire more than they do in the classrooms because the students in OE do not worry about scheduling their classes at the same time of their jobs; furthermore, the OE provides the students with the opportunity to study what they want on their own (focusing on autonomy). Similar to our results, Andrzejczyk et al. (2021) reported that their students appreciate online learning, especially the classes that cover practical subjects and they considered it the best way for practical classes (Romaniuk & Łukasiewicz-Wieleba, 2022). Likewise, Radović-Marković (2010) mentioned that online education is very beneficial for the students: "...students will be the ones to enjoy highest gain as they will get the education to their order and needs, as well as suited to the requirements of their future job positions" (p.297); the author focuses on the fact that the students who earned their education online have same opportunities compared to those who had an in-class education.

7.2. The Role of Online Learning in Developing Students' Existing Academic and Job-Related Skills:

Therefore, since the TE is not sufficient for the respondents, another question is asked to inquire about the techniques and the strategies they use to fill in the gaps the traditional learning caused and to acquire the skills that are necessary for their current or future jobs. The results demonstrated that 45.16% of the respondents make use of the online trainings, watch YouTube professional channels, use English based videos, and use other technological tools like phone applications. Moreover, they tend to seek the help of social media to learn from specialists online; they attend live conferences of professional coaches. Similarly, Goel, et al. (2022) claimed the AI tools are very important in identifying the students' and/or employees' skill gaps, and in customising their learning experience. Social Networks, despite their shortcomings, are considered one of the applications that are beneficial in the learning process (Devi, Gouthami, & Lakshmi, 2019); these online resources provide the students with both basic and practical knowledge. Additionally, Waddill (2021) recommended four strategies for keeping updated to the requirements of the workplaces during the post COVID-19 era. Among the strategies, the author mentioned "Apprenticeship" through which the employees or the future employees will be engaged in a training for to develop the

skills essential for the job. This is what 11.29% of the respondents of our research mentioned; they claimed that undertaking professional trainings and searching for internships or works even with low salaries just to gain profession-related experiences (how to deal with colleagues and how to work in general). Consequently, these results show that online education is highly recommended for the sake of improving the students' skills and /or developing new skills.

To be more precise, we provided the students with a list of statements covering the benefits that online education brought to them to express their level of agreement regarding how OE aided them in the processes of upskilling and reskilling. The findings, then, revealed that the majority of the students positively agreed with the statements provided, because OE helped the students to have more spare time to pursue their interest, and the internet offers many resources that help them do that; as a result, many of their skills have been developed. Principally, the students claimed that online education developed their empathy, leadership, and adaptability as it gave them more time to search for part-time jobs. Furthermore, because of OE, the respondents could manage to assess the need for new specific skills required in their future job, they could manage to make attempts to fill the skill gaps they had and develop their skills. They have been able to develop some life skills (like problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions), they have been able to develop their team building skills, they have been able to pursue the team targets rather than their personal targets, they could develop their communication skills, it aided them be more exposed to other areas and fields, they have been able to build sensitivity toward a socio-cultural environment, it helped them to develop their curiosity towards other fields, and finally their technological skills are enhanced since OE is introduced to their university. The respondents' answers ranged from agree and totally agree which show their positive attitude towards the roles of the OE in the reskilling and the upskilling (it improved the English-related skills and other which are not related). In short, all the skills that OE helped the students to acquire include writing skills (66%), then critical thinking (64.2%), ICT skills (64.2%), reading skills (62.3%), data analysis skills (47.2%), English pronunciation and accent (45.2%), listening skills (43.4%), communicative skills (41.5%), leadership & management (41.5%), speaking skill (35.8%), the lecture based skills (22.6%); and finally with the lowest percentage (7.5%), the students reported the gaming skills. Among these skills are those which are related to EFL like reading and writing and speaking, and there are those which are not, like management and leadership, ICT and gaming. Thus, according to the respondents, online education is helpful for the improvement of their field-related skills and their future job within the same field; and develop skills which are not related and that can be helpful to them as well.

In the literature, many studies have investigated the benefits of online education in helping students develop their communication skills in specific and English based competencies in general; be it through the platforms of online learning or via its flexible and accessible means (Zidat & Djoudi, 2010; Mayende, Prinz, & Isabwe, 2017; Mohammed, 2021; Yavuz, Ozdemir, & Celik, 2020). Additionally, according to Radonjic (2021), these skills mentioned by the respondents are called soft skills, which are crucial for any role the students may assume in their workplaces in the future; the author (2021) said:

As a matter of fact, recruiters value "soft skills" increasingly because leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, communication skills, etc., are generic competencies that you can develop (or not!) in pretty much any role and industry and the presence or absence of such soft skills can significantly affect your performance and the value you bring to a company" (What is a skill's section)

