



## Merits and Demerits of Online Learning as Seen by Iraqi EFL Students

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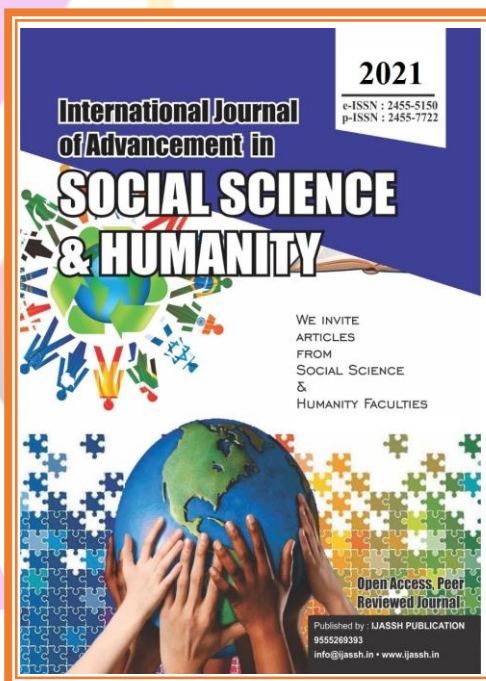
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**ABSTRACT**

To control the spread of COVID-19, various countries have agreed to temporarily close educational institutions around the world. Studying has not stopped, but it now takes place entirely online, thanks to distance learning programs offered by schools and colleges. Over the last decade, online learning has risen at an exponential rate. The coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) caused educational institutions to recognize online instruction as a result of the collapse and closure of the classroom.

As a result, learners were increasingly optimistic about the value of online teaching and learning during the pandemic. In the face of disasters like the COVID-19 epidemic, online learning is discovered to be a blessing rather than a burden to academic progress. Educators, intellectuals, and researchers would be concerned about the proposed prospective path of study. Many countries have decided to temporarily close educational facilities in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Online learning, on the other hand, has not stopped; in fact, institutions and universities today provide totally online education. This study attempts to learn more about how the COVID-19 situation may affect students' learning by examining current evidence from recent worldwide statistics on the most common way of online learning. It focuses on the various ways in which the virus, as well as the steps used to control it, may affect student success as well as the success of students in the college. According to 'conservative' projections, students would lose an average of one year of learning. It's also indicated that pupils aren't all affected in the same way by COVID-19, which will affect them.

**Keywords:** *Online Learning, Traditional Learning, COVID-19, Pre-Test Method & -- Post-Test Method.*

### Objective of The Study

The study aims to investigate the value of online teaching and learning during the pandemic.

### Research Question

What are the main important *Merits and Demerits* of online learning from the points of view of Iraqi EFL students?

### THE CONCEPT OF ONLINE LEARNING

Online learning is here to stay, and it is quite likely to grow in the future. The history of online education clearly illustrates that it has grown at an exponential rate, propelled by internet access, better technologies, and high demand. It has grown from correspondence programs in the nineteenth century to dynamic and well-designed institutional online facilities in the twenty-first century. We can fairly expect that, as a result of a rigorous process of reshaping, refining, and restructuring, online education will continue to expand its reach and influence in higher education. However, it is unlikely to replace traditional higher education; rather, it will serve as a supplement. Online education, on the other hand, is growing in popularity due to its adaptability, accessibility, and affordability, particularly among people who would otherwise be unable to obtain education due

to physical distance, schedule conflicts, or high costs (Sun & Chen, 2016: 170).

In order to comprehend the potential for educational productivity afforded by online learning options, it's also vital to look at the pedagogical and practical affordances through which efficiency improvements might be attained. Online learning has also been offered as a means of improving educational achievement, expanding access at cheaper costs than traditional methods, or allowing great teachers to focus on what they do best by automating or discharging more monotonous duties (Bakia et al., 2012: 12).

