Class-home Connection Using Communication Technology and its Impact on Anxiety Reduction and Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT:

This study tries to shed light on the importance of using communication technology in class-home connection, where the two-way communication that requires electronic interactive dialogue between teachers and parents are used, and how this communication may enhance students' English language academic performance and help in reducing their classroom anxiety. The sample of the study consists of thirty EFL secondary school students with their parents. Two instruments were used to collect data; structured interview with parents, observation checklists to measure students' anxiety, in addition to use students' academic performance to determine their level of achievement in English. The results show that parents have positive attitudes towards using communication technology in class-home connection. It further demonstrates that students' level of anxiety was reduced notably after applying the experiment, when the parents connect with the teacher daily, in addition to palpable improvement in students' academic performance in English language.

Keywords: Class-home Connection, Communication Technology, Academic Performance, Anxiety Reduction.

Introduction

The decision of involving families in schools work and deals with them as active partners is not an easy thing unless finding real and applicable tools for it. Theoretically, Epstein's theory of intersection of the influence focuses on the crucial role of the three constituents; the school, family, and community for the sake of satisfying students' needs. Epstein (1992, p.1140-41) states that the history of the communication between the three institutions, which socialize and educate children, can effect on future success of students, in addition to be in the circle of importance for both school and family. In his theory that based on many studies, he recommends that "the status variables are not the most important measures towards understanding the parents' involvement. At all level classes, the

evidence suggests that the school policies, the teacher and family's activities are more important than race, parents' education, family size, marital status and even the degree of determination if the parents continue to be part of their children education" (p.109).

Finding suitable communication methods to connect schools and the parents they serve remains a challenge for many administrators (Cary, 2006). Therefore, the use of smart and strategic aids of new information and communication technologies can make the communication possible and providing external outreach to parent engagement (Carr, 2012). The use of technology is of ultimate importance in this concern. It can improve the kind of communication among people as stated by Pavlik (2007) who reports that the new technologies of communication have a very good influence on public relations. In the same context, Springston (2001, p. 606) mentioned that the "new technologies are enhancing, and to some degree changing, public relations roles". The thing that makes this process easier nowadays is the use of smartphones applications such as using social media for the two way communication (home and school) which proves to be easy, quick and cheap in many worlds' contexts. Ramirez (2001) confirms that integrating technology to school- home communication can help both communicate quickly to a broad parent community. More specifically, the use of internet technology, specifically with smartphones, is the most used tool that can facilitate the proposed communication between schools and parent community. Salend et al,. (2004, p. 65) state that the use of the internet can help to be an "interactive tool for individualizing homework and supporting the involvement of families in the homework process".

A lot of applications can serve the communication between families and teachers. Giannetti & Sagarese (1998) clarify that the frequent development of reports, phone calls, e-mail messages, and social media applications, which are the implementations of smartphones, could boost and improve leaners achievement more than the traditional report card. The use of these technological applications inside schools called blended learning, if it is used by teachers for teaching aims, which is essential in EFL contexts nowadays as stated by Al-Obaydi (2019). Jawad & Abdul Mahdi (2019) also Focus on the importance of mobile learning in English language teaching as a compliment to the role of the teacher in class.

Communication technologies can improve the two way communication between school and home by providing new and more effective ways in which "communications can be produced, distributed, displayed, and stored" (Wright, 2001, p. 6). It can be defined as information, applications, resources, and facilities accessed via technology (Selwyn, 2004). Technology generally can motivate students in relation to class attendance and engagement (Al-Obaydi, 2017). The use of communication technology, specifically the use of social media can have positive and negative impacts on social environment of people (Yıldırım & Gansinger, 2018). Put this in mind, it can transform practices and build new expectations regarding school home communication. The intended communication involves one-way or two-way exchanges (Berger, 1991).

One-way communication occurs when only teachers seek to inform parents about their children activities or progress. Two-way communication requires interactive dialogue between teachers and parents. Conversations may occur via different tools such as telephone calls, parent-teacher conferences, and social media communication tools.

As far as teachers' role is concerned, it is important to put in mind that teachers should have enough experiences in relation to dealing correctly with learners' families. In this way, Caspe (2003) focuses on having teachers' preparation and professional development programs that should promote the development of communication abilities and skills for teachers. Brewer & Kallick (1996, p. 181) confirm that technology can provide teachers with communication opportunities "not limited by school hours or location".

