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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of a 5-year school family partnership project in Israel with the goals of improving children's reading and writing achievement and forming a parent's task force to create wide involvement and change. Participating in this study were 510 parents of the first graders enrolled in 21 classrooms in 7 Jewish schools in Acre, Israel. Of these parents, 236 parents participated in the School Family Partnership (SFP) program and 274 were in comparison schools. The 21 teachers also participated. Measures included a parent questionnaire assessing the extent to which they encouraged reading, the family literacy environment, and the home-school partnership; a teacher questionnaire evaluating the parents' involvement; and a city-wide reading and writing test for the children. Information on program implementation was based on observations, in the partnership activities, semi-structured interviews, the teachers' list of activities, and parent feedback. Findings indicated that parents', teachers', and children's outcomes were higher in the SFP program than in the comparison schools. However, the comparison program and the low-level implementation group were similar in parents' and teachers' outcomes. The highest scores or gains in all measures were in the high implementation classrooms. Children's outcomes in reading and writing were most sensitive to level of implementation; the better the implementation, the higher were test scores. Results from the structural equation analysis validated the links of parents' participation and evaluation of the program to a better home environment, which explained children's academic success. (Contains 16 references.) (Author/KB)

The impact of School Family Partnership (SFP) on parents' attitudes and children reading and writing in first grade

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Abstract

The partnership dialogue between home and school, are rooted in two research literatures. The first one deals with School Family Partnership based on Epstein's (1995) theory as a potential to enhance academic and social development. The second focus on the impact of home environment on becoming a successful learner in school. In a five-year project in Acre, Israel, parents and teachers participated in bi-weekly activities within schools and between schools (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Zelniker, 1999; Horovitz, 2001). The goals were to make the children succeeded in reading and writing and to form a parent's task force to create a community-wide involvement and change (Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1999, 2002).

The participants: In 1998, 510 parents of first grade children enrolled in 21 classrooms in seven Jewish schools, participate in the study. Of them 236 parents' participated in the SFP and 274 parents were in comparison schools. The 21 teachers of the 510 children also participate in the study.

The measures: included Parents' attitude measure (64 items with .93 Alpha), Teachers measure (with .96 alpha), and a reading and writing citywide test for the children. Parents questionnaire measured: *Encouraging reading* (reading with the children, talking about TV programs and talking about books), *family literacy environment* (involvement, helping in homework, enriching activities), and *home-school partnership* (knowing the teaching program, feedback and contact, participation in schools' activities). Teachers evaluated *parents involvement*, (knowing the reading instructional method; teachers' perception of the parent as a partner, and teacher evaluation of the parent as helping his/her child to success in learning), evaluation of each child's *ability* and achievements, and a detailed list of *partnership activities* conducted by the teacher in the school year (Horovitz, 2001).

The implementation: level of the program was based on observations, participation in the partnership activities, semi-structured interviews, and teachers' list of activities and parent feedback. The observation further differentiated between three levels of implementations within the partnership program.

The results: The first analysis compared experimental to comparison (2 groups), and then detailed it to groups by level of implementation (4 groups). Overall parents, teachers and children outcomes were higher in the partnership program. However the comparison (no program) and the low-level implementation were similar in parents and teachers outcomes. The highest scores/gains in all measures were in the high implementation classrooms. Children outcomes in reading and writing were most sensitive to level of implementation the better the implementation the higher are test scores. The SEM model validated the links of parents' participation and evaluation of the program, to a better home literacy environment, which explained children academic success.

The discussion: Will highlight the unique elements of this program, and the importance connection of quality implementation of the partnership program alongside quality pedagogy in the classrooms.

**The impact of School family partnership (SFP) on parents attitudes and children
reading and writing in first grade**

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Introduction

At first glance, there seems to be an agreement regarding the importance of parental cooperation and participation in the school. Teachers side with the importance of the home-school partnership but in fact, they do not do enough to materialize this partnership. Alongside a positive verbal attitude, the educational system did not succeed in finding in parents a true and full-time partner (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). In most cases, there is a flow of one-way information coming from the teacher, focused on passive parental action, such as achievement report, helping to organize a party, or helping the child deal with crisis. This policy originates from the common belief that "parents don't come to school", and it reflects a pessimistic view of parents as a collaborating, constructive and supporting power, to the benefit of the child advancement. Many parents are in the dark regarding school plans, learning activities and their ability to coordinate between the world of the school and the world of the home to help their children. As a result many parents are generally uncomfortable with school (Epstein, 1990; 1996).