Online learning makes use of a variety of technologies to deliver education, including the internet, email, chat, new groups and messages, and audio and video conferencing, all of which are disseminated across computer networks. This allows learners to learn at their own pace and at their own convenience. Online education necessitates a lot of resources and careful planning. Teachers are considered facilitators rather than transmitters of material awareness, and ICT is seen as a resource that enhances students' learning. Learners benefit from free e-learning resources. E-Learning has reintroduced the pleasure of learning and has shown to be more appealing to pupils due to its inventive

and engaging material delivery (Arorra, 2019: 32).

When teachers and students develop knowledge through subjects and experiences, objectively weigh vastly diverse perspectives, and combine multiple inquiries, education can be revolutionary. By creating critical learning spaces, educators can help students improve their ability for interpretation, creativity, critical synthesis, creative expression, self-awareness, and intentionality. The rapid expansion of online courses in the United States and around the world has been attributed to the support of such revolutionary strategies (Sun & Chen, 2016: 57-58).

### **Traditional Learning Vs Online Learning**

An alternative to conventional educational settings is virtual education. Since virtual schools provide a new approach to courses, growth in them can be seen worldwide. Schools of all sizes and profiles are attentive to fast-rising online courses that are gaining more and more ground. A multimedia class is part of the distance learning network, which typically includes outside of the classroom experience, course content, themes, assessments, evaluations, and other resources. Computer learning may be as efficient as conventional learning, as a wide variety of applications in this field are used by most students (organization and

presentation, web browsing, email, social networking sites, etc.). Generally speaking, we consider the plurality of educational circumstances in which the means of ICT are used extensively by e-learning. The e-learning platforms' technical facilities satisfy the desires of the students and seek to fulfil their training needs (Vali Ilie & Frăsineanu, 2019: 1193).

To achieve this, a strong balance between the scientific and technological aspects and the pedagogical ones is important. Cognitive learning used a few decades ago as a response to behaviourism, describes learning as a quest for the knowledge stored in memory, after the primary processing of information, the creation and abstract processing of mental images. The conventional learning paradigm focuses on the delivery of information, teacher's reflections, construct granted, abstract symbols, replication of endorsement-retention, finalizations and targeted applications (Ibid).

Higher education institutions in the United States and around the world have increasingly adopted an online learning delivery model in place of, or in addition to, traditional on-campus education. Over 6.1 million students took at least one online course in 2010, accounting for 31% of all higher education students, according to a 2011 estimate. According to a more recent

report (Allen and Seamans, 2013), the number of students taking at least one online course increased by 570,000, bringing the total to one million. According to the survey, the number of students taking at least one online course has reached an all-time high, with a 9.3% growth rate, and there is no hint that this trend will slow down in the future. Many individuals are curious as to what is causing this shift and how it will affect institutions across the country (Alsaaty et al., 2016: 31).

As shown below, academic contributions to the study of online education's efficacy in comparison to traditional face-to-face education can be divided into four schools of thought:

1. "The sameness of online and traditional modes of learning, that is, the two modes are equally effective from the educational standpoint";
2. "The superiority of the online mode relative to the face-to-face mode";
3. "The superiority of the face-to-face mode relative to the online mode"; and
4. "The superiority of the hybrid education, that is, face-to-face lectures blended with an appropriate level of online learning" (Alsaaty et al., 2016: 33).

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning**

Blended learning allows teachers to have use of the limited. Time with their students. By transferring some of the traditional classroom activities to the online. World, you end up spending. Less time talking to the class and more time working with individual students.

#### **1-More Efficient Classroom Time Management**

Blended learning allows teachers to use limited recourses. They devote attention to their pupils. Some traditional educational activities can be moved to the internet. You end up spending all of your money. Spend less time speaking to the class as a whole and more time with individual students.

#### **2- Easier Categorization**

With greater time to deal with one-on-one clients. Teachers discover that they can better distinguish between students in the classroom. Individualize instruction, respond to student inquiries, and provide personalized feedback. It also automatically recognizes various internet resources, such as mathematics. Exercises can be structured to grow increasingly tough as the student's correct responses increase.

### **3- Students Who Are More Engaged**

Online videos are used in blended formats such as flipped classrooms. Also, there are resources. Students should be prepared before coming to class. Students are already learning in this manner. You'll learn the theory and be able to put it into practice during class. The class is important in this model. The role is taken by the teacher. Mentoring and instructing.