Cameron & Lee (1997) made two studies to see the satisfaction by teachers and parents concerning the use of voice-mail technology. Results show that enhanced connection in both quality and quantity for upper elementary-aged learners. Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickulu (2010) clarify that still there is a gap in accessing between school and home due to many factors such as poverty, language obstacles and some cultural challenges. Heath, Maghrabi, & Carr (2015, p.388) agree that their research results "support the view that there is a high degree of information communication technologies alignment between the parents and the principal and his staff, and there is a high degree of satisfaction regarding communications efficacy". Johnson & Johnson (2016) in this concern, study the effects of engaging families in developing learners' funds of knowledge. Parents may lack time to deal with their children, so they prefer to communicate with teachers virtually and in this way teachers can use internet-based website to inform parents about their children (Ivanova & Doncheva, 2019).

It is evident that educators consider that class- home connection is a key predictor to success. In this concern, Hayes (2011, p. 154) comments that "parental involvement can be conceptualized as the means by which parents support their children's education and development to ultimately provide a positive influence on their academic achievement and school adjustment". Unfortunately, most parents do not know how to deal with their children and what is expected of them, or how to communicate to get information and resources they may use to make their children's' experience of school more success (Murphy, 2013). Communication, in this context, may be defined as a "two-way process of convergence" (Rogers, 2003, p. 6).

In the environment of learning a foreign language, classroom anxiety considered as one of the main factors that may prevent learning. In this context, Krashen (1982) states that "low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety" (p. 31). This comes as part of Krashen's hypothesis of effective filter which means that learning can occur easily in a low anxiety atmosphere. School Teachers should know that the process of language

learning is usually strainful, and that the "tension and discomfort related to language learning call for the attention of the language teaching profession" (Horwitz, 2001: 122). Gregersen (2003) argues that teachers usually fails to identify students' anxiety and deals with it as either low motivation or poor attitude towards learning. Even if this point is right, teachers are supposed to think more of these reasons of anxiety and cooperate more with parents to solve them. In relation to language anxiety for mail students and as the sample of the study includes only mail students, Jawad & Al-Obaydi (2015: 15) conclude that "Male student-teachers have more language anxiety than female student-teachers as they have low self-esteem and low personal expectation". Put this in mind, it is essential to study factors that can effect in reducing the degree of anxiety that students may feel in their English language classes. One of these factors is the kind of the relationship between class and home.

Learners who learn English as a foreign language in EFL context face a lot of challenges due to the many obstacles they face. One of these challenges is the attitude, which students construct, during their study in the classroom. In this context, Kannan (2009) confirms that learner's attitude may affect to a large extent on learning a foreign language as this may impact the process of learning negatively. So, working to help students gain positive attitude toward learning is the endeavor of this study. Communicative language teaching is prevailing nowadays in Iraq as the new communicative syllabuses and the governmental efforts show. English language teachers in Iraq take positive stance towards using communicative language teaching (Hussain, 2020), which needs extensive efforts from both teachers and families.

The main idea in this study is how to find more opportunities for parents and teachers, who are busy all the time, to communicate? Put the above discussion in mind, it is crucial to focus on two important issues; the first one is the level of learners in English language specifically if we know that they live in EFL context where the English language is used only in class, and how the communication between class and home can affect it based on what is stated by Auerbach (2012) that an important part of developing English language learners' educational experience is dependent on the kind of connections teachers develop with the learners' families. The second issue is the level of anxiety that young EFL learners may face in class and how the connection between class and home can affect it positively.

Questions of the study

1. What are the main attitudes of the parents concerning promoting the two way class-home connection using communication technology?
2. Is there any impact of using class-home connection, using communication technology, on EFL secondary school students' academic performance of English?
3. Is there any impact of using class-home connection, using communication technology, on EFL secondary school students' classroom anxiety reduction?