In general, the students think that online education is beneficial in helping them develop the skills related to their career, or acquire other skills that may help them in their future professional lives (60%). This is because it keeps people informed on everything happening in the world; it aids them to be more creative as they can observe and discuss other people's experiences. They are free to read what they want and acquire vocabulary as needed etc.; they can have different interactions with natives and non-native speakers, get a glimpse of the world of employability; have enough resources for self-study and autonomous learning and so on. That is why the majority of the respondents claimed that the eLearning platforms are the type of online education that helped them get these benefits. The platform includes posting lectures and activities and the students are required to complete the tasks attached; thus, the students will have enough time to do extra things until the new lecture is posted. All these benefits can raise the students' awareness about their future jobs and the required skills in the domains of their interest based on the new world changes that occurred in the COVID-19's post era, because progress happens gradually and not at once. Similarly, Padmaja and Mukul (2022) claimed that the use of e-content, e-training and digital skill development programs will be useful in reskilling and upskilling processes as they provide new knowledge assets to update and upgrade these skills. This is how the introduction of online education led the EFL students towards the upskilling and the reskilling or at least initiated the two new concepts until the students are officially full-time workers. For Padmaja and Mukul (2022), the education sector needs to be aware of the emerging technology for which it is responsible for preparing the next generation of workers and leaders in society; thus changing the conventional methods and promoting the students', teachers', and stakeholders' skills through the adoption of different types of online education is a way to keep the students up to date with the current developments.

Nevertheless, relying solely on online education could be uncertain especially because of the students' lack of experience, the existence on fake accounts, organizations, websites and similar risks. If the students are not guided, the benefits to be gotten would turn into threats (either psychological, financial or other types of harm).

Based on the reviewed literature, the students' responses, and the results of the study, this section entails some pedagogical implications and suggestions that might be beneficial in developing the higher education:

- Online education enables EFL learners to acquire new skills and knowledge and to use these skills anytime and anywhere; therefore, curriculum designers should ensure that lectures are designed using these technologies.
- Online education is beneficial, but there is no substitute to field experience. Therefore, giving students more opportunities for practice, internships, and professional life experiences (especially for Master's students) is highly recommended. However, this requires stakeholders to reduce the time scheduled for in-class sessions. In addition, higher education institutions should establish partnerships with the employment and socio-economic environment.
- The documented content on the internet is sometimes more valuable than tutorials (legally and officially free certified tutorials, documents, trainings, etc.); therefore, it is important to encourage students to read and follow more certified content rather than random sources.
- Students do not find it appealing to rely solely on e-learning platforms, therefore, it is recommended to use a variety of advanced techniques in online education.
- Online education can help students; nonetheless, teachers, curriculum designers, and stakeholders should guide them toward safe online jobs and websites, given the existence of many fake organizations, websites, and accounts that students should be aware of. In this regard, even teachers should receive training on the matter.
- Teachers and stakeholders should also upgrade their skill sets to fit into the new era of a digitalized world.
- Online education provides students with different sources, giving them access to a large amount of information regarding the target domains and skills they are interested in. Thus, maintaining a balance between online and traditional learning can develop students' problem-solving abilities, which are needed in their future jobs.

- One of the most important benefits of online education is the acquisition of ICT skills, which are essential for both professional and academic success. Therefore, teaching students about ICT is highly recommended.
- Online education helps students develop their research skills (such as using online questionnaires, reading, and writing). It is important to emphasize this point.
- Further research should be conducted in this area, particularly experimental studies, to provide empirical evidence of the positive relationship between online education, reskilling, and upskilling.

8. Limitations of the study

This study provides insights into the role that online education plays in the processes of reskilling and upskilling; nonetheless, it is important to recognize certain limitations. The study focused on students at various levels but only at one Algerian institution. There were only 55 respondents, which is relatively a small sample size for descriptive studies, making it difficult to generalize the findings. Additionally, since the study relied on self-reported data collected at a single point in time- which may be biased- future research could support these results with longitudinal observational data.

9. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to describe the role of online education has in guiding students towards upskilling and reskilling from the EFL students' perspective. The analysis of the students' questionnaire showed that their responses are mostly positive with regard to the use of online education and its effect on the skills development in general.

Most of the students reported that, with online education, they had time for extra activities related to their field of interest while completing the requirements of their studies, and that it provided many resources. Moreover, the study demonstrated that online education helped them in reskilling (like fine arts, online marketing, e-business, and so on), as it helped them be more exposed to other areas and fields. Furthermore, online education enabled the students to develop various life skills, namely, ICT skills, critical thinking, and decision-making skills.

Most importantly, Online Education helped them upskill and enhance their EFL-related skills like reading and writing, speaking, listening, communication, pronunciation, and so on. Importantly, the results indicated that online education contributed to building sensitivity toward a socio-cultural environment; hence,

reflecting the advantages of online education not only in an individual's professional life but also in their social life.

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