

# How Do **Disruptive Innovators**

Prepare Today's Students  
to be Tomorrow's Workforce?

**GLOBAL ALUMNI'S  
E-LEARNING REVOLUTION**

Copyright © 2020 Inter-American Development Bank. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons IGO 3.0 Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives (CC-IGO BY-NC-ND 3.0 IGO) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/igo/legalcode>) and may be reproduced with attribution to the IDB and for any non-commercial purpose. No derivative work is allowed.

Any dispute related to the use of the works of the IDB that cannot be settled amicably shall be submitted to arbitration pursuant to the UNCITRAL rules. The use of the IDB's name for any purpose other than for attribution, and the use of IDB's logo shall be subject to a separate written license agreement between the IDB and the user and is not authorized as part of this CC-IGO license.

Note that link provided above includes additional terms and conditions of the license.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Inter-American Development Bank, its Board of Directors, or the countries they represent.



# Author



**Pablo Rivas**  
CEO,  
Global Alumni  
[pr@globalalumni.org](mailto:pr@globalalumni.org)

## About Global Alumni

At Global Alumni, we envision breaking traditional academic patterns by transforming universities and digitalizing education services. We use technology to create a learning experience adapted what the 21st century demands of working professionals.

Adopting a boutique strategy approach, we serve a limited number of high-ranked universities across the world. Breaking the barriers of distance and language, through our online channels, we reach an international audience of learners who are facing the Fourth Industrial Revolution's changing environment.

# Abstract

Technology has comprehensively transformed societies. We work, interact, buy, and travel differently to the way we did a decade ago. The speed with which changes will continue to alter our reality will only increase, so it is necessary—if we want professionals trained for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and a solid business fabric—that those of us in education face the current and future challenges head-on.

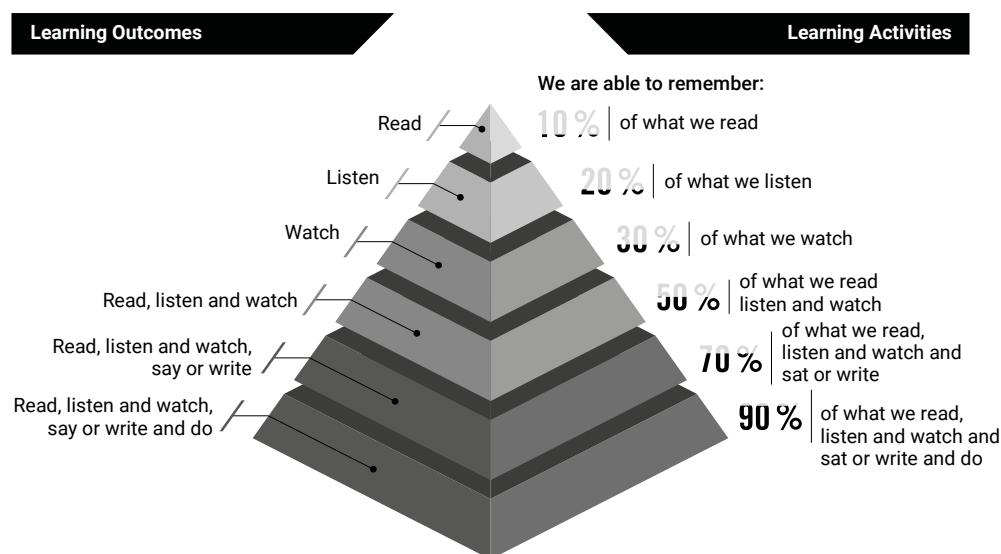
The education sector has remained unchanged for centuries, with timid (and above all, low-quality) advances after the Internet's irruption into our lives. Global Alumni, the first Euro-American EdTech, works with some of the best universities in the world (such as MIT Professional Education, University of Chicago, and Esade, among others) to jointly develop online education programs adapted to the demands of today's job market.

We have designed new educational methodologies that place students at the center of the equation and guarantee an education of the highest quality and at the level expected of the labor market marked by globalization. While the challenge facing the education sector is enormous, the opportunities that technology offers are endless.

# 1. Introduction

Education has survived three industrial revolutions yet has barely altered its methodology throughout the years. Indeed, the irruption and development of the Internet have brought some significant changes to the field. For example, we can now learn online without physical books. Still, the essence has remained the same. The learning methods from the past century, which we are all familiar with, aim to prepare professionals for jobs based on predictable technological environments. There is little point in learning the same things today that we learned a decade ago. We must acquire new knowledge and skills to keep abreast of technological advancements and how they impact our professions. For example, in many technical jobs, it has become clear that robots can do many basic mechanical tasks better than humans. The world cannot continue to teach as it did 50 years ago because today's job market is nothing like it was even five years ago. Once the Fourth Industrial Revolution starts, today's professionals will need a new type of education to prepare themselves for an eminently digitalized and globalized world with the most significant technological application in history.

