

## The Effect of Reading-Writing Integration on Jordanian Undergraduate Students' Writing Performance

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### Abstract

Writing is one of the main academic skills that undergraduate students need in pursuing their disciplines. Many researchers emphasize the importance of integrating reading with writing as the two skills involve similar cognitive processes. The current study aims to examine the effect of an instructional program based on reading-writing integration on Jordanian undergraduate EFL students' writing performance and explore their attitudes concerning the effectiveness of the instructional program in developing their writing skill. To collect the data, three instruments were utilized: pre and post writing tests, a writing rubric and an interview. The study used a quasi-experimental design. The subjects of the study were 50 undergraduate EFL students from Philadelphia University in Jordan divided equally into a control group and an experimental group. The findings reveal that there is a significant differences at  $\alpha=0.05$  between the two means of the two groups at the writing post-test due to the instructional program in favor of the experimental group. Furthermore, the instructional program has a positive effect not only on students' overall writing performance, but also on the writing sub-skills: focus, development, organization and language. The program affected students' attitudes positively. Curriculum designers and instructors should integrate these two skills in the textbooks and teaching.

**Keywords:** EFL university students, reading-writing integration, writing performance

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## Introduction

The writing skill need to be taught properly from the early stages of learning English at school. Writing is not only a means to express oneself ideas and feelings, it facilitates the acquisition of other study skills that the students need in their academic settings such as synthesizing, analyzing and criticizing (Rao, 2007). Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1998) confirm that writing provokes thinking, so it can be used to facilitate the learning of any subject. Lerstrom (1990) asserts that personal success requires the mastery of many skills; among these are good writing skills.

The advent of the communicative approach in the seventies of the last century is a paradigm shift in language learning which emphasizes integration of Language skills as one of its basic tenets. Brown (2001, p.233) highlights the importance of skills integration stressing that “rather than being forced to plod along through a course that limits itself to one mode of performance, students are given the chance to diversify their efforts in more meaningful tasks.” He adds that most of the time one skill reinforces the other. For example, we learn to write by examining what we read, and we learn to speak by modeling what we hear. Since such integration is significant, many researchers report the reciprocal effect of reading and writing (Grabe, 2001; 2003; Hirvela, 2004; Tuan 2012).

Second- foreign language acquisition research advocates the necessity of reading writing integration. Tierney and Pearson (1983, p.568) state that “we believe that at the heart of understanding reading and writing connections one must begin to view reading and writing as essentially similar processes of meaning construction”. In reading, readers manipulate their prior knowledge, their strategies and the information in the text to construct their own meaning. Similarly, writers are engaged in a gradual process to construct the intended meaning. Being similar processes of meaning construction, it is assumed that reading and writing have a reciprocal effect (Grabe, 2001; 2003; Hirvela, 2004; Tuan, 2012). Improvement in one skill will result in enhancing the proficiency of the other (Hirvela, 2004).

Many researchers' studies show that integrating reading with writing improves learners' writing proficiency (e.g., Almansour & Alshorman, 2014; Sanchez, 2009; Tuan, 2012; Yoshimura, 2009). Pedagogically, reading can be integrated with writing through various teaching practices such as extensive reading, using models, rhetorical reading and voluntary reading (Tsai, 2006). Hao and Sivell (2002) confirm that teaching writing apart from reading may obstruct writing improvement. Reading provides students with information of different topics to implement in their writing, text structure, English expressions, vocabulary, and language forms (Tuan, 2012).

Grabe (2003) confirms the positive effect of reading on writing performance in terms of language, organization and content. Reading provides students with the opportunity to examine the correct use of grammar, how to compose sentences and how the sentences are logically connected to form texts. Brown (1987, p.331) asserts that “reading a variety of related types of text enable students to gain more insights not only about how they should write, but also about the subject matter that will be the topic of their writing”. In the sane line, Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) believe that readers, as they read, must tackle different types of knowledge that they can implement in their writings .These include orthography, words, morphosyntactic information,

cohesive devices, text structure and typographical information such as capitalization, paragraphing and punctuation.

### **Problem and questions of the study**

At the university level, to be a successful student, one needs to be equipped with certain skills. Among these skills are reading, writing, critical thinking, and oral presentation. Although these skills are very important for university students, university instructors rarely teach them (Bean, 1996). Even for courses which are supposed to teach reading and writing such as English skills courses, they still follow traditional techniques in teaching them. The current approaches in teaching language emphasize the integration of reading and writing, yet instructors still teach them separately (personal observation). It is also noticed that Jordanian students at the secondary stage have difficulties in the writing skill (Al-Emami, 2009; Al-Makhzomi, 1986; Al-Mashaqba, 2012; Al-Nethami, 2009), so these students finish their secondary education and join the universities not ready for the writing demands especially when English is the medium of instruction in many university specializations.

In the researchers' quest for a solution, reading writing integration is used as a strategy to improve students' writing skill. Thus, the study aims to answer the following two questions:

1. To what extent does the reading-writing instructional program develop students' writing skill?
2. . What are the students' attitudes concerning the effectiveness of the instructional program in developing their writing skill?
- 3.

### **Significance of the study**

The study addresses a significant strategy in teaching foreign language which is skills integration. The researchers hope that the present study provides insights into this important field because, according to the researcher's best knowledge, such research studies in Jordanian EFL context are few. Furthermore, the instructional program which is designed for this study includes a variety of activities that can be helpful for English language university instructors who are interested in the integration of reading and writing. They can use such activities in their courses. EFL textbook writers and curriculum designers may also find practical implications for reading and writing instruction.

### **Sampling, instrumentation, data collection and data analysis**

The participants of the study consist of 50 Jordanian undergraduate EFL students enrolled in English Skill (102) course offered by the language center at Philadelphia University during the first semester of the academic year 2015/2016. Two sections are chosen purposefully. The two 25-students sections are assigned randomly as a control and an experimental group. The control group is taught the material in the textbook; whereas the experimental group is taught the reading-writing integration program which is designed by the researchers. The participants of the study are taught the reading texts and the writing lessons of four units from Unlock 3: Reading and Writing textbook.

To achieve the purpose of the study, the researchers designed pre and post writing tests to measure the students' writing performance before and after the treatment. They are designed according to the four types of essay that the students have learned during the semester

(descriptive, argumentative, problem solution and cause and effect essay). In each test, students are asked to choose one of four topics (each topic represents one type of essay) and write a complete essay. To correct the pre and post writing tests, an adapted version of Wang and Laio's rubric (2008) is used (Appendix A). The researchers adopted three criteria of Wang and Laio's rubric (focus, development, and language) whereas they developed the fourth criterion (organization).

The researchers designed the instructional program which was implemented during the first semester of the academic year 2015-2016. During the semester, students met in three 50-minute lectures a week. The instructional program consists of eight reading texts and four writing tasks (four units) from *Unlock 3: Reading and Writing* textbook. They were taught interactively using different reading and writing activities.

To investigate further the effectiveness of the instructional program, the researchers held semi-structured interviews. After implementing the program, 18 students from the experimental group were interviewed individually for 15 minutes. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for frequent themes.

To answer the research questions, means, standard deviations, adjusted means and ANCOVA are used to find out whether there are any significant differences in the students' writing performance due to the instructional program.

### **Validity and reliability of the instruments**

In order to judge the validity of the writing tests, the rubric scale, the instructional program and the interview, a jury of nine professors from Yarmouk University and Philadelphia University were asked to provide their feedback concerning their suitability to the purposes of the study; they looked into their language and their content. Their suggestions (e.g., clarifying the instructions of some activities) were taken into consideration in the final versions of the instruments.

In order to establish the reliability of the writing tests, they were applied to thirty students of a pilot study group. Reliability was measured by the test-retest formula using the Pearson reliability coefficient. The obtained values were (0.87) for focus, (0.85) for organization, (0.88) for development, (0.83) for Language, and (0.89) for the overall test. All calculated values are considered acceptable to achieve the purpose of this study.

To ensure the reliability of the rating, students' writings were evaluated by the researcher and another experienced rater independently using the writing rubric. Inter-rater reliability was measured by averaging the scores given to each student by the two raters. The raters' agreement was 0.90.