The partnership dialogue between home and school, are rooted in two research literatures. The first one deals with School Family Partnership (SFP) Epstein's (1995) as a potential to enhance academic and social development. The second focus on the impact of home environment on becoming a successful learner in school. The main models of the family as a learning environment derived from Bierman, (1996), Moles, (1996) and Zill, (1996). And the significance of home literacy from Auerbach,(1995), Purcel-Gates, et al., (1995), Shaver & Walls, (1998). Their writing contributed aslo to the measures reported later. In critical stages of schooling such as in first grade when the child is challenged with reading acquisition, the two have to be coinciding. Parents can contribute to the school learning environment and the school can contribute to the family learning environment. This mutual model of dialogical process is the base of the present research. Thus the present study employed measures of parents and teachers in a reciprocal evaluation and related those to children's reading and writing achievement.

Epstein's (1987b, 1992, 1995) theory on overlapping areas of influence in pupil's life served as the guide for the practical work in the city. The conceptual framework is holistic in nature as it combines educational, social and psychological perspectives of social organization of schools and learning contexts. Epstein theory suggests a growing awareness from the child to the family, to the school and to the community. Rarely do School-Family-Partnership studied in such a reciprocal design.

The uniqueness of the present SFP program

The uniqueness of the present study included the following six characteristics. First, *a city-wide five year change project* took place in Acre a mixed Arab-Jewish city in

Northern Israel. Second *sharing one pedagogy*, about 70 % of the elementary schools in Acre implemented Success For All (SFA), which is based on cooperative pedagogy (Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2001). Third, *sharing one School-Family Partnership model*. Thus these schools integrated SFA and SFP in a creative way (Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1999, 2002). Fourth, *a comparison group of schools* was available for the field study within the city. As a group of schools (about 30%) choose not to implement in first grade Success for All, nor to follow the structured School-Family Partnership(SFP). However they implemented other innovative pedagogies and other forms of family school contact. Fifth, *the schools were competent in the program* SFP was developed and implemented carefully for two years before this study was conducted (Horovitz, 2001). The teachers and the parents were exposed to training, workshops and activities following the theoretical framework of Epstein (1995). Sixth, *creating a strong link between instruction and parents' participation*. The principals and elements of the SFA and SPF traveled from the classroom into homes and vice versa. And last but not least Acre schools are still committed to the School-Family Partnership program (Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2002).

Following the different categories of parents' involvement many activities were adopted in the city and were planned to meet the needs of the highly heterogeneous population. The population includes families from different socioeconomic backgrounds, with high percentage of poor families and students in academic risk. They were Arabs and Jews, religious and non-religious families, immigrants and long timers. The verall goal was to bring the parents to know the pedagogy and help them to support their children to success in school. In first grade it means to master reading and writing. Not less important, was a goal to bring the teachers to know the richness of the families and

be able to learn from them about culture, language and the educational aspiration they hold for their children.

Parents and teachers participated in bi-weekly activities within schools and between schools (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Zelniker, 1999; Horovitz, 2001). Those included workshops for parents and their children, group guidance for parents, sessions of shared learning, open days for parents, parent-child reading and writing, regular and constant communication with parents, exchanging of information, feedback and evaluation forms, home visits, parent volunteering and community-wide celebrations related to literacy and culture.

Schools in the comparison group kept their educational agenda which included home-school contact. These schools justified their stand by indicating that they are not ready yet for this highly structured and systematic program. However, the comparison schools did what is wide accepted in Israeli schools. Contact parents at the end of the kindergarten year to get them acquainted with school, conduct introductory meetings with parents prior to the beginning of the school year, individual meeting with each child, two informative meetings with parents during the school year regarding achievements, and one or two class banquets during the school year.

The study examined the effect of the school-Family Partnership program on making a change in the parents, the teachers, and the children. For the *Parents* we predicted that the parents in the program will show the highest positive change in their self report behaviors as literacy facilitators at home. They will also rate higher their partnership with the schools than parents in the comparison schools. For the *teachers* we predicted that in the program teachers will evaluate higher the contribution of the parents to the academic

development of their child, and will perceive the parents as having higher positive attitudes to the school than comparison parents. For the children we predict that academic gains of the children in the partnership program will be higher than children academic gains in the comparison schools. The same tests were administered to all children in Acre at the end of first grade

The Study

The participants included 510 parents, 236 parents' participated in the SFP and 274 parents in comparison schools. This study included only the Jewish schools. They were parents of children in 21 first grade in seven Jewish schools in Acre. Teachers of the 510 children taught in 21 classrooms.