Figure 1. Dale Pyramid



Source: Global Alumni, 2020



## 2. Underlying Issues in Current Education

Universities are still based on an original model that dates back to the Middle Ages. They have a classic hierarchy that is synonymous with rigidity on three levels.

First, universities have a structural rigidity that prevents them from absorbing certain technological advances and progressing at the pace of society.

Second, universities are based on in-person classes and exams that reward memorization. Finally, universities have an intrinsic rigidity imposed by the need to have a physical space to carry out work.

The essential problem in education is that the speed of the educational environment does not reflect changes in society. Such changes are particularly evident in the latest trends in the current labor market. Nowadays, not many universities have an expert in cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, the Internet of Things (IoT), machine learning, or big data and data science in their departments. How many universities provide bachelor's or master's degrees in these technologies? How long does it take for schools to update their programs to reflect the latest advances in a continually changing economy? This premise is applicable not only in the scientific field. Slowness also undermines a law school's capabilities or a marketing degree, because in the end, all sectors will end up incorporating and applying new technologies to their processes one way or another.

In addition to speed, the ways universities deliver education—such as face-to-face lectures, regular classes, and evaluations—are quite limiting. In extraordinary situations, such as the current global pandemic, staying on track with course plans seems almost impossible. When the balance breaks down, doubts arise. Accordingly, few educational institutions are familiar with collaborative work tools, digital classrooms, and e-proctoring tools that allow learning to continue fully. The system was simply not prepared for this pandemic.

Academic hierarchy is another issue that needs to be addressed in the classic university structure. The system entails long bottlenecks in academic promotion. University departments themselves are often governed by antiquated criteria that are out of sync with the new reality. The current academic hierarchy lacks transparency, an intrinsic quality of digitalization, and open data (Aparici, 2019). Such digitalization puts an end to discretion and demands a necessary and urgent change in mentality for both teaching staff and university structures.



Physical campuses, limited to a specific location, limit the possibility of integrating great academic or professional candidates to the best educational institutions simply because they are far from these places. The prestigious MIT had 11,520 students in the 2019-2020 academic year (MIT, 2020); Oxford had more than 24,000 (University of Oxford, 2019), and Harvard had a total of 36,012 students (Harvard University, n.d.). These and other prestigious universities prioritize quality over quantity of students. That is, they seek the most extraordinary candidates rather than a large number of candidates. Traditionally this distinction was made from a face-to-face perspective. Now, thanks to the opportunities offered by the digital world, they can maintain their qualitative philosophy by offering their knowledge to the world's best minds.

Furthermore, top-tier universities will soon be able to provide solutions to the problem of tuition cost. In the United States, this cost surpassed \$18,470 during the 1971-1972 academic year (private institutions, four-year program) to reach \$49,870 in the 2019-2020 year. In public universities, these numbers increased from \$8,890 in 1971-1972 to the current \$21,950 (IESALC, 2007).

Rising tuition cost is a constant that extends to other regions. According to the Report about Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, prepared jointly by UNESCO and IESALC, in this region, "tuition and enrollment fees at public universities are generally low and, in some cases, symbolic. On the contrary, registrations and fees in private institutions are expensive and regulated by market supply and demand. This creates a problem in terms of equity, as opportunities for students from low-income backgrounds to access higher-quality education are scarce" (IESALC, 2007). This research also indicates that in the period between 1994 and 2003, "while the average family income remained almost stable, private education tuition doubled, showing the sacrifice of household income."





The good news is that digital education can help. Digital learning can decrease tuition costs and allow a more significant part of the population to access specialized training, which will undoubtedly positively impact society.



# 3. Striking Back: The Education Sector's Response

Traditionally, education has been based on a limiting funnel system in which the economic factor is linked to academic performance. The higher the economic capacity, the higher the possibility of accessing the best universities and building a better curriculum. But digitalization changes this paradigm. Digitalization means opening what was previously closed. Thus, a double benefit is obtained: While the universities preserve their markers of quality and identity and expand their influence, many professionals of the future will enjoy access to new digital content, subjects, and teachers without precedent. Studying at MIT or the University of Chicago will not require maximum financial effort, nor will an academic degree oblige one to be physically present in a certain place.

Figure 2. Differences between the three models of digital learning: MOOC, distance learning, and e-learning.