### **Findings of the study**

To answer the research question concerning the effect of the reading writing instructional program on students' writing performance, means and standard deviations of the students' scores on the writing pre and post- tests are calculated. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Means and standard deviations of the students' pre -/ post-writing performance test scores**

| Teaching Strategy | N  | Pretest (Covariate) |           | Posttest |           |
|-------------------|----|---------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
|                   |    | Mean                | Std. Dev. | Mean     | Std. Dev. |
| Traditional       | 25 | 10.66               | 3.37      | 14.82    | 5.23      |
| Integration       | 24 | 10.06               | 3.40      | 19.40    | 2.89      |

Table 1 shows observed differences between the students' mean scores in writing performance on the post test, in favor of the students in the experimental group .To determine the statistical significance of these differences (at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ), ANCOVA is used to compare the participants' performance on the writing post-test after excluding the students' scores on the writing pre- test as shown in Table 2

**Table 2 Results of ANCOVA of the students' scores on the writing post- test after excluding the students' scores on the writing pre- test**

| Source of Variance  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F            | Sig. | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|---------------------|----------------|----|-------------|--------------|------|------------------|
| Pretest (Covariate) | 116.63         | 1  | 116.63      | <b>7.32</b>  | 0.01 | 13.73%           |
| Teaching Strategy   | 286.08         | 1  | 286.08      | <b>17.96</b> | 0.00 | 28.08%           |
| Error               | 732.78         | 46 | 15.93       |              |      |                  |
| Total               | 1105.29        | 48 |             |              |      |                  |

Table 2 shows a statistically significant effect (at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) in the students' mean scores on the writing performance post-test due to the instructional program. To determine the group with the significant difference, the adjusted means and standard deviations of the students' writing performance post-test scores are calculated, as shown in Table 3

**Table3** *Adjusted means and standard deviations of the students' post-writing performance test scores*

|             | Mean  | Std. Error |
|-------------|-------|------------|
| Traditional | 14.69 | 0.80       |
| Integration | 19.54 | 0.82       |

Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference in favor of the experimental group due to the instructional program (reading writing integration) compared with the control group. The practical significance of the treatment (as show in Table 2) is 28.08 which signals a moderate effect of the treatment.

To investigate further the effect of the program on students' writing sub-skills (focus, development, organization and language), means and standard deviations of the students' scores on the sub- skills (focus, development, organization and language) in the pre -/ post- writing performance tests are calculated due to the teaching strategy. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4** *Means and standard deviations of the students' scores on the sub – Skills in the writing pre -/post- writing tests due to the teaching strategy*

| Writing:     | Teaching Strategy | N  | Pretest (Covariate) |           | Posttest |           |
|--------------|-------------------|----|---------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
|              |                   |    | Mean                | Std. Dev. | Mean     | Std. Dev. |
| Focus        | Traditional       | 25 | 2.17                | 0.70      | 3.38     | 1.21      |
|              | Integration       | 24 | 2.19                | 0.69      | 4.27     | 0.71      |
| development  | Traditional       | 25 | 2.17                | 0.68      | 3.08     | 1.05      |
|              | Integration       | 24 | 2.17                | 0.72      | 3.88     | 0.69      |
| Organization | Traditional       | 25 | 6.68                | 3.51      | 10.97    | 4.95      |
|              | Integration       | 24 | 6.43                | 3.29      | 15.13    | 4.15      |
| Language     | Traditional       | 25 | 2.47                | 0.84      | 2.61     | 0.93      |

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|             |    |      |      |      |      |
|-------------|----|------|------|------|------|
| Integration | 24 | 2.15 | 0.76 | 3.24 | 0.51 |
|-------------|----|------|------|------|------|

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Table 4 shows observed differences between the students' mean scores in writing sub-skills on the post test as a result of the differences in the teaching strategy. To determine the statistical significance of these differences (at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ), ANCOVA is used to compare the participants' performance on the writing sub-skills in the post-test after excluding the students' scores on the writing pre- test as shown in Table 5 (see Appendix B).

Table 5 (appendix B) shows a statistically significant difference (at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) in the students' performance on the writing sub-skills on the post-test due to the teaching strategy. To determine the group with the significant difference, the adjusted means and standard deviations of the students' sub-skills scores in the writing post-test are calculated, as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6 Adjusted means and standard deviations of the students' sub – skills scores in the writing post- test due to the teaching strategy**

| Dependent Variable | Teaching Strategy | Mean  | Std. Error |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------|------------|
| Focus              | Traditional       | 3.30  | 0.18       |
|                    | Integration       | 4.35  | 0.18       |
| development        | Traditional       | 3.01  | 0.15       |
|                    | Integration       | 3.95  | 0.16       |
| Organization       | Traditional       | 10.78 | 0.80       |
|                    | Integration       | 15.33 | 0.82       |
| Language           | Traditional       | 2.57  | 0.14       |
|                    | Integration       | 3.28  | 0.14       |

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Table 6 shows significant differences in performance on the writing sub-skills in the post writing test between the experimental (reading writing integration) group and the control group in favor of the experimental group.

To answer the second question, the responses of the interviewees are studied and analyzed carefully; they show positive attitude toward the program. The following themes have been identified:

- 1- Most students confessed having a negative attitude and low motivation toward the writing skill before the program, yet their motivation increased and their attitude changed positively through the program. They became more confident to write and their writing ability gets better.
- 2- Most of the students acknowledged the effectiveness of the program on these writing microskills: spelling, punctuation, grammar, paragraphing, and capitalization.
- 3- Most of the students asserted that the program helped them to better produce and organize the ideas to create coherent texts.
- 4- Many students reported that the program positively affected their reading comprehension because integrating writing with reading eases comprehension and enhances it.

### **Discussion of the findings, conclusions and recommendations**

The findings of the study demonstrate statistically significant differences in the overall writing performance and the writing sub-skills performance in favor of the participants in the experimental group. This confirms the effectiveness of the reading writing integration as a catalyst for writing performance. The instructional program has a positive effect on students' writing performance.

This positive effect could have resulted from the explicit activities that the students participated in during the program. These activities provide students with the opportunity to grasp the high and low level skills of writing as they read the texts. During the program, students plunged in different reading activities such as having reading models for the writing tasks and analyzing them, allowing students to read their own writings and reflect on them, allowing students to read for each other and reading some of the students' works and assessing them collaboratively. All these activities enable students to see clearly how successful writers construct their writings and how they can improve their writings. Instead of teaching reading and writing skills separately, students are taught the two skills in an integrative way allowing them to see the two sides of the coin. For example, during the program students are continuously asked to write the main idea and the supporting ideas of the paragraphs. As they perform such tasks, they realize that, in writing, each paragraph should include one main idea which is almost presented in the topic sentence and elaborate on it using the supporting sentences. In addition, having a visual image using the reading models as they perform the writing tasks allow students to remember easily how they should write.

Furthermore, having reading models in front of the students as they perform the writing tasks seem to enhance students' self-confidence which affects positively their learning atmosphere and subsequently their writing performance. To add more, the activities included in the program asked students to look carefully into the organization of the ideas within and between paragraphs, the construction and the arrangement of the parts of the essay, and the use of vocabulary and cohesive devices in the texts. Learning all these features in context, the reading texts, helped students employ what they have learned in their writing.

The findings of the study warrant the following conclusions:

- 1- The treatment has brought about improvement in the students' writing performance which may signal a positive relationship between the integration of reading and writing on one hand and their writing performance on the other.

- 2- In the interview, students reported the gains in their writing performance. This includes the improvement in the high level skills such as organization and ideas and low level skills such as spelling, grammar, paragraphing and capitalization.
- 3- The treatment has brought about gains in students' attitudes toward writing and their motivation. The students reported that having reading models eases writing and makes it more interesting. It also enhances their self-confidence.
- 4- The treatment seems to bring about gains in students' reading comprehension. Students reported that their reading comprehension was also positively affected as a result of the integration of the two skills. Being involved in different writing activities related to the reading texts enhances their comprehension.