### **4- Encourage Pupils to Be More Creative**

There are hundreds of thousands. Of the internet. Students can use these resources to create movies, animations, new media, and podcasts. This provides the kids with. New approaches to working and expressing what they've learned. Stronger students can undertake extra work online to demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension of the subject without wasting valuable study time.

### **5- Students Who Are More Prepared**

Students perform better in class when you finish working online to prepare them in advance (as in the flipped class approach, for example). This usually signifies that they are more invested in the subject from the beginning.

### **6- Instilling 21<sup>st</sup> Century Talents in Students**

Students today must learn to work, study, and cooperate online. They must also develop the critical and creative thinking skills that are required by modern employers. By encouraging your students to work, share, and contribute online, blended learning can help you teach these abilities.

### **7- A Reduction in Paperwork**

Many teacher desks and bags are piled high with student papers that must be reviewed and returned. Scores and comments must be written down in the student's notebook or on the report card. Many tasks are digitized by online learning platforms, allowing you to stand out online (from school or at home).

### **8- All of Your Instructional Materials in One Location**

Any computer that has an Internet connection can access online resources. This means you should only submit one video clip, website link, or article at a time to a newspaper or other resource. You, your students, and other teachers will be able to access them from their personal computers or from a computer lab with Internet access.

### 9- Reduced Costs

Although developing the information technology needed to teach blended learning may need some upfront investment, many schools and universities report cheaper long-term expenditures due to a reduced textbook, paper, and copy costs.

### 10- Parents Who Are Better Knowledgeable

Because most children perform their work at home, their parents have more opportunities to participate and assist them. As a result, children receive more parental support, and parents have a closer relationship with their sons' schoolwork.

In addition to the benefits of online learning, it also includes a number of drawbacks. According to Hoffman (2011), reported in (Fakhir, 2015: 22), online learning methods confront numerous problems, including ensuring that participants can successfully use technology, changing teachers' perceptions toward the usefulness of the blend, and so on. Learn, manage, and track learners' progress, discover the optimal fit between delivery medium and performance goals, and ensure that online resources provide engagement rather than simply instructing learners. He went on to say that disability and misunderstanding irritation, as well as the discomfort that comes with it, may be

unfavourable. Productivity, learning, social interactions, and overall accomplishment are all affected. In addition, there are numerous obstacles in the areas of evaluation, monitoring, and classroom management.

According to Chen and Lu (2013: 29-30), students' cognitive load, workplace conditions, and learning methodologies were all negatively impacted by online learning. Teachers frequently misunderstand blended learning to mean that it is their responsibility to be enthusiastic about the network platform and to provide a variety of activities that provide students with more information. This demonstrates detrimental consequences on students' learning mix, resulting in bad outcomes. Because students have diverse learning methods and experiences, some prefer to summarize and remark on textbooks, for example. When we supply excellent instructional information to students and ask them to engage in digital learning, the impact of learning will be impacted. And because the network platform functioning is poor, the negative consequences of navigation are lost, it is a difficult procedure.

Finally, greater expenses will have an impact on the impact of student learning throughout the implementation of online learning since they raise the cost of accessing resources. Some teachers use electronic resources to communicate with

students, such as e-books, and these are called teaching resources for blended learning. This method of instruction results in a lack of engagement, and it is possible to improve internet learning by giving students the necessary internet resources. Many learning resources, in actuality, consume excessive amounts of energy and are also seen as a waste of time (Chen and Lu, 2013: 29-30).

### **Covid-19 and Online Learning**

Online learning has progressed over the previous decade as a result of its accessibility. Online learning strives to make it accessible to both teachers and students, allowing them to practice wherever they want and without the constraints of traditional learning. However, the world is trembling as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Due to the crisis, educational institutions have been compelled to partially cease the school calendar. Whether to comply with law enforcement or to immediately embrace online instruction, a certain level of education is required (Kamal, 2020: 217).