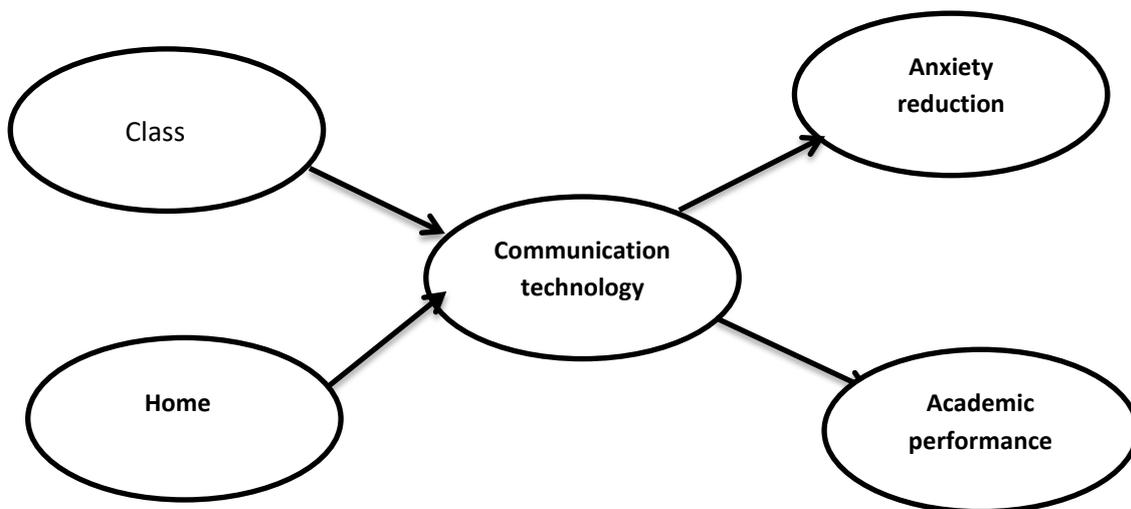**Methodology**
Theoretical Model

Figure 1 the theoretical model of the study

Sample of the Study

The sample of the study consists of thirty secondary school students with their parents, or at least one of them. The students belong to Al-Fouz secondary school in Baghdad governorate. They are all female students with the same age and they have equal academic backgrounds of their parents.

Instrument

The first instrument that used in this study consists of the structured interview that used to know the families attitudes concerning the type of the connection with the English language teacher of their children. The interview consists of five questions with different multiple choice items for each. The second instrument is an observation checklist that is used by the teacher to know the degree of anxiety of the learners after home-school connection was happened. In addition to that, the researcher depends on learners' academic performance marks in English language before and after the intended connection to see if there is any affect. The two instruments were constructed by the researcher and they are exposed to a group of specialists to ensure their face validity. Approximately, all specialists agree on the suitability of the instruments to the aims of the study except with some modifications that taken into consideration.

The Application of the Experiment

As a beginning step, the teacher interviewed the members of the students' families to know their viewpoints concerning the use of communication technology, specifically mobile media, in the two ways of connection with them. The time of the interview was an hour but most of them finish in less than that. Based on the results obtained from the interview, the teacher determines the kind of connection that will occur in the experiment. The connection with students' families lasts two months. During this period, the English language teacher of the students connects

with students' families daily. Sometimes, students' families are communicated with the teacher if there is any query concerning their sons or the homework. The number of the parents that participated in the interview was thirty. It has been depended on one of the parents, either the father or the mother to be responsible of following up the student. At that time, the teacher observed students in class and tried to construct decisions about their academic performance and their level of anxiety, whether increased or decreased. The teacher apply the observation checklist twice; before and after the experiment in order to determine the difference between them. Students' academic performance is also determined according to their achievement test before and after the experiment.

Results

The Results of the Interview

The final version of the interview consists of five questions; the results of them are as follows:

1. Do you usually use communication technology applications by smartphones all the time?

(Yes, partially, no)

The sample consists of thirty interviewees. All of them were interviewed by the researcher. The results show that twenty four of them were used communication technology applications by smart phones all the time so the answer is yes. Four of them said partially and only two said no, not all the time, see figure 1.
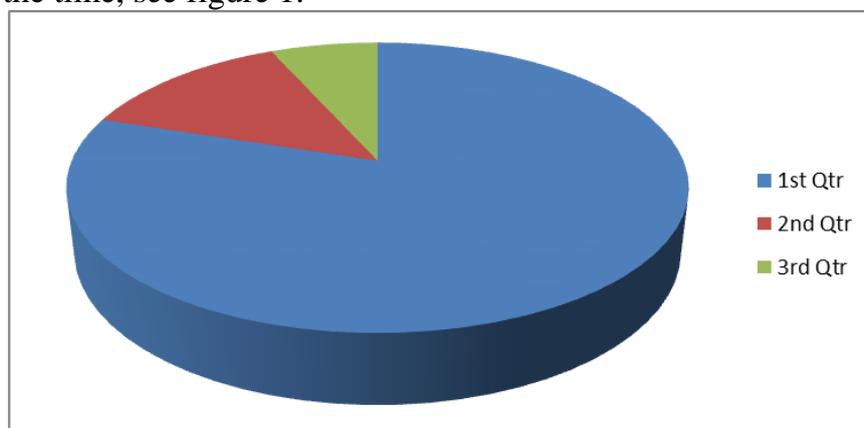