The measurement: The parents answered a School-Family Partnership (SFP) questionnaire (64 items) in their respective native language. It measured three factors: *Encouraging reading* (reading with the children, talking about TV programs and talking about books), *family literacy environment* (involvement, helping in homework, enriching activities), and *home-school partnership* (knowing the teaching program, feedback and contact, participation in schools' activities). The Alpha of the parents questionnaire was .93 (Horovitz, 2001; Ayoub, 2000).

The teachers gave the following data, a short questionnaire evaluating *parents involvement*, with items on knowing the reading instructional method; teachers' perception of the parent as a partner, and teacher evaluation of the parent as helping his/her child to success in learning (Alpha .96). The teacher also gave an evaluation of

each child's' *ability* and achievements. A third measure was a detailed list of *partnership activities* conducted at the school year (Horovitz, 2001, pp 61-67).

Children's measures; All children were tested in the end of the school year on a reading and writing test administrated to all children in Acre. (Put here about the test)

The implementation level of the program was determined based on observations, participation in the partnership activities, semi-structured interviews, and teachers' list of activities and parent feedback. The observation further differentiated between three levels of implementations within the partnership program. Low, Median and High levels of implementation were defined. The analysis of the data was then conducted in two stages; first stage compared two partnership contexts, SFP program and comparison. A second analysis was conducted for the four groups by level of implementation.

The data of parents' pre-post questionnaire was analyzed using Multivariate Repeated Measures with time and group as independent variable and the three measures detailed above as the dependent measures. In the pretest no significant differences emerged between the program schools and the comparison schools, (see Table 1) thus the following Table present only post test data (for the full data see Horovitz, 2001). Teachers' SFP evaluation and children's final test scores were obtained only in the end of the year, and thus ANOVA analysis was used.

Results: School-Family Partnership

The impact of School-Family-Partnership was significantly positive and higher for all participants; parents, teachers and children. Parents in the SFP program increased their

scores in self-report on their roles as encouraging reading, creating a family literacy environment and their evaluation the school-family partnerships. In the pretest comparison parents were similar or higher in their initial perceptions and attitudes, thus in the process of the school year parents who did not have the SFP program became displeased and their scores decreased. (See Table 1 and Figure 1).

Teachers' evaluation of the parents as partners in their child development and partnership in school increased (no pretest measures). Academic achievements in reading and writing were higher for the children in the classrooms that implemented School Family Partnership (See Table 1 and Figure 1).

Insert about here Table 1 and Figure 1

This data was subjected to a Structural Equation Analysis (SEM). Overall the SEM showed (a) explained relationships (one side arrow) and (b) links (two ways arrows). Figure 3 indicated that participating in the SFP programs positively and highly explained parents' attitudes and perception about the program (.64), and was linked highly to family (home) literacy environment (.62), which explained children's' test scores (.31).

Parents' evaluation of the program explains teachers' evaluation of the parents in the program (.69) but this was not a reciprocal finding. Teachers measure of children ability highly explained academic outcomes (.61), which was explained by family literacy (.33). The SEM model challenges further questions and thought in the field (see Figure 3). The

Fit Indexes (FI) of the model such as the Relative FI , (RFI), the Normed FI (NFI) and the Comparative FI (CFI) were in the range of .97 to .99. The RMAEA was smaller the .10.

Insert Figure 3 about here

In the second analysis the 21 classrooms and teachers implementing SFP were differentiated by judgments based on the above mentioned observations to levels of implementation. The results in the second analysis are based on four groups (comparison and low, median and high level of implementation of SFP). The results indicate that No program (the comparison) and low implementation were similar in all outcome measures except scores in reading and writing. The Median and high implementation was similar in attitudinal and perceptual measures but not in test cores. (see Table 2 and Figure 2)

Insert here Table 2 and Figure 2

Academic outcomes in reading and writing were sensitive to level of implementation. The better the implementation of the SFP program the highest the academic scores. This analysis suggests two important educational implications. The first is that having SFA as the instructional method effects positively children reading and writing achievements. Every SFA child had dramatically higher test scores, then the lower test score a child in the comparison with no SFA had (Mean rounded are 62, 73, 76, and 83). Second when SFA is in place, the quality of the partnership program can boost up academic test scores by 15% and equalize outcomes for all children as shown in the SD sizes.