		SELF PACED (MOOC)	REMOTE LEARNING	ONLINE LEARNING
 <b>CONTENT CREATION</b>	Faculty	★	★	★
	Instructional Design e-learning Team	✗	✗	★ ★ ★
	Faculty guidance: instructional design & multimedia team	✗	✗	★ ★ ★
	Simple Digital Content (pdf, ppt)	★	★	✗
	Elaborate Digital Content (charts, graphics, dynamic explanations...)	✗	✗	★ ★ ★
	Video content resource	★ ★ ★	★	★ ★ ★
	Pre-recorded simple videos	★	✗	★
 <b>DELIVERY</b>	Pre-recorded elaborated videos	✗	✗	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	Interaction with Faculty	✗	★	★
	Mentors to assist in student's learning process	✗	✗	★ ★ ★
	Ratio students per mentor	✗	-	Limited
	Asynchronous activities	★ ★ ★	★	★ ★ ★
	Synchronous activities	✗	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★
	Course timeline with start and end dates	✗	★	★
 <b>STUDENT EXPERIENCE</b>	Collaborative activities: peer to peer, interaction...	✗	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	Learning Experience	Individual	Individual - Group	Individual - Group
	Student learning reports	✗	★	★ ★ ★
	Innovation & Cutting Edge Technology	✗	★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	Student validation system	✗	★	★ ★ ★
	Proctored exams	✗	★	★
	Predictive Analytics for Student Evolution	✗	✗	★ ★ ★
 <b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	Automated Technical Support	★	★	★
	Dedicated "Human" Technical Support	✗	★	★ ★ ★
	Completion Rates	Low	Average	High
	Dropout Rates	High	Average	Low
	Networking Activities	✗	★	★ ★ ★
	Virtual Community	✗	★	★ ★ ★
	Guaranteed Certifications (User Identity Validation)	✗	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★
	Updated Content	✗	★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
	Quality Control Overall Process	Low	High	High

Source: Global Alumni, 2020



Moreover, digital transformation connects with another guiding principle of this new digital era: lifelong learning. In a flexible scenario where technology proposes drastic changes in the economy every two or three years, learning is no longer a task only for the young, but rather is a necessary and vital attribute for everyone.

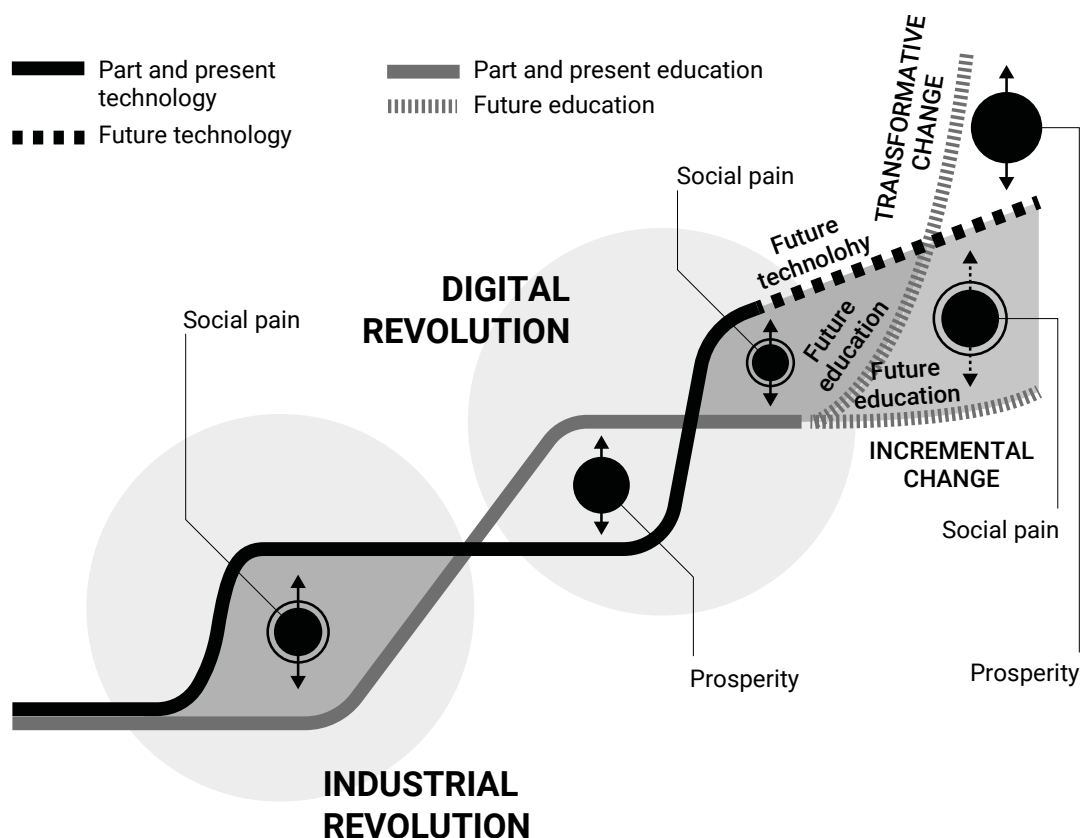
Global Alumni is an EdTech organization dedicated to addressing these issues and transforming universities. With a team of professionals from more than 20 countries, Global Alumni provides a unique and high-quality solution for the education sector based on e-learning and blended learning (also known as b-learning). Though in permanent expansion and change, b-learning relies on a few quality providers. With a business-to-university business model, Global Alumni's goal is to allow the world's universities to digitalize their academic offerings. As seen in the table below, Global Alumni launches personalized, innovative, and multilingual programs – in English, Spanish, and Portuguese – to meet the linguistic needs of three-quarters of the world and to benefit from the many advantages of online learning. We maintain strategic partnerships with universities by becoming an extension of them. We put ourselves in their shoes and work side by side with their departments until we have created the product they want. In parallel, we guide the faculty through new educational methodologies to familiarize course developers with the most innovative and useful applications and dynamics of digital teaching, so that the online and blended learning experience becomes a new learning experience.