Figure 2 the result of the first question

2. Do you use the social media applications including the Watsapp, Viber, Facebook messenger, etc.?   (Sometimes, most of times, never)

Twenty interviewees answered they used the application of social media most of the time. The other ten interviewees said sometimes. No one said never as in figure 2 below.
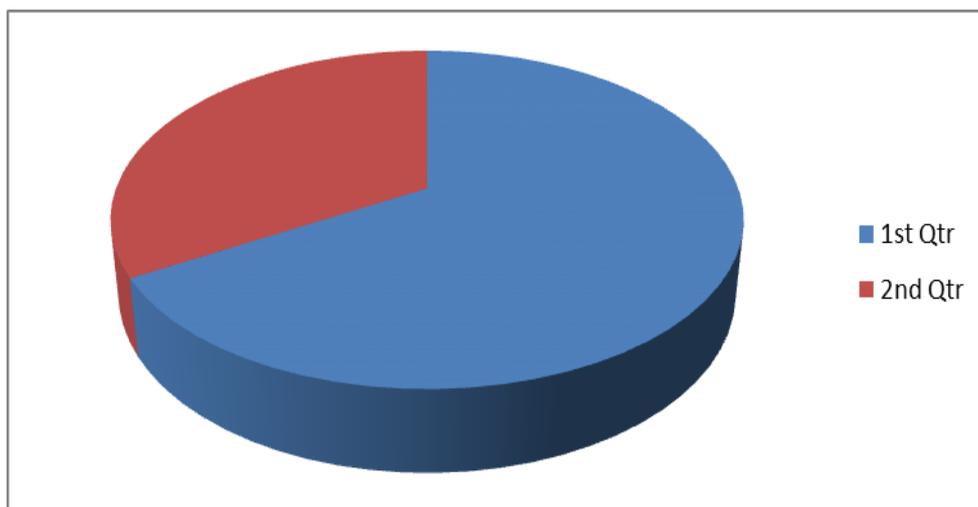
Figure 3 the result of the second question

3. Do you think that using social media applications via smart phones is a good way for home – class connection?   (yes I think so, No, I don't think so)

Figure 3 below shows that twenty seven out of thirty said "yes I think so". They convinced that such kind of connection is important. Only three individuals said "No, I don't think so".
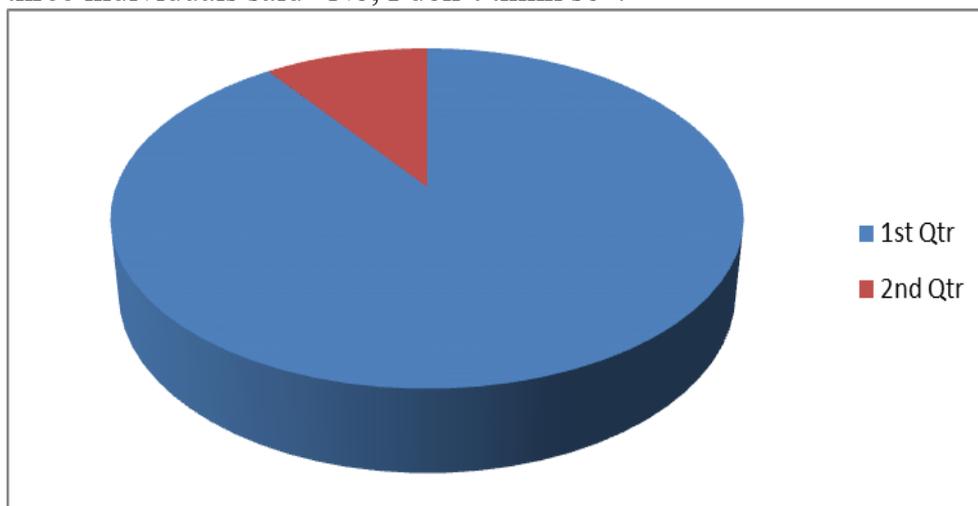

Figure 4 the result of the third question

4. Do you prefer meeting the teachers of your children physically in the school conferences or to communicate with them via smart phones? (meeting, smart phones, both of them)

Twenty one of the interviewees answered "both of them". Seven interviewees answered "smartphones", and only two interviewees answered "meetings" as in figure 4.
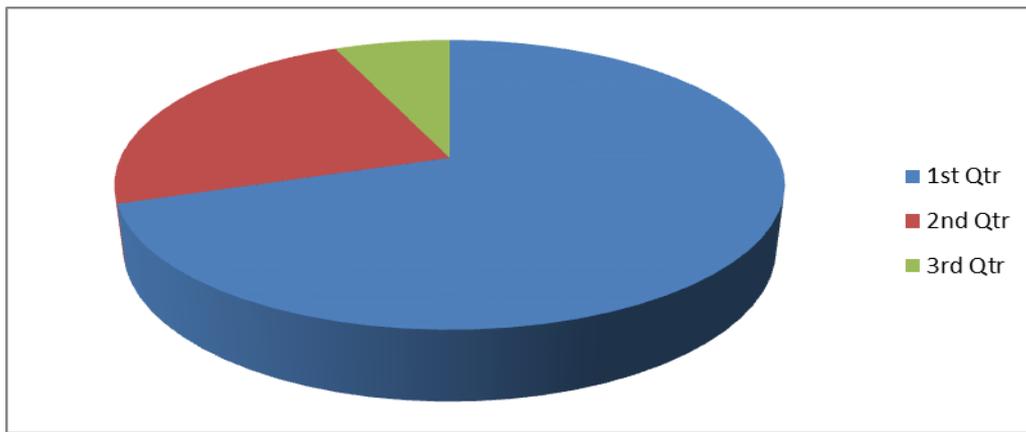
Figure 5 the result of the fourth question

5. How many times do you prefer to communicate with teachers? (Once a week, twice a week, daily, when needed).

    Eighteen interviewees said they want to communicate with teachers daily, five of them said twice a week, five of them said once a week, and the other two interviewees said when needed, see figure 5 below.
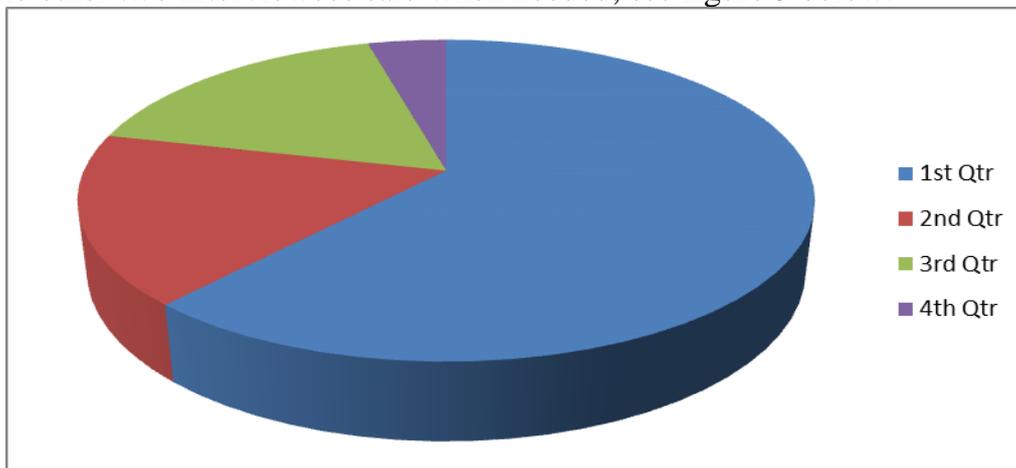

Figure 6 the result of the fifth question

The Results of the Anxiety Observation Checklist

    The anxiety observation checklist consists of twelve items, the teacher accordingly determines whether she/he agree, partially agree or disagree. The teacher applied the checklist twice, before and after the experiment. Table 1 below shows the difference in the mean score of the observation checklist before and after the experiment. It is clear that the relationship between the two observations is significant, as proved by using t-test formula, in favor of the post observation. This means that there is a positive effect of using the two way class-home smartphones connection on students' level of anxiety.