Summary

The power of the pedagogy and the power of the partnership mutually contribute to the outcomes. Especially in First grade which is a critical stage for high-risk students. Parents' involvement in the school and commitment to their children can be easily grabbed and accepted by the teachers and the schools. Here are some experts from parents' writings about the SFP program and what it gave them and their children:

"The workshops helped me to connect with the teacher and with the curriculum...I could understand much better the processes the child goes through in the classroom when he learns to read, to write and to work cooperatively...In the workshops we learned how to guide the child at home in an enjoyable way to both sides..."

When the parents refer to the children they wrote:

"It helped my child because we became involved in the process of her learning, my girl was very happy... My child expresses himself much more than in the past. Indeed he became very open talking with us about school...It is my third child in the school, and I am amazed in seeing what the program does for the children, I am very sorry that my older children did not enjoy it as well."

Future thoughts should discuss the potential of a large-scale project in a multinational, multicultural and multi linguistic community and how to maximize the possibility to make a difference for the children and their families. Some lessons from the holistic project will be discussed. The selected reference list gives more information about the holistic project in Acre, Israel.

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Table 1: School-Family Partnership (SFP) by Time and Group

	Pre				Post				F (Time x Group)
	Comparison (n=275)		SFP (n=235)		Comparison (n=275)		SFP (n=235)		
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Encouraging Reading	3.54	.60	3.59	.53	3.40	.73	4.12	.50	207.00*
Family literacy	4.03	.61	4.00	.59	3.71	.55	4.39	.39	393.31*
Parents' SFP evaluation	3.36	.77	3.33	.75	3.08	.62	4.27	.45	669.64*
Teachers' SFP evaluation	-	-	-	-	2.92	1.04	4.27	.89	234.56 ¹ *
Test score	-	-	-	-	71.92	16.60	80.69	12.90	32.15 ¹ *

*P<. 001

¹Anova analysis

Table 2: School-Family Partnership (SFP) by Level of Implementation

	Comparison (n=91)		Low (n=184)		Median (n=78)		High (n=157)		F
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Encouraging Reading	3.63	.68	3.29	.73	4.11	.50	4.13	.50	50.94*
Family literacy	3.69	.48	3.73	.59	4.42	.36	4.38	.40	69.58*
Parents' SFP evaluation	3.16	.55	3.03	.65	4.17	.43	4.34	.43	184.41*
Teachers' SFP evaluation	3.10	1.06	2.86	1.02	4.25	.94	4.28	.86	72.78*
Test score	62.48	20.75	73.78	15.00	76.17	14.01	82.98	11.75	19.74*

