

## *Original Paper*

# Confusion of the Use of Been and Being by English as Second Language Learners in Nigeria

Amina Gogo Tafida<sup>1</sup>, Bala Muhammad Dhalhatu<sup>2</sup> & Mohammed Alhaji Usman<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Language Education, General Studies Unit, School of Science and Technology Education, Federal University of Technology, Minna, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Communication, General Studies Unit, School of Science and Technology Education, Federal University of Technology, Minna, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup> English Language, Department of English Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State, Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*English language teaching in Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges resulting in negative academic performance of students at various levels of education. Some of the challenges include unqualified and inexperienced English language teachers, inadequate space allocation for English language on the school timetable, improper teaching methods, lack of English language specialists to teach the various aspects of English, giving emphasis to some aspects of the language than the other among others. The paper takes a look at the confusion of the use of been and being by English as second language learners which might be due to less emphasis given to that aspect of the language during the teaching/ learning process. A test containing 30 questions was administered on two groups of schools- public and private. In each of the schools, some SS3 and JSS3 students were sampled for the study and the results show significant error margins of more 50% in the two sets of respondents. Tables and pie charts were used to show the findings. The major findings of the study show that: the verb forms, 'been and being' are confusing to English as second language learners especially at secondary school level; there is significant difference in the level of confusion in the use of been and being by students in public and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis and there is significant difference in the level of confusion in the use of been and being by senior secondary school students in public and private schools among others. Some of the recommendations offered are: the teaching of language forms should be accompanied by numerous real life examples; Language teaching should progress from known to unknown; it is essential to use substitution tables to provide the learner with enough practice on language use; and that qualified English language teachers should be employed to teach English*

language. These findings and recommendations are expected to improve the teaching and learning of English as second language.

### **Keywords**

*being, been, past participle, confusion, Grammatic knowledge, verb forms*

## **1. Introduction**

English Language being a foreign language differs in several aspects with the indigenous Nigeria languages and these differences are likely sources of errors to learners of English which is also a second language and an official language in Nigeria. The roles of English in Nigeria and the world over make its teaching and learning a necessity for Nigerians. Ndimele (2014) observes that the underdevelopment in Nigeria can only be tackled with improved literacy in a commonly understood official language of communication and that Nigeria must develop through an unlimited access to quality education, there must be a language that is adequately and generally understood in all its forms by the majority of the population. Nigeria therefore requires participatory communication which is possible through participatory communication. Hence, no economic programme or economic theory will make any sense until there is mass literacy of the active population of the nation through a commonly shared means of national or regional communication.

Ndimele (2014) argues that what Nigeria is suffering from is not falling standard in education, rather, what we are witnessing is language failure. In other words, the language that is commonly used as the medium of instruction (i.e. the English language) in most of our schools has failed us (as pupils and even their teachers have little or no oral as well as written proficiency in it). A child whose language skills are deficient in the medium of instruction will surely perform abysmally in any other cognitive areas involving the use of language. It is therefore in line with this that the paper takes a look at an aspect of the grammar of English language that confuses the verbal communication of English as second language learners. Experience has shown that many learners and speakers of English, from different levels of education find it difficult to decide when to use the verb forms “being” and “been” in their oral and written expressions. *Being* is pronounced as two syllables, be-ing, while ‘*been*’, is just one syllable, and sounds like “bin”, as in “recycle bin.” Writers occasionally confuse the words *being* and *been*. As a rule, the word *been* is always used after *have* (in any form, e.g., *has, had, will have, having*). The word *being* is never used after *have*. *Being* is used after *to be* (in any form, e.g., *am, is, are, was, and were*). The main similarity between being and been is that they are both participles of the verb “to be.” This is why a lot of students have a problem with them. Now, the main difference is that *being* is the present participle (all present participles end in “-ing”, like swimming, running, learning). On the other hand, *been* is the past participle (some past participles end in “-ed”, like learned, studied; others are irregular like, run, swum, written, spoken. It is also used in the passive voice, but can also be used in several other tenses as well.

### *1.1 Statement of the Problem*

In Nigeria, English co-exists with about 450 Nigeria's indigenous languages. This language contact and interaction situation has produced reciprocal influences between English language and Nigeria's indigenous languages. An analysis of the utterances of those who teach or learn English in Nigeria shows hybridization in morphological and syntactic structures in English patterns resulting from the interaction between English and Nigeria's indigenous languages. Contrastive analysis of English and Nigerian languages reveals series of interference features and pedagogical defects in the methodological orientation of those who teach and learn English in Nigeria. Also, an analysis of written English of students' writings across the levels of education, including Masters and PhD theses, shows clearly that some English as second language speakers and learners have problems with some aspects of English, particularly due to lack of cultural/linguistic relationship between English and the indigenous languages as well as improper teaching of such forms. One typical problem is confusion in the use of 'been and being' by some English as second language users. The writer has come across many oral and written expressions with obvious misuse of being and been. For instance, series of examples abound with the use of 'is' preceding 'been' before verbs in past participle form as in 'is been practiced, is been seen, is been given, etc. This paper takes a look at this problem and others relating to wrong use of the verb forms "being" and "been" as it will produce grammatical errors resulting in interference in communication.