It's fascinating to consider the learners' learning loss from the perspective of the COVID-19 situation. This loss of inaccessible human capital would have a detrimental impact on productivity, creativity, and incomes, including future drop-in student cohort earnings directly

affected by the lockout. According to preliminary estimates, French elementary school children lost between EUR 700 and 800 million per year as a result of the COVID-19 confinement regime. These prices are substantially larger when earnings losses are added together at all levels of education. In order to limit COVID-19's harmful impact on education, policymakers should bear this aspect and these facts in mind when determining the amount to spend (Di Pietro et al., 2020: 3-5).

COVID-19's impact on education presents at least two key challenges for decision-makers. Following that, steps can be done to ensure that more vulnerable kids make up for the academic losses they sustained during their lock-up. This can be done efficiently and effectively to ensure that such a situation does not lead to long-term educational and economic inequity. Second, because it is possible that public institutions would be unable to operate entirely in-person throughout (or throughout) the upcoming academic year, new teaching and learning alternatives should be implemented. Although the mixed/revolving learning system (with offline and online components) is an intriguing solution, it is important to note that: (1) the curriculum must be redesigned; (3) younger children may struggle to adapt to this model, particularly for the online learning component; and (4) the architecture



of several existing school buildings will not be appropriate if the physical distance must be maintained (Di Pietro et al., 2020: 5-6).

### **Requirements of Online Learning**

For students to enroll in an online course, they must have access to a computer, the Internet, and the desire to succeed in a non-traditional classroom. Online courses provide an excellent approach to delivering courses that are not constrained by time or location, allowing education to be offered from anywhere at any time. Learners are discovering the online world as a convenient method to fit education into their hectic schedules. For many of today's students, the ability to attend a course 24 hours a day, seven days a week from any device with Internet connectivity is a significant motivator (Stem, 216: 3).

The requirement credits for earning a post-secondary degree are deeply connected to this cost and higher education issue. Traditionally, before receiving a bachelor's degree, students must obtain the majority of a company's college credits. The issue of contention is how online classes will be used to give credits or certificates, and many online educators seek credit equivalency. For example, Coursera's developers, Daphne Koller and Andrew Ng worked with the American Council on Education to suggest credit equivalents for specific online courses. The purpose of this initiative is to

increase graduation rates, reduce the time it takes to get a degree, reduce the cost of higher education, and provide more possibilities for nontraditional students. However, it is uncertain whether colleges would accept the suggestion, and there is also concern that the transfer could dilute a traditional degree (Nguyen, 2015: 310).

Finally, online learning has the potential to provide world-class education to anyone, wherever they are, as long as they have Internet access. Various blogs and businesses are featured. Despite the fact that online learning is typically inefficient compared to traditional face-to-face learning, some of the claimed advantages and benefits of online learning are substantial. The essence of the issue is that the most basic element of online learning is the efficacy of the online configuration in educating pupils when compared to the traditional format. To overcome this issue, the positive, negative, mixed, and null results of online learning efficacy relative to the traditional format will be examined (Nguyen, 2015: 310).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The researcher used an experimental strategy that was suited for the nature of the study, which was aimed at determining the impact of online learning on second-year

students in Iraqi institutions' reading skills. Two groups of students were chosen to determine the influence of the independent variable (online learning strategy) on the dependent variable (reading skills): an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received instruction over the internet, while the control group received instruction in the usual manner.

This study makes use of an experimental design to investigate the impact of online learning on Iraqi EFL University students' reading comprehension skills of the study sample. A pre and post-reading comprehension test was applied to the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG) in order to compare the results. The test was applied during the first course of the academic year (2020 / 2021) at Al-Qadisiyah University. The researcher has done this for the purpose of establishing the validity and reliability of the test:

Group	Total
Experimental Group	30
Control Group	30

Table (1) the sample of the study

### Data Collection

Students' reading comprehension and vocabulary scores were the subjects of the

pre-test data. This type of information was gathered by administering the pre-test to both groups. The control group was taught using the traditional face-to-face method, which was defined as a teaching-learning class led by the teacher rather than the students in a classroom where students read and do exercises from pre-determined textbooks; the teacher closely followed the course outline, ensuring that all learning activities were completed in the classroom.

