

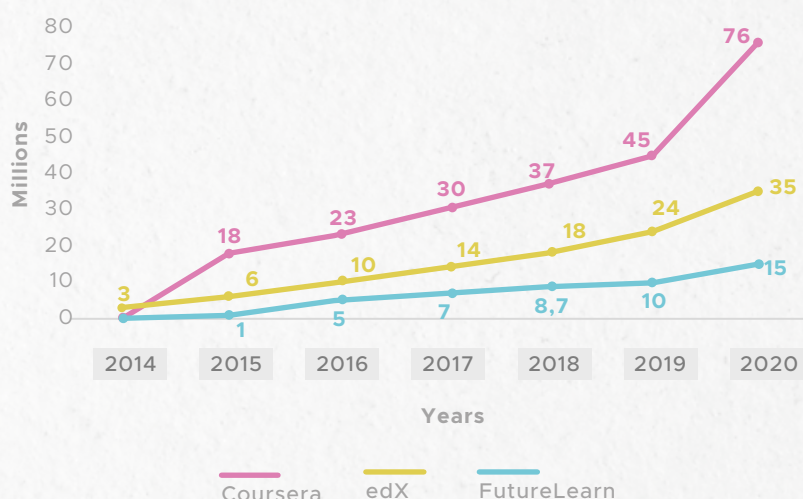


Although it is a trend in recent years, the formation through virtual courses has taken great relevance. By the end of 2016, more than 30% of students enrolled in post-secondary educational institutions had taken at least one course under this modality. Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated its adaptation throughout the world. However, there is still a debate about the quality of these courses, its defenders affirm that it eliminates barriers of access and of time flexibility, by allowing the student to organize their study schedules and gain specialized knowledge updated from anywhere, while its detractors, argue that the performance and retention rate are lower in online courses compared to traditional face-to-face classes.¹

One of the great advances in this subject occurred around 2012 when American and European universities began to offer their virtual courses, not only to their students but to universities in other countries through online platforms such as Coursera, edX, FutureLearn, among others², which has made these platforms very popular in the recent years.

These platforms continue to improve and offer more services. In recent years, specializations and master's degrees have been offered as people take a number of specific courses.

Number of enrolled people in online education platforms 2014-2020



Source: Self built data taken from Garcia & Perez (2021), Shah (2020.)

Another advantage that experts have stated is that online courses can help fulfill the Objective for Sustainable Development No.4, which aims to guarantee an inclusive and fair education and to promote opportunities for lifelong learning for everybody. Thus, three Main benefits have been described that stand out from these courses:

1. Increases Higher education coverage without the need to build infrastructure, which can save time and costs through a model of combined teaching, although it implies greater access to quality internet.
2. Improves access to cutting-edge knowledge, since people are facing the great advance of technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, nanotechnology, among others that arise day by day, online courses allow the teachers, students and collaborators of the universities to be constantly updated.
3. In cases where it is possible to recognize the online courses, universities can reduce the unit cost of the courses to which credits are granted, thereby reducing the overall cost of tertiary education.

In the recent labor market survey carried out by the Observatorio de Sapiencia, it was observed that about half of the people graduated from Higher Education Institutions (IES) of Medellín in recent years have taken complementary online courses after graduation to acquire new knowledge or to update theirs.

This phenomenon will inevitably continue to increase in the coming years, for this reason the people in charge and the experts in education should analyze its implications in the medium and long term: is logical to build our own national or local platforms to teach online courses as is the case of the British platform FutureLearn or should we partner with existing platforms? How do we train teachers so that this modality is a complement in their teaching processes?, additionally, some countries are undergoing the process of recognition of this type of courses, what will be the evaluation mechanisms for this recognition in our country and the impact it can bring.? Among other necessary questions that the traditional education systems are currently facing regarding this modality.

¹ Fisher C, Baker R, Li Q, Avakian G y Warshauer M (2021). Acces to online College courses can speed students' degree completion.[Web article]. Brookings. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/11/22/access-to-online-college-courses-can-speed-students-degree-completion/>. (15th of December 2021)

² Garcia M & Perez L. (2021). Accreditation of online course in higher educativon-Early adpoters in the European Union, India, Indonesia and Malaysia.

³. Shah D (2020). By the numbers: MOOCs in 2020. [Web article]. The Report by Class Central. Available at: <https://www.classcentral.com/report/mooc-stats-2020/> (18th of January of 2022)