*P<.001

Figure 1: School-Family Partnership (SFP) by Group

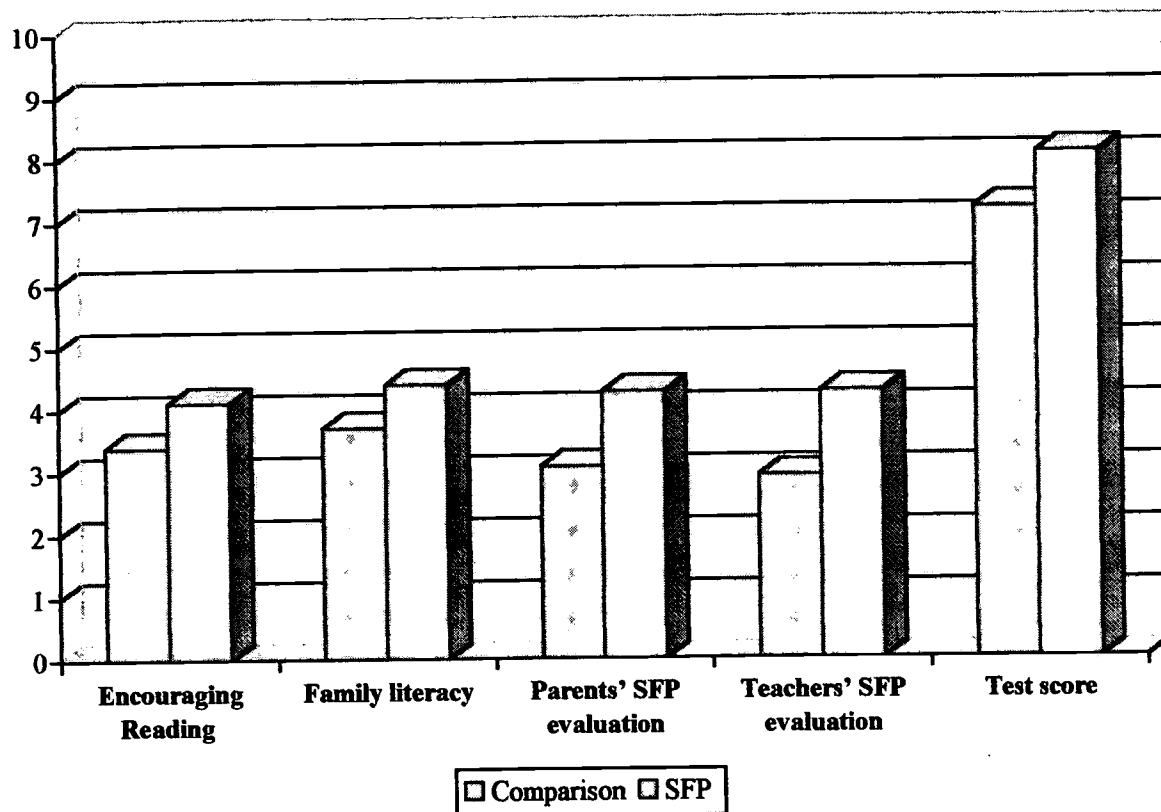


Figure 2: School-Family Partnership (SFP) by Level of Implementation

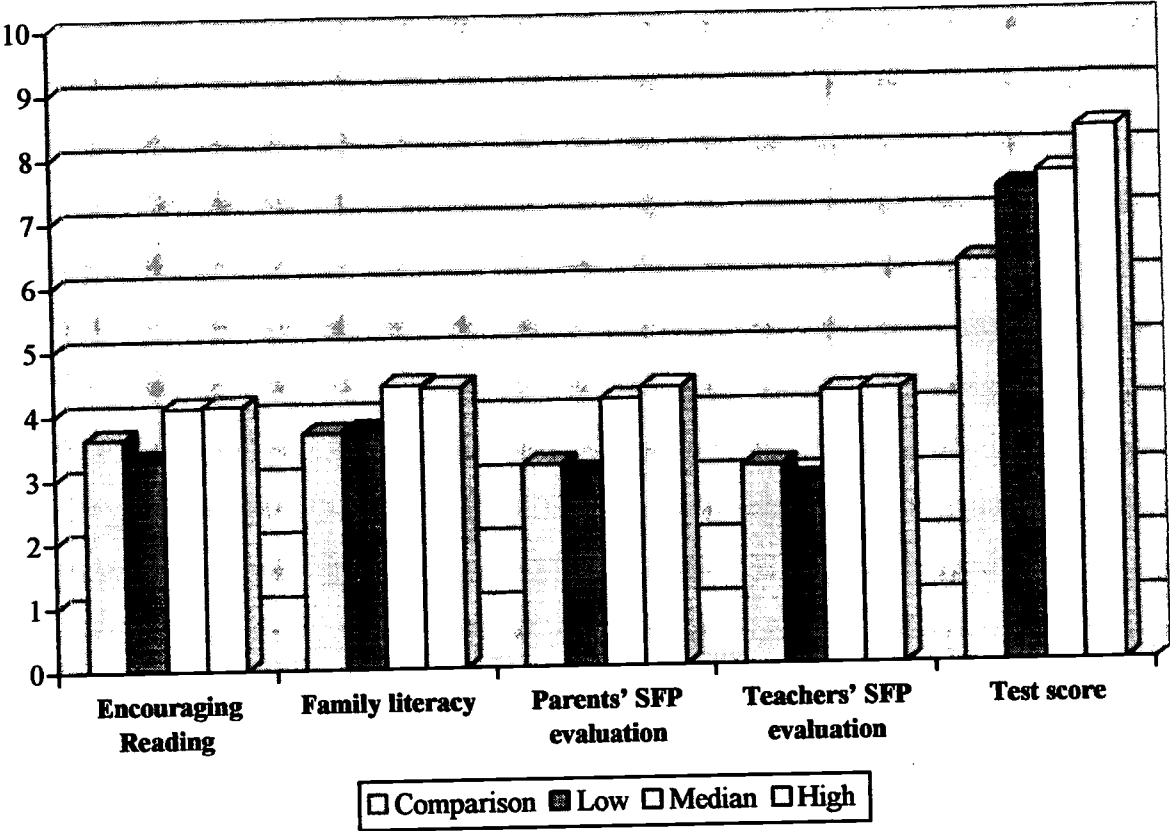