Table 1 the results of the pre-post anxiety observation checklist

The observation	Mean	S.V	Calculated t-test	Tabulated t-test	Significance
Pre-observation	115.23	9.75	9.56	1.96	Significant
Post-observation	124.89	11.34			

The Results of the Students' Academic Performance

The researcher depends on the mean score of the students' academic performance to determine whether class-home connection using smartphones has any positive effect on students' achievement. Results demonstrate that the mean score of the students' achievement test before the experiment was 65.5 out of 100, while the mean score after applying the experiment was 85.2 out of 100. This result shows that there is a highly positive impact of using class-home connection by smartphones on students' academic performance in English as clarified in figure 6 below.
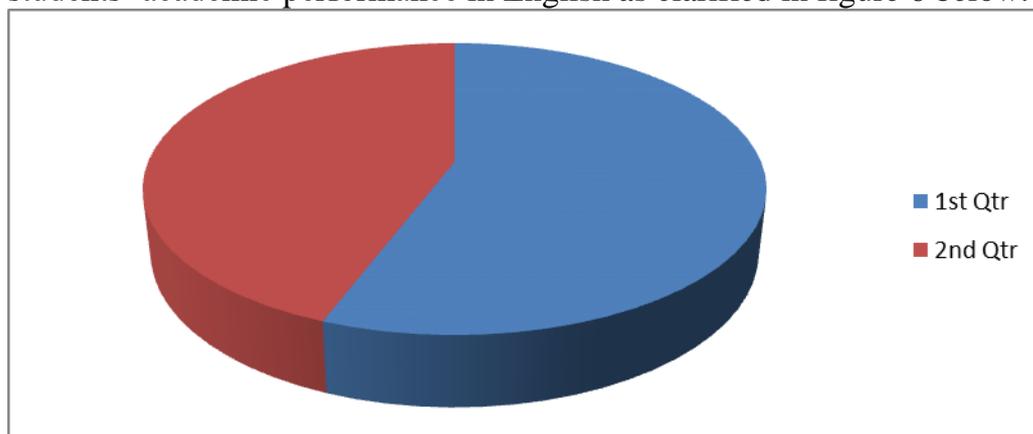

Figure 7 the result of the students' academic performance

Conclusion and Discussion

As the results of the present study demonstrate, the attitudes of parents were highly positive towards using communication technology in class-home connection. In the first question, most parents reply by yes (twenty four out of thirty) that they use the application of the social media all the time. This reply encourage the researcher to apply the suggested the connection via communication technology by smartphones. In the second question, twenty interviewees answered they used the application of social media most of the time. The rest of the sample said sometimes. This is also encouraging response. The third question, regarding the use of social media connection in the two way connection (from home to class and vice versa), clarifies that the majority of parents (twenty seven out of thirty) are agree that it is a good and easy way for the connection with class. Fourth question of the interview demonstrate that most interviewees answered "both of them" which means they prefer to see the teachers physically in addition to communicate with them by using the communication technology applications. This result is very important as it show that both ways of connecting with schools (conferences and the online communication) are crucial for the families. Parents need also to attend school to see in reality the place and the situation of their sons. The last question was concerning the times that parents prefer to call teachers. Most interviewees (eighteen out of thirty) said they want to communicate with teachers daily. This shows the degree of anxiety the parents and the students live in. Though this situation overload the teachers by receiving about thirty or more message daily, but it effects positively students' anxiety reduction and enhance their academic performance. So, based on the results stated above,

it is suggested to arrange the kind of connection between teachers and students in a specific table to ensure full understanding of the time of the two sides.

The results also show that the use of communication technology, specifically smartphones applications of social media in the connection between the parents and the teacher daily affects students' level of anxiety in reducing it during the experiment progressively as the students' show more enthusiasm and engagement during their daily activities. As far as students' academic performance in English language is concerned, it is clear that their level of understanding was improved significantly due to the help and follow up of their parents. Their interaction with the teacher and with their peers increased notably. They did their homework perfectly and on time. The cooperation between the teacher and the parents is reflected in the positive enhancement of students' performance. The difficulty of learning English in EFL contexts, where the use of English language limited to the English classes, needs real solutions to overcome all kinds of obstacles. The use of communication technology in abundance during the daily living of people whether teachers or parents, and the presence of many free social media applications makes such plans of solving students' problems, of all types, real and actual. It is worth mentioning that this study comes in line with Cameron & Lee (1997), Johnson & Johnson (2016), and Ivanova & Doncheva (2019) in that all of them agree on the importance of using different types of information technology to enhance class-home connection.

Implications and Recommendations

This study sheds light on the essential role of the family in the academic performance and in the psychological state of their students. The use of communication technology, specifically social media applications, may serve the three constituents of the educational process; the teacher, the students, and the parents. It helps parents to remain in picture of their sons' performance. By communicating with the teacher daily, they can follow up the homework and know if the student face specific problem in class. The teacher also benefit from this communication, though it will overload him/her, but it will be good supporter to them in their daily effort of teaching. The improvement of the students' level, as a result of the parents' role, will help teachers save time and efforts. Teachers generally, and language teachers specifically are invited to play the role of the researchers in the classroom as they must search all the time about the reasons that may lead some learners to regret and show hesitation or little enthusiasm towards learning. The main constituent of this circle is the student who will be confident and relaxed. The consolidation of efforts of both, parents and teachers, appear on the students' anxiety and academic performance. Students' anxiety represents an important factor that can hinder the actual level of the students. By becoming confident learner, this will affect positively his/her academic performance. All these factors work dynamically by exploiting the technology of communication as it facilitate the connection, providing lots of applications for chatting and

communication, in addition to be free most of the time. Therefore, it is essential to empower the three constituents of the educational process by suggesting and using organized tables of communication to guarantee its success.

One of the notable results of this study indicates that parents prefer both meeting teachers physically in addition to communicate via social media applications. This means that schools should recommend the continuous existence of school conferences periodically, in addition to communicate with teachers virtually, to provide a chance for parents and teachers to meet and discuss in many matters other than the academic level of the students.

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Appendix 1
The Version of the Interview
1. Do you usually use smart phones? (yes, partially, no)
2. Do you use the social media applications including the Watsapp, Viber, Facebook messenger, etc?   (sometimes, most of times, never)
3. Do you think that using social media applications via smart phones is a good way for home – class connection?   (yes I think so, No, I don't think so)
4. Do you prefer meeting the teachers of your children physically in the school conferences or to communicate with them via smart phones? (meeting, smart phones)
5. How many times do you prefer to communicate with teachers? (Once a week, twice a week, daily, when needed).

Appendix 2
Anxiety observation checklist

N.	Items	Agree	Partially agree	disagree
1	He always seems confused during the lesson.			
2	Do not participate in the lesson even if he well prepared.			
3	Confused when asked about the lesson.			
4	He thinks his answer is wrong though it is correct.			

5	Stutter when participating in the lesson.			
6	Do not share his answers with others.			
7	Confused upon oral performance.			
8	Hiding behind classmates during the lesson.			
9	He prefers to answer in Arabic.			
10	Happy when the lesson ends.			
11	Go outside and miss the class.			
12	Sit always at the end.			

تواصل البيت –الصف باستخدام تكنولوجيا الاتصالات وتأثيره في خفض القلق والأداء الأكاديمي

المستخلص

تحاول هـذه الدراسـة تسـليط الضـوء علـى أهميـة اسـتعمال تكنولوجيـا الاتصالات في تواصل او ارتباط البيت –الصف بحيـث اسـتعملت الاتصالات التـي تتطلب الحوار التفاعلي الالكتروني بـين المدرسـين والوالـدين واحتماليـة ان تعـزز هذه الاتصالات من الأداء الأكاديمي لطلبة اللغة الإنكليزيـة وان تسـاعد فـي خفـض القلق الصفي لهم. تكونت عينة الدراسـة مـن ثلاثـين طالبـا مـن طلبـة المـدارس الثانوية الدارسين اللغة الإنكليزية بوصفها لغـة أجنبيـة مـع والـديهم. تـم اسـتعمال اداتين او وسيلتين لجمع المعلومـات وهما المقابلة المنظمـة وقـوائم الملاحظـة لقيـاس قلق الطلبة فضلا عن اسـتعمال الأداء الأكـاديمي لتحديـد مسـتواهم التحصـيلي فـي اللغة الإنكليزية. اظهرت النتائج بـان الوالـدين او الإبـاء لـديهم اتجاهـات إيجابيـة نحو استعمال تكنولوجيا الاتصالات في تواصل البيـت – الصـف .اظهـرت الدراسـة أيضا انخفاض مستوى القلق لدى الطلبـة بصـورة ملحوظـة بعـد تطبيـق التجربـة عند تواصل الوالين مع المدرسين يوميا فضـلا عـن التحسـن الملمـوس فـي الأداء الاكاديمي للطلبة في اللغة الإنكليزية .