Born at the beginning of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, our DNA is 100% digital. Thanks to our extensive experience in the field over the last few years, we understand the difficulties involved in transforming well-established institutions with great legacies.

All Global Alumni's solutions are customizable to adapt to the specific needs and identities of each university. We anticipate changes, greatly enhance the learning curve, and avoid making mistakes that have already been made. The result is that our programs are designed to improve the skills of future professionals. In an economic environment such as the current one, where lifelong learning is a vital solution, we contribute to bringing professionals up to date and improving their employability.

Figure 3. The race between technology and education

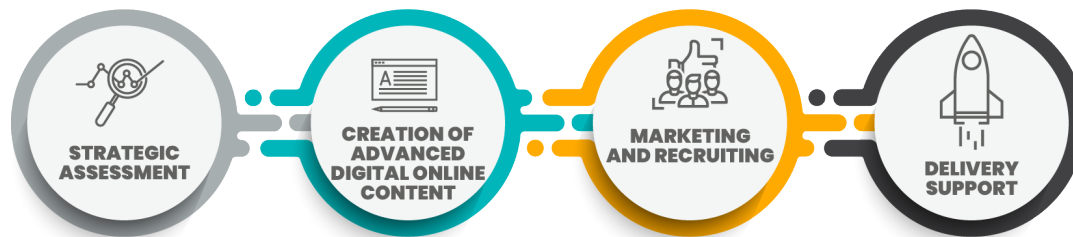


Source: OCDE, 2020

# 4. Global Alumni's Educational Model

Global Alumni transforms the world's best universities and promotes online education and blended learning. Global Alumni uses a holistic four-step process, extending from the designing strategic plan on how to reach the market, online delivery support, and the technological roadmap.

Figure 4. Global Alumni's educational model



Source: Global Alumni, 2020.

## Step 1: Strategic Assessment

Our strategic consulting services allow us to analyze the competitive educational ecosystem and each institution's strengths and weaknesses (brand, core areas of knowledge, and geographical footprint). We design ad hoc digital strategic proposals for each university based on this detailed analysis and help them implement and operate in a collaborative scheme, always placing the students at the center of the educational commitment. By adapting to their requirements, we ensure that the projects we develop are an extension of each university's personality and characteristics.

## Step 2: Creation of advanced digital online content

High-quality content creation is the central focus of our digital transformation strategies. This includes two different but complementary aspects: on the one hand, accurately capturing the knowledge and teaching style of the faculty; on the other, turning that input into an educational product adapted to the online environment.

The university faculty's knowledge and teaching capabilities are two of the key core strengths of the institutions collaborating with Global Alumni. The challenge is to capture that knowledge and how each faculty member imparts their knowledge—in their own style. Or in the words of Global Alumni's CEO "to capture his or her spirit." There are several means to achieve this. The most common emerge from the close and frequent interaction between the instructional design team and the faculty during the content creation process. This allows:

- To subordinate the online content design and course structure to each faculty's specific delivery style, making each program unique and different.
- Seamless integration of faculty video-recorded snaps across the content units, providing learners a full faculty experience.

With a multidisciplinary team that knows every teaching angle in digital environments, Global Alumni creates digital content that transfers the learning experience to online learning and blended learning. It also proposes an academic solution adapted to each program with the latest technological and audiovisual tools. These contents are continuously updated to give the participants the most current information, thereby facilitating immediate application in the labor market and helping the business world take advantage of the opportunities that the Fourth Industrial Revolution's economy presents.

### Step 3: Marketing and recruiting

The third step is to identify and capture learners. They do not flock to the programs just because they open a website. It is necessary to make potential learners aware that the course exists, and to provide assessment and guidance on the best choices for their professional careers. Global Alumni delivers the full service– from designing the online marketing strategy, identifying the sweet spots of the interested target population, and reaching a broad American, Latin American, and European audience by leveraging the campaigns in the three languages in which the courses are offered, namely: English, Spanish and Portuguese.