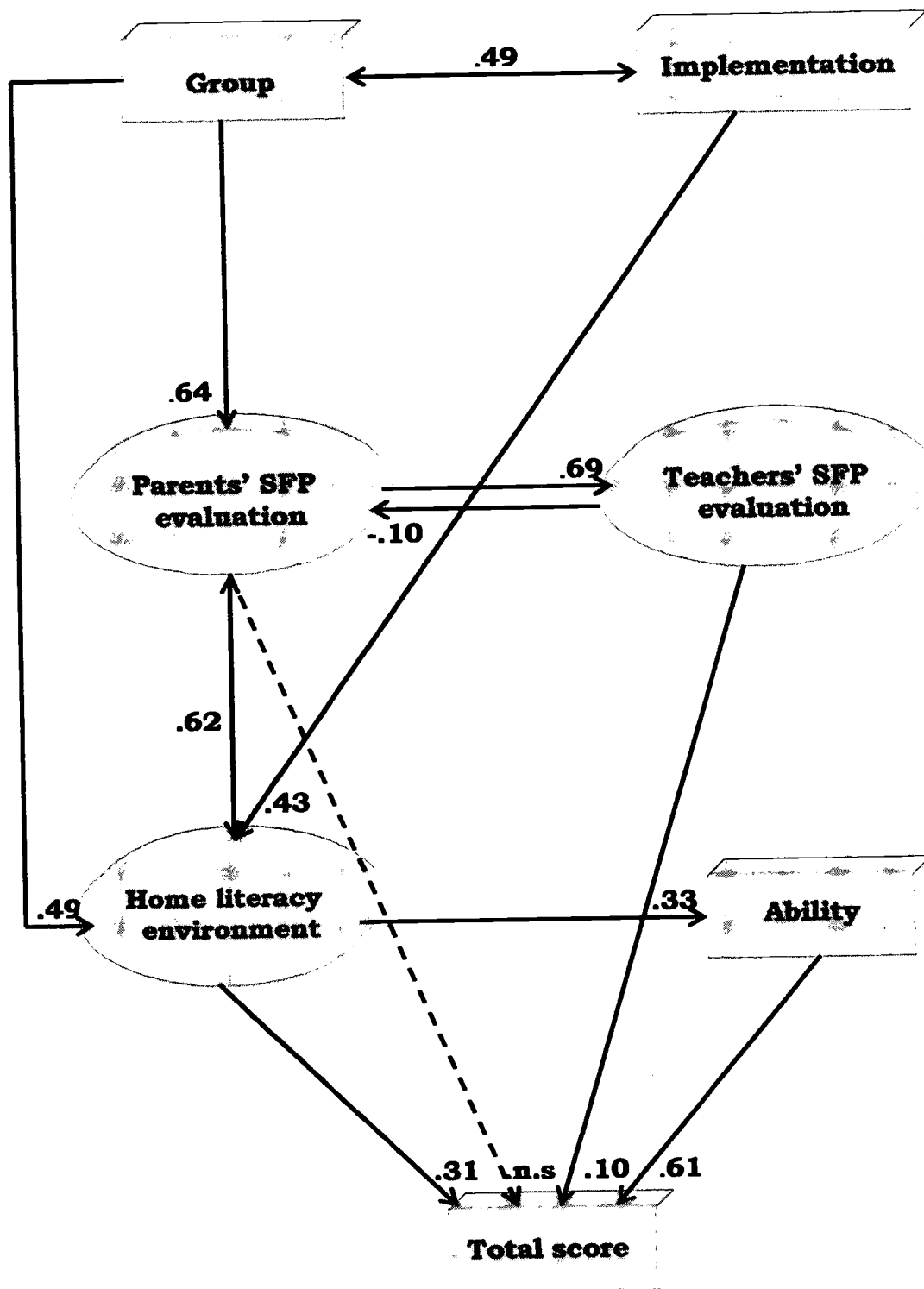


Figure 3: School-Family Partnership (SFP) Model (SEM)



$\chi^2, d.f. (sig)$	NFI	RFI	CFI	RMSEA
398.18, 74 (.00)	.986	.974	.988	.093



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