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers present the following recommendations

- 1- Reading-writing integration should be enhanced. EFL teachers should design proper reading-writing activities to increase undergraduate EFL students' writing skills. It is better to teach these two skills in an integrative way instead of teaching them separately.
- 2- Curriculum designer should consider the importance of such integration in designing EFL textbooks.
- 3- More research needs be carried out on the effect of reading- writing integration on reading comprehension. Future research might also involve a larger sample in other EFL contexts and other genres.

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Appendix A

Essay Writing Scoring Rubric

| Traits                                | Description               |  | scores |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|--|--------|
| <b>Focus</b><br><br>(5 marks)         | a.                        | Precisely addressing the topic or claims.  | 5      |
|                                       | b.                        | Addressing most of the topic or claims.  | 4      |
|                                       | c.                        | Addressing the topic or claimsadequately, but sometime straying from the task.   | 3      |
|                                       | d.                        | Inadequately addressing the topic or claims.   | 2      |
|                                       | e.                        | Having problem in focus or failing to address the topic or claims  | 1      |
| <b>Development</b><br><br>(5 marks)   | a.                        | Well developed; using specific appropriate details,examples and explanations to support the topic or claimsand illustrate ideas.   | 5      |
|                                       | b.                        | Developed; using appropriatedetails, examples and explanations to support the topic or claimsand illustrate ideas.   | 4      |
|                                       | c.                        | Limited development; using some details or examples to support the topic or claims.  | 3      |
|                                       | d.                        | Using inappropriate or insufficient details to support the topic or claims and illustrate ideas.   | 2      |
|                                       | e.                        | Using few or irrelevant details to support the topic or claims or illustrate ideas.  | 1      |
| <b>Organization</b><br><br>(10 marks) | Introduction<br>(2 marks) | *Effective introduction (skillfully orients the reader to the topic/claims by including excellent lead (background information) and a structural sentence that previews the structure of the essay). | 2      |
|                                       |                           | Adequate introduction (orients the reader to the topic/claims by includingadequate lead(background information) and a structural sentence that previews the structure of the essay).                 | 1.5    |
|                                       |                           | Limited introduction (partiallyorients the reader to the topic/claims by including background information but a structural sentence is not included.   | 1      |
|                                       |                           | Minimal or inadequate introduction (inadequate lead , no structural sentence is included).   | .5     |
|                                       | Body                      | **Thoroughly develops the topic /claims with relevant body paragraphs and strong topic sentences.  | 2      |
|                                       |                           | Develops the topic /claims with body paragraphs and topic sentences.   | 1.5    |
|                                       |                           | Superficially develops the topic /claims with body paragraphs, attempts topic sentences.   | 1      |

|                              |                                      |   |     |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|-----|
|                              |                                      | Inadequately develops the topic/claims with minimal body paragraphs and unclear topic sentences.  | .5  |
|                              | Conclusion<br>( 2 marks)             | Strong conclusion (follows from and effectively supports the topic or claims presented, reflects the writer's point of view ).  | 2   |
|                              |                                      | Adequate conclusion (restates the topic, follows from and supports the topic or claims presented.)  | 1.5 |
|                              |                                      | Weak conclusion (mostly repeats the topic sentences).   | 1   |
|                              |                                      | Inappropriate or no clear conclusion.   | .5  |
|                              |                                      |   |     |
|                              | Coherence &<br>Cohesion<br>(4 Marks) | a. Creates cohesion through skillful use of transition words, phrases, and clauses within and between paragraphs; logical progression of ideas from beginning to end. | 4   |
|                              |                                      | b. Creates cohesion through transition words, phrases, and clauses within and between paragraphs; adequate progression of ideas from beginning to end.                | 3   |
|                              |                                      | c. Creates some cohesion through basic transition words, phrases, and clauses within and between paragraphs; uneven progression of ideas from beginning to end.       | 2   |
|                              |                                      | d. Uses limited and/or inappropriate linking words, phrases, or clauses; little or no organization of ideas.  | 1   |
| <b>language</b><br>(5 marks) |                                      | a. Perfect or near perfect language (grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, capitalization.)   | 5   |
|                              |                                      | b. Language is almost accurate, contains few errors.  | 4   |
|                              |                                      | c. Language is fair with some errors that do not impede readability.  | 3   |
|                              |                                      | d. Language is inappropriate with obvious errors that impede readability.   | 2   |
|                              |                                      | d. Language is poor, contains serious and pervasive errors.   | 1   |

\*In argumentative essay, an effective introduction should also include a thesis sentence (a sentence in which the writer expresses his position of the argument (for or against).