This way, we help universities to significantly expand their international footprint and open education opportunities to students in constituencies with limited high-quality alternatives through our online program offering.

### Step 4: Delivery support

Delivery support is the last step in the process. Global Alumni designs the student learning itinerary, providing a balanced mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities that allow study flexibility and enough live interaction with the rest of learners and the teaching team.

Global Alumni understands the needs of the professionals it accompanies and optimizes their learning experience. We develop this process in a digital environment with all the necessary technological architecture. New dynamics allow the students to experience innovative ways

of interacting with the content, the faculty, and other students. Students can strengthen their cognitive processes and learn to perform in a virtual environment.

In this sense, students are not just expected to navigate the a virtual campus blindly, but are offered continuous technical and academic support from the very first moment of enrolling in the program.

An essential character in Global Alumni's delivery model is the mentor or facilitator: an experienced senior professional with a deep understanding of the program's topic who works alongside the professors and instructor to provide participants with real-life experience case studies and practical application of the knowledge acquired in the program.

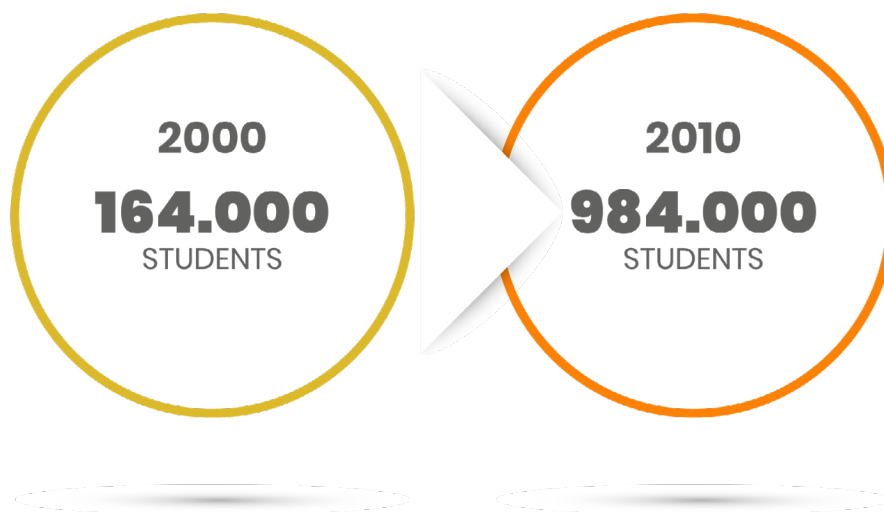


# 5. The Situation in Latin America

In 2017, a group effort of 20 authors across the entire Latin American continent published the Report about Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. This report argues that distance-based higher learning constitutes “one of the components of the institutional and pedagogical differentiation that the continent has been experiencing in the last decade” (Rama, 2017). According to the research, this improvement contributes to a greater diversity of students, policies, quality assurance frameworks, pedagogies, and scales and regionalization levels. All of these “encourages greater competition within educational systems and even allows for the replacement of face-to-face courses and overcoming the traditional forms of organization and access to university learning” (Rama, 2017).

In 2000, distance education began to improve its quality standards minimally and to increase its reach significantly. However, this methodology, in which the dominating factor was blended learning, only covered 1.3% of students—164,000 in total. Since then, its growth has been irrefutable: In 2010, there were 984,000 students in the region in hybrid educational modalities. Behind this expansion and evolution, we see an increase in Internet use in low-income families, the development of new professional skills in the labor market, the inclusion of private education in distance learning courses, and lower costs. The current medical emergency caused by Covid-19, the need to restrict the population’s freedom of movement, and the even more difficult return to the classroom predict that digital education will go from being complementary to a necessary good.

Figure 5. Evolution of the number of distance-education students in Latin America in a decade



Source: Rama, 2017

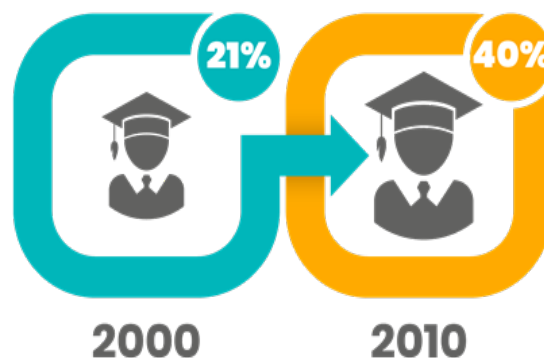
In countries like Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico, national governments are committed to promoting distance education. Some agents in the region have opted to create alliances to offer this virtual content, such as UVirtual in Chile and the Consorcio Clavijero in Mexico. Open-source virtual platforms support these models, as is the case with Learning Management Systems, whose extensive generalization shows how a standard format of virtual education has been created to facilitate the sharing and optimization of resources.

Likewise, the legislative overregulation of distance education has also been confirmed, as have the mechanisms that safeguard distance education quality. According to the report, this new phenomenon “will favor the establishment of professional licensing systems, as seen in some professional fields in Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Brazil.” Yet, it should be the students themselves who have a voice in what they demand from this new teaching method.

The number of students enrolled in higher education programs nearly doubled in Latin America and the Caribbean in the last decade. The upward trend in demand is evident, but there is still a way to go in terms of the efficiency and quality of the education on offer (Ferreira et al., 2017).

The 18-to-24-year-old students in higher education courses in the region rose from 21% in 2000 to 40% in 2010. Although inequality in university access continues to be a problem, notable progress among the population with less purchasing power has been made. Quality online education will allow knowledge to expand, reduce the social gap in the education sector, and promote a framework of social ascension in emerging economies.

Figure 6. Evolution of students between the ages of 18 and 24 in higher education in the region



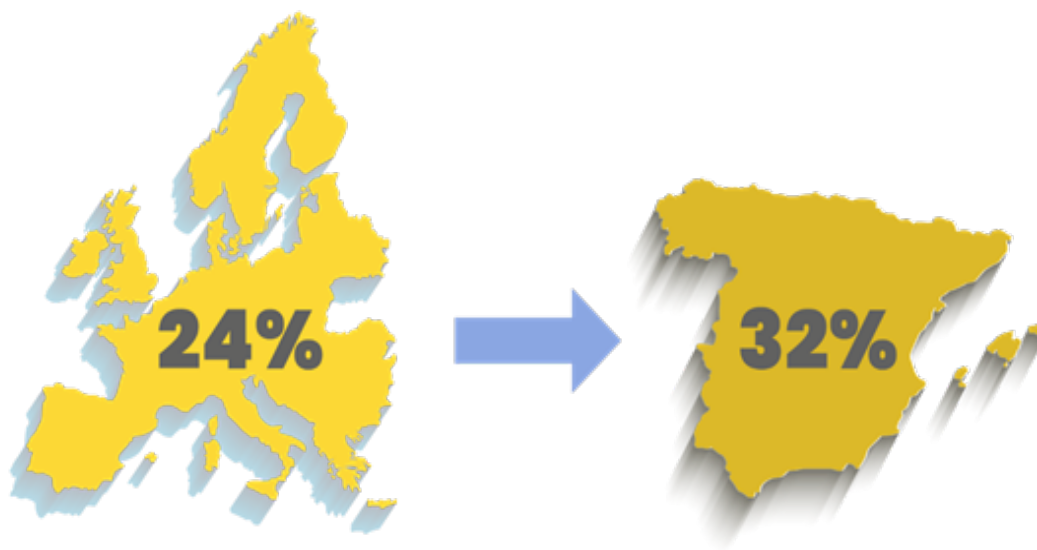
Source: Ferreira et. al., 2007

# 6. Implications

Until just a few years ago, e-learning was an unusual element within the educational ecosystem. A professional would generally try to complement their CV with a rather basic online course, or in the best of cases, through corporate training offered by their company. Time has shown us that these first digital education initiatives were not of the highest quality and suffered from a lack of sophistication.

The digital evolution of these traditional tools has taken a 180-degree turn in the last decade. The data is irrefutable. Now, 24% of training in Europe takes place online. This percentage rises to 32% in Spain (INE, 2019).

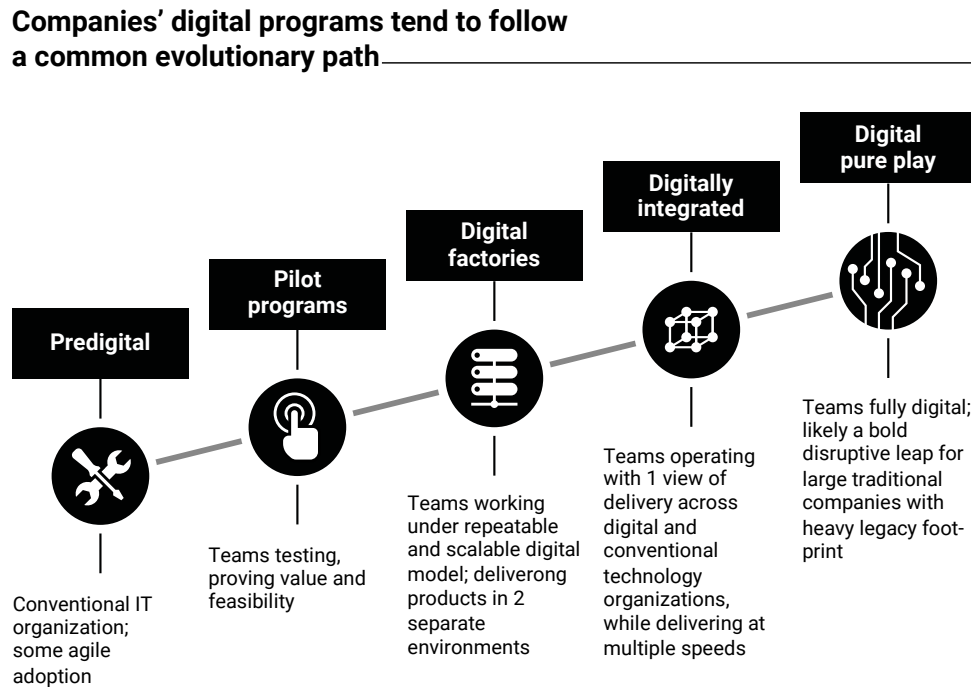
Figure 7. Online training in Europe and Spain



Source: INE, 2019

The transformation of the education sector is now irreversible and is generating potential opportunities. Digital technology has forever changed the international stage of education and provided never-before-seen management tools. Technology has turned the teaching and learning process into a dynamic reality that is highly adaptable to new professional demands. It also creates a perfectly competitive market where all actors must be involved in creating a unique educational experience. Developing a program in the opposite direction—following the old teaching processes without considering technological advances and education experience—will not be well received by all those who seek to broaden their knowledge and skills today. In the end, they will not fulfill their educational purpose and will not survive.

Figure 8. Evolutionary paths of companies' digital programs.



Source: Khan et al. (2017). McKinsey & Company

Faculty have more resources than ever before to expand and enrich their knowledge with every instrument, such as monitoring student behavior through predictive algorithms or adapting their needs with customized curricular structures based on their performance. On the other hand, students have a new horizon of possibilities. It is no longer necessary to take out huge loans to receive better education, nor is there a linguistic barrier or growing suspicion that the subjects taught are lightyears away from their immediate application in companies. Universities finally have the opportunity to expand, embodying the concepts universities were born to have, that is, taking knowledge to a much wider international audience. Studying at the University of Chicago, MIT or Esade will no longer depend on a checkbook, as programs are now modular, flexible in time, and more affordable.

Thanks to the virtues of e-learning, students and professionals across Latin America will be provided with a new, unprecedented educational context to improve the region's future. The impact of knowledge and education that guarantees students' high employability opens wide the doors of an international professional market where the personal possibilities multiply, breaking down social barriers and allowing at-risk populations to opt for higher-quality education.



# References

**Aparici, R.** (2009). "Pedagogía digital," *Educação & linguagem*, vol. 12, n.º 19, January-June.

**Ferreira, M. M., Avitabile, C., Botero Álvarez, J., Haimovich Paz F. & Urzúa, S.** (2017). *Momento decisivo. La educación superior en América Latina y el Caribe*. Washington D. C.: Banco Internacional de Reconstrucción y Fomento/Grupo Banco Mundial.  
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/26489/211014ovSP.pdf> [Accessed: May 2020].

**Harvard University** (n. d.). "Harvard at a Glance," Harvard University. h  
<https://www.harvard.edu/about-harvard/harvard-glance> [Accessed: May 2020].

**IESALC.** (2007). *Informe sobre la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe 2000-2005. La metamorfosis de la educación superior*. Caracas: UNESCO.  
[https://www.oei.es/historico/salactsi/informe\\_educacion\\_superiorAL2007.pdf](https://www.oei.es/historico/salactsi/informe_educacion_superiorAL2007.pdf) [Accessed: May 2020].

**INE.** (2019). *España en cifras 2019*. Madrid: INE, pp. 13-16.  
[https://www.ine.es/prodyser/espa\\_cifras/2019/16](https://www.ine.es/prodyser/espa_cifras/2019/16) [Accessed: May 2020].