The experimental group, on the other hand, was taught using a mixed learning approach. The researcher taught the pupils some basic reading abilities in the first two lectures, which took place in the classroom. The researcher began allocating students to online lectures utilizing the Google Classroom technology in subsequent lectures. These lectures cover new chapters from the same book that they discussed in their face-to-face lesson. They were encouraged to participate in the online class by answering questions, discussing concepts, and sharing their thoughts on what they had read.

The course took place twice a week, with each instruction lasting an hour. The post-test was used in both sections by the end of the course. The test measured their reading comprehension skills and compared the post-test of both groups to their pre-test to see if there was any growth or

development with the blended learning segment.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the collection of data for the two techniques of pre-test and post-test, the application of the test methods indicated above is separated into two groups of students, one of which is termed an experimental group and the other is called a control group. In two groups, the two test techniques were used independently.

The assumptions for the statistical test (t-test) were evaluated before executing the t-test, and the data were determined to meet these assumptions.

### **Findings of the Study**

#### **---Pre-test method**

In the t-test, we focus our attention on testing the null hypotheses and the alternative hypothesis and according to the data we will make the statistical decision to accept or reject the null hypothesis, where the null hypothesis states, "There is no statistically significant difference at the significance level 0.05 between the control group and the experimental group of the pre-test " against the alternative hypothesis", "there is a statistically significant difference at the significance level 0.05 between the control group and the experimental group of the pre-test " and after building the above hypotheses, these hypotheses must be tested using the t-test. In the light of the results, it can be decided to accept or reject the null hypothesis. As shown in the following table:

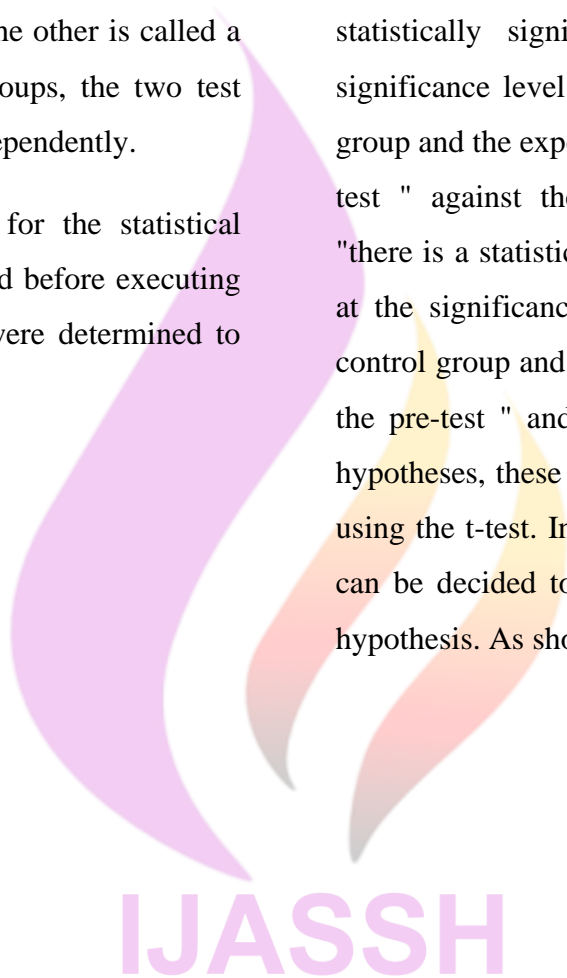


Table No. (2) "The t-test for the control group and the experimental group for the pre-test"

Independent Samples Test							
Pre-test		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for equality of means			
		F	sig	t	d.f	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
		Equal variances assumed	3.390	0.071	0.108	58	0.915
Equal variances not assumed			0.108	55	0.915	0.3000	

From the results presented in the above table for (Levene's Test for Equality of Variances), we find that the value of (F) equals (3.390) which is an insignificant value now (sig) of (F) with a value of (0.071) that is greater than (0.05) According to these results, we will accept the assumption that the variance is equal, and reject the hypothesis that the variance is not equal. Whereas, the two control groups and the experimental group from two societies are not different, meaning that the difference is homogeneous between these two groups. Therefore, we will rely on the analysis on Equal variances assumed row, to complete the rest of the analysis.

Through the results listed in the above table, we find that the value of (t) at

the degree of freedom (58) has reached (0.108), which is not significant now, the value of the level of significance (in column Sig. (2-tailed)) is equal to (0.915) and it is much greater From (0.05) and therefore we will accept the null hypothesis which states that "there is no statistically significant difference at the significance level 0.05 between the control group and the experimental group of the pre-test " and we reject the alternative hypothesis which states "there is a difference is statistically significant at the level of significance 0.05 between the control group and the experimental group of the pre-test ". Thus, the Pre-test had an equal effect on the experimental group and the control group".

Among the difference between the mean differences, we find that the difference between the two experimental groups and the control group. It was equal to (0.3000), which indicates the convergence of the values of the two groups above in the pre-test.

**---post-test method**

The sample under test is also equal to (30) items for each group. Also, the assumptions for the t-test were confirmed, and after the assumptions are fulfilled, this test can be performed on the data under study. Where Table No. (3) represents a statistical description of the two groups, as follows:

Table No. (3) represents the statistical description of the post-test for the control group and the

Group Statistics					
	groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
post-test	control group	30	24.1667	9.13532	1.66787
	experimental group	30	36.4333	11.46113	2.09251

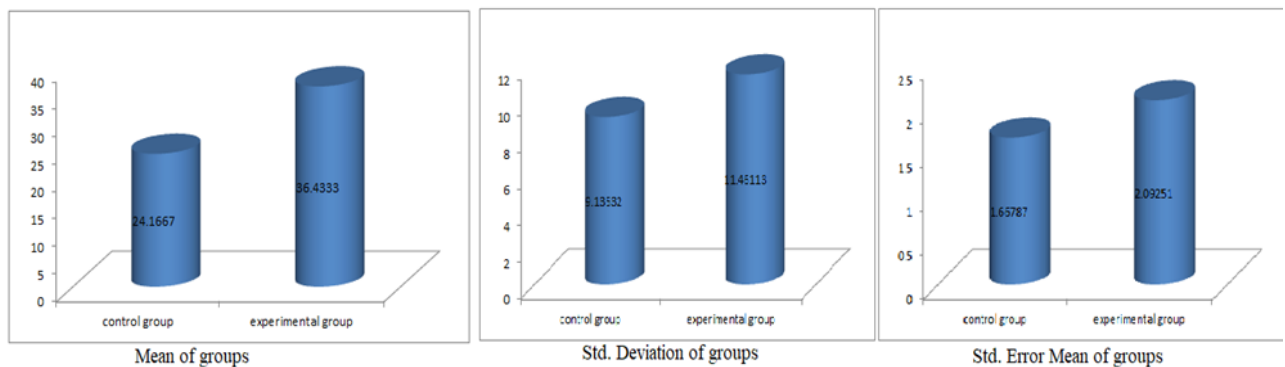
experimental group.

From the results presented in Table No. (3), it is clear that the average of the control group was equal to (24.1667), and with a standard deviation of (9.13532). But the average of the experimental group was equal to (36.4333) and with a standard deviation of (11.46113) and after comparison between the average of the two groups and the standard deviation for them we find that the average of the control group is much less

than the average of the experimental group) where the difference between the two averages is very large, this is an indication, however, the post-test had an unequal effect on the two groups and thus the post-test had good results and a clear effect. We find that the value of the standard deviation of the control group was equal to (9.13532), but the standard deviation of the experimental group was equal to (11.46113).

Based on a comparison of the standard deviation of the two groups, the values of the post-test of the control group were close to each other, but the values of the post-test of the experimental group were rather far apart. The values of the post-test for the control group were close to each other, as their value was (1.66787), but they were equal to (2.09251) the values of the

post-test for the experimental group, and based on the comparison of the two results, we found that the values of the post-test for the control group were more closely related to each other than the values of the post-test for the experimental group. The diagrams below serve to illustrate this point:



Statistical description of post-test method

Figure No. (2) shows the statistical description of the post-test.

**-- post-test method**

In the t-test, we focus our attention on testing the null hypotheses and the alternative hypothesis and according to the data we will make the statistical decision to accept or reject the null hypothesis, where the null hypothesis states, "There is no statistically significant difference at the significance level 0.05 between the control group and the experimental group of the post-test "Against the alternative

hypothesis" There is a statistically significant difference at the significance level 0.05 between the control group and the experimental group of the post-test ". After building the above hypotheses, these hypotheses must be tested using the t-test. In the light of the results, it can be decided to accept or reject the null hypothesis. As shown in the following table:

Independent Samples Test							
P o s t- t e s t		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for equality of means			
		F	sig	t	d.f	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
		Equal variances assumed	0.657	0.421	-4.584	58	0.000
Equal variances not assumed			-4.584	55	0.000	12.2667-	

Table No. (4): "The t-test for the control group and the experimental group for the post-test"

From the results presented in the above table for (Levene's Test for Equality of Variances), we find that the value of (F) equals (0.657) which is not significant now (sig) of the value of (F) and its value (0.421) is greater than (0.05) According to these results, we will accept the assumption that the variance is equal, and reject the hypothesis that the variance is not equal. Since the two groups, the control group and the experimental group, belong to two groups that are not different, that is, the heterogeneity between these two groups is homogeneous. Therefore, we will rely on the analysis on Equal variances assumed row, to complete the rest of the analysis.

Through the results listed in the above table, we find the value of (t) at the degree of freedom (58) in a language (\* 4.584) which is a significant value now. The

value of the level of significance (in the Sig column (2-tailed)) is equal to (0.000) which is much less than (0.05) Consequently, we will reject the null hypothesis that states that "there is no statistically significant difference at the significance level 0.05 between the control group and the experimental group for the post-test " and accepts the alternative hypothesis that "there is a difference with Statistical significance at the significance level 0.05 between the control group and experimental group for the post-test".

As a result, the post-test had a significant and clear influence on the experimental group when compared to the control group, and the experimental group's arithmetic mean is now bigger than the control group's arithmetic mean. We discovered that the difference between the

two groups, the experimental and control groups, was equal to the difference between the mean differences (12.2667). In the post-test, this reflects the difference between the two groups' values.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Electronic education is a form of distance and distance education that has its roots in online learning. If the student cannot connect to other students but is in the position of the lecture, he could be lagging behind or ahead of them, and then he may select the teacher and the resources to learn it. Muslims have dealt with it through Qur'anic schools and madrasa circles. Technical development in different fields has been observed in the present period, and one of the most influential things that occurred was this. The era is the information revolution that has brought about a significant revolution in the essence of obtaining information,

Both at the level of lesson or lecture, or at the level of general education and knowledge circulated, and this is what facilitates the growth of the idea of person or self-education offered and assisted by e-learning, where the learner continues his learning according to his skill and his abilities and speed of learning. According to his previous knowledge and expertise, but despite these benefits of e-learning, it is still in its infancy and faces barriers There are

many obstacles, especially in terms of usability of infrastructure. The emphasis on educational progress The essence of e-learning success depends on the growth and selection of e-learning.

The required one that satisfies the educational criteria, such as constant upgrading to keep track with changes and take into account the controls and expectations of the educational framework selected to ensure the learner's level and progress and achieve educational and educational objectives. One of the major innovations with a strong impact on the academic side is e-learning, since it has a smaller cast, a shortening of time and commitment, and helps all users to learn everywhere they are. We remember that in normal circumstances, a specific number of universities turn to this form of education, and some of them are not discussed at all, because understanding the essence of its use and benefiting from it does not even offer only goals, but in the existing two years and in the present two years. Owing to the dissemination of the Covid19 virus, which hindered the real involvement of teachers and students in institutions, the instructional methods of continuing the conventional educational methods forced officials to establish and activate the system in all educational institutions in order to complete the scientific process.



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