

Favourability and Popularity of Online Learning: Research Summary

Key Points

- Online learning surged in favourability and popularity, especially post-COVID-19.
- Enrolment peaked at 75% of college students in fall 2020, stabilizing at 54% in fall 2022—still above pre-pandemic levels.
- Satisfaction varied (59.5% pre-pandemic, 41.3% during), with post-pandemic acceptance tied to improved technology.
- Blended learning has emerged as a dominant post-pandemic trend.

Comprehensive Analysis of Online Learning Favourability and Popularity

Historical Context and Evolution

Online learning traces its roots to 19th-century correspondence courses, evolving into internet-based education by the 1990s. The University of Toronto offered the first fully online course in 1984 ([Adamas University, 2020](#)).

Enrolment Trends Over Time

- **Pre-Pandemic:** Enrolment in online courses grew from 33.1% in 2017 to 34.7% in 2018 ([Inside Higher Ed, 2018](#)).
- **Pandemic Peak:** In fall 2020, 75% of college students took online courses ([Forbes Advisor, 2024](#)).
- **Post-Pandemic:** Enrolment dropped to 54% in fall 2022, remaining above pre-pandemic levels ([Forbes Advisor, 2024](#)).
- **Global Growth:** Coursera registrations skyrocketed from 21 million in 2016 to 92 million in 2021 ([World Economic Forum, 2022](#)).

Student Satisfaction and Favourability

- **Pre-Pandemic:** Satisfaction stood at 59.5% ([Frontiers in Psychology, 2023](#)).
- **During Pandemic:** Satisfaction fell to 41.3%, hampered by technical difficulties ([Tandfonline, 2021](#)).
- **Post-Pandemic:** Recovery to ~59.5% was driven by better engagement and course quality ([Frontiers in Psychology, 2022](#)).

- **Key Factors:** Success hinges on learner engagement, course design, and technical support ([Educational Technology Research and Development, 2022](#)).

Longitudinal Studies and Attitude Changes

- **Pre-Pandemic:** Readiness declined among dental students from 2014 to 2017 ([PMC, 2018](#)).
- **During Pandemic:** Negative attitudes peaked at 13.3%, later improving ([PMC, 2023](#)).
- **Challenges:** Technical issues and mental health concerns persisted ([PMC, 2023](#)).

Post-Pandemic Trends and Blended Learning

- **Shift to Blended Learning:** By 2025, 98% of universities offer online courses, with online university enrolment up 11% ([Devlin Peck, 2025](#)).

Detailed Comparison Table: Enrolment and Satisfaction

Year	Enrolment (% Taking Online Courses)	Student Satisfaction (%)	Notes
2017	33.1%	~59.5%	Steady growth, flexibility valued
2018	34.7%	-	Continued increase
2020 (Fall)	75%	41.3%	Pandemic peak, technical challenges
2022 (Fall)	54%	-	Above pre-pandemic levels
2023	-	~59.5%	Recovery tied to engagement

Conclusion

Online learning’s popularity soared during the pandemic (75% enrollment in fall 2020), stabilizing at 54% by fall 2022. Satisfaction dipped to 41.3% during the crisis but rebounded to pre-pandemic levels (~59.5%) by 2023, bolstered by advancements in technology and course design. Blended learning has solidified as a key trend, with 98% of universities offering online options by 2025.

Key Citations

- [Inside Higher Ed, 2018](#)
- [Forbes Advisor, 2024](#)
- [Frontiers in Psychology, 2023](#)
- [Tandfonline, 2021](#)
- [Devlin Peck, 2025](#)