\*\* In argumentative essay, relevant body paragraphs means two paragraphs ( one argues for the claim ,and another argues against the claim).

## Appendix B

**Table 5. Results of ANCOVA for students' scores on the post- tests of sub – skills of writing separately due to the teaching strategy after excluding the students' scores on the pre- test**

| Dependent Variable | Source Variance          | of Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F            | Sig. | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|----|-------------|--------------|------|------------------|
| Focus              | Focus (Covariate)        | 0.00              | 1  | 0.00        | 0.00         | 0.98 | 0.00%            |
|                    | development (Covariate)  | 0.62              | 1  | 0.62        | 0.81         | 0.37 | 1.84%            |
|                    | Organization (Covariate) | 5.09              | 1  | 5.09        | <b>6.67</b>  | 0.01 | 13.42%           |
|                    | Language (Covariate)     | 2.10              | 1  | 2.10        | 2.75         | 0.10 | 6.01%            |
|                    | Teaching Strategy        | 12.62             | 1  | 12.62       | <b>16.52</b> | 0.00 | 27.75%           |
|                    | Error                    | 32.85             | 43 | 0.76        |              |      |                  |
|                    | Total                    | 56.39             | 48 |             |              |      |                  |
| development        | Focus (Covariate)        | 0.02              | 1  | 0.02        | 0.04         | 0.85 | 0.09%            |
|                    | development (Covariate)  | 0.27              | 1  | 0.27        | 0.46         | 0.50 | 1.06%            |
|                    | Organization (Covariate) | 5.13              | 1  | 5.13        | <b>8.90</b>  | 0.00 | 17.14%           |
|                    | Language (Covariate)     | 1.44              | 1  | 1.44        | 2.50         | 0.12 | 5.49%            |
|                    | Teaching Strategy        | 10.09             | 1  | 10.09       | <b>17.50</b> | 0.00 | 28.92%           |
|                    | Error                    | 24.80             | 43 | 0.58        |              |      |                  |
|                    | Total                    | 45.40             | 48 |             |              |      |                  |
| Organization       | Focus (Covariate)        | 1.54              | 1  | 1.54        | 0.10         | 0.75 | 0.23%            |
|                    | development (Covariate)  | 3.00              | 1  | 3.00        | 0.19         | 0.66 | 0.45%            |
|                    | Organization (Covariate) | 190.98            | 1  | 190.98      | <b>12.29</b> | 0.00 | 22.22%           |
|                    | Language (Covariate)     | 2.66              | 1  | 2.66        | 0.17         | 0.68 | 0.40%            |
|                    | Teaching Strategy        | 234.89            | 1  | 234.89      | <b>15.11</b> | 0.00 | 26.00%           |
|                    | Error                    | 668.35            | 43 | 15.54       |              |      |                  |
|                    | Total                    | 1196.48           | 48 |             |              |      |                  |
| Language           | Focus (Covariate)        | 0.00              | 1  | 0.00        | 0.00         | 0.96 | 0.01%            |
|                    | development (Covariate)  | 0.34              | 1  | 0.34        | 0.76         | 0.39 | 1.73%            |
|                    | Organization (Covariate) | 4.25              | 1  | 4.25        | <b>9.57</b>  | 0.00 | 18.21%           |
|                    | Language (Covariate)     | 0.30              | 1  | 0.30        | 0.68         | 0.41 | 1.57%            |
|                    | Teaching Strategy        | 5.62              | 1  | 5.62        | <b>12.66</b> | 0.00 | 22.75%           |
|                    | Error                    | 19.08             | 43 | 0.44        |              |      |                  |
|                    | Total                    | 31.72             | 48 |             |              |      |                  |