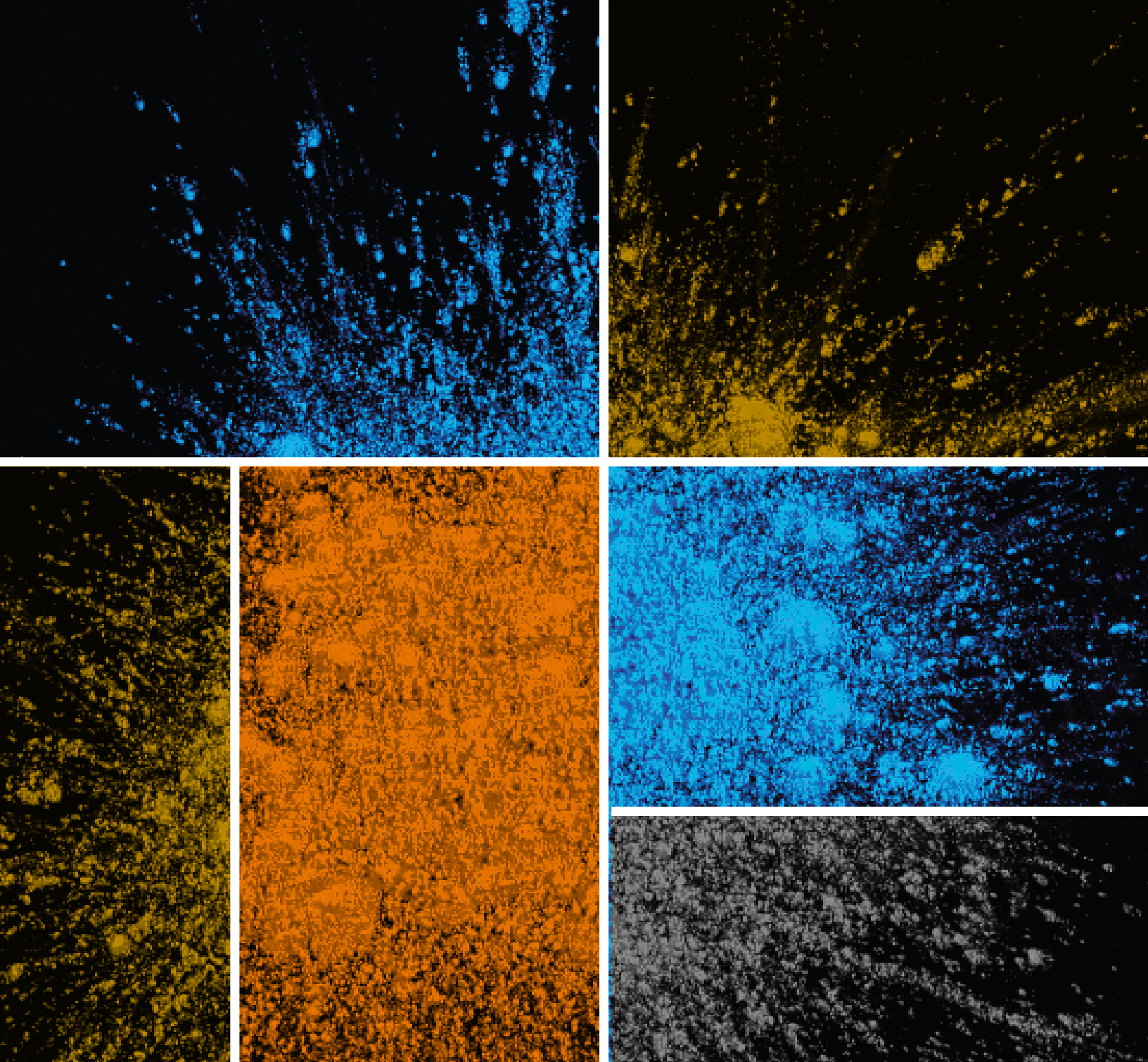
**Khan, N., Lunawat, G. & Rahul, A.** (2017). *Toward an integrated technology operating model*. Digital McKinsey.  
<https://www.mckinsey.com/-/media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/McKinsey%20Digital/Our%20Insights/Toward%20an%20integrated%20technology%20operating%20model/Toward-an-integrated-technology-operating-model.ashx> [Accessed: April 2020].

**MIT.** (2020). "Enrollments 2019-2020," MIT Facts.  
<https://web.mit.edu/facts/enrollment.html> [Accessed: May 2020].

**OCDE.** (2020). *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030*.  
[https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/about/E2030%20Introduction\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/about/E2030%20Introduction_FINAL.pdf) [Accessed: May 2020].

**Rama, C. (Ed.)** (2017). *La Educación Superior a distancia en América Latina y el Caribe*. Montevideo: Grupo Almagro Editores. [https://www.academia.edu/34994104/La\\_educaci%C3%B3n\\_superior\\_a\\_distancia\\_en\\_Am%C3%A9rica\\_Latina\\_y\\_el\\_Caribe](https://www.academia.edu/34994104/La_educaci%C3%B3n_superior_a_distancia_en_Am%C3%A9rica_Latina_y_el_Caribe) [Accessed: May 2020].

**University of Oxford.** (2020). "Student Data Management and analysis," University of Oxford.  
[https://public.tableau.com/views/UniversityofOxford-StudentStatistics/AtaGlance?:embed=y&:display\\_count=yes&:showVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/UniversityofOxford-StudentStatistics/AtaGlance?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showVizHome=no) [Accessed: May 2020].



**IDB**

Inter-American  
Development Bank