### *1.2 Objectives of the Study*

The aim of this study was to investigate the use of the auxiliary verbs been and being among secondary students in Minna metropolis. Specifically, the study has the following objectives.

1. To find out if there is confusion in the use of 'been' and 'being' by students in government and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis.
2. To find out if there is confusion in the use of 'been' and 'being' by senior students in government and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis.
3. To investigate the confusion in the use of 'been' and 'being' by junior students in government and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis.

### *1.3 Research Questions*

1. Is there confusion in the use of 'been' and 'being' by students in government and private schools in Minna metropolis?
2. Is there confusion in the use of 'been' and 'being' by senior secondary students in government and private schools in Minna metropolis?
3. Is there confusion in the use of 'been' and 'being' by junior secondary students in government and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis?

### *1.4 Research Hypothesis*

The study was guided by the following null hypothesis:

1. there is no significant difference in confusion in the use of 'been' and 'being' by students in government and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis.
2. there is no significant difference in confusion in the use of 'been' and 'being' by senior secondary students in government and private-owned secondary schools in Minna metropolis.
3. there is no significant difference in confusion in the use of 'been' and 'being' by junior secondary students in government and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis

### 1.5 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The present study was based on the significant role of grammatical knowledge, Krashen's Affective Filter and Social Constructivist Theories. Grammatical knowledge is important because without it students are likely to convey their thoughts in a wrong way hence affecting the meaning of their communication. Cook (1991) opines that Grammatical knowledge is important on the basis of two reasons. Firstly, there are grammatical principles shared by all languages, such as grammatical categories (nouns, verbs, etc.). Secondly, languages hold some separate principles, such as constituent structures (the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence). Therefore, to learn a second language, it is necessary to discover and set the parameters of the language. Furthermore, grammatical knowledge also has a connection with three branches of linguistics (Leech, 1983). Firstly, the syntactic level which relates to how to form sentences, such as negative sentences or clauses in English. Secondly, the semantic level which relates to meanings behind the sentences. Lastly, the pragmatic level has to do with the context in which sentences are created. Grammatical errors in subject-verb agreement, subject omission, indirect questions, various forms of "other," the article "the," prepositions, word choice, and verb forms can constitute a lot of problems in writing by English as second language learners (Herrero, 2005). Haussamen, Benjamin, Kolln and Wheeler (2003) suggest that non-native English students need to learn the meaning of a language associated with its grammatical knowledge. Azar (2007) points out that grammar is needed for comprehension in the nature of a language. She states that if there was no grammar in language, we would have only individual words or sounds, pictures, and gestures to convey meanings. She notes that students who experience grammar instruction usually have an advantage over the students who lack sufficient grammatical knowledge.

## 2. The Uses of Been

The verb 'Been' is the third form of the verb 'to be'. The third form is also called the past participle. 'Been' is the past participle of "be" and is always used along with auxiliary verbs like have, had, has, etc., and can be applied to more tenses or situations than being (Julita, 2016). For instance, it is used when talking about some time duration as in: He has been ill since Monday.

### 'Been' is used in present or past perfect passive as in:

I have *been* married for six years.

Tom has *been* crazy about sports cars all his life.

My car has *been* brought.

I have *been* given a beautiful present.

The walls have *been* painted green.

The thief has *been* taken away.

The food has *been* eaten by the students.

I have *been* to Lagos twice.

I have never *been* late to class.

I have *been* an English student for five years.

The prize had *been* won by Ali.

Many classes have *been* given this semester.

English students have *been* taught well.

Several topics have *been* covered.

Birmingham was a great place to study! I had *been* there before.

I had never *been* with such interesting, friendly people.

Umar had *been* married for twenty years when he divorced.

The interview had *been* conducted before his arrival.

The grammar had *been* explained very clearly.

‘Been’ is also used in present perfect continuous or past perfect continuous passive as in:

They have been looking for a flat for months.

Laura has been doing the job since she was eighteen.

She has been reading this comic for last two hours.

I have *been* teaching English for over 15 years.

I have *been* working in Federal University of Technology, Minna.

Examples of the use of ‘Been’ in past perfect continuous are as follow:

They had *been* living in Minna before they moved here.

Federal University of Technology, Minna had *been* employing dedicated lecturers.

Dr Fatima had *been* seeing us for ten year.

When I first came to Denver, I had *been* studying English for five years.

I had *been* looking for a different kind of learning experience.

**‘Been’ is used in future perfect passive as in:**

The job will have been done by now

His examination will have been written by this time next year.

The thief will have been released by police.

The doctor shall have been seen by him

The true story will have been heard by her.

The house will have been built by the man.

I will have been married for thirty-five years in August.

**‘Been’ is also used in future perfect continuous passive as in:**

They will have been living here for six years next month.

He will have been writing novels.

By the end of the year, Audu will have been serving the country.

I will have been living in my new house by the year 2018.

By October 2018, Nigeria will have been celebrating her 58<sup>th</sup> birth day.

‘Been’ is used in perfect conditional passive constructions as seen below:

The man should have been taken to court.

The robber should have been killed.

The salary should have been increased.

I would not have been able to pay my house rent this year.

He could have been rung before the visit.

The man might have been involved in an accident.

**Been** is used after **could have, should have, and would have:**

You should have been on time for your job interview.

The presentation would have been better if we’d done more preparation.

He could have been injured badly when he fell off his motorcycle; he was lucky he didn’t get hurt.

**‘Been’ or ‘Being’ may be used as an introductory clause**

Having been ill, (past participle clause) i was grateful to feel well again.

Being may also occur at the beginning of a sentence as a modifier to the subject noun in the main clause.

Julita (2016) opines that being can be used in situations that happen in the present, in a continuous or progressive sense and in the passive voice or tone. As in, Being ill, (present participle clause) i stayed home in bed. Being a doctor, he sees several patients every day.

**3. Uses of Being**

‘Being’ is the present participle of the verb ‘be’ and can be used with the continuous form of the verb ‘be’ is all its forms i.e. am, is, was, are and were. The form **‘being’** is either present participle or gerund. For instance: When I arrived at the scene of the accident, the victim was being placed in an ambulance.

I don’t know why but John is being really difficult today.

I love being on my own.

Stop being so rude to me!

Sorry, I can’t pick you up. My car is being repaired.

I think Tim is being irrational.

**Being as a gerund**

The word ‘being’ can be used as a gerund which is a type of noun.

Do all actors like being famous?

His being clumsy caused the accident.

I live in terror of not being misunderstood.

### **Being as a noun**

The word 'being' can also be used as a noun, meaning "creature."

We are all human beings.

Being a doctor is not so easy.

Stop being a loner and start getting out of your room.

Where were you when I was being called a novice?

A strange being stepped out of the room at night when i was on my bed

The present participle, *being*, is used in the passive voice, namely, the passive form of the present continuous or progressive, and the past continuous or progressive.

### **Being in present continuous passive**

Passive form of the present continuous or progressive occurs when active sentences in present continuous are converted to passive voice. This means the verb form 'being' facilitates the use of progressive in passive form as in:

1. We are writing letters of complaints (active)  
1. Letters of complaints are being written (passive)
2. The man is killing a dog (active)  
2. A dog is being killed by the man (passive)
3. They are giving classes every day (active)  
3. Classes are *being* given every day. (Passive)
4. The panel is interviewing Celina for a teaching job (active)  
4. Celina is being interviewed for a teaching job (passive)

In the sentences above, the actions are in progress in present tense and '*Being*' is necessary for similar constructions in the passive form.

### **Being in past continuous passive**

Passive form of the past continuous or progressive occurs when the actions were in progress at a specific moment in the past and '*being*' is used in the passive form to facilitate the progression. For instance: 1.

- We were writing letters of complaints (active)
1. Letters of complaints were being written (passive)
  2. The man was killing a dog (active)  
2. A dog was being killed by the man (passive)
  3. They were giving classes every day (active)  
3. Classes were *being* given every day. (Passive)
  4. The panel was interviewing Celina for a teaching job (active)  
4. Celina was being interviewed for a teaching job (passive)

Being is almost always used in the present continuous, even if it refers to a past action, it remains present continuous. Examples: "Being a careful man, he checked if there were snakes in the abandoned house."

Although his action was in the past, his state of being careful is in the present continuous. He did not stop being careful after his action in the past.

**Being** a fan of Shakespeare, i have been reciting the lines by heart.

*Being* is used when there is a show of existence of something. For example,

The train brought many stations into *being*.

No human being should be homeless.

I watched a movie about a being from outer space.

We are called from nothingness into being.

Moreover, *being* can act as an adjective before a noun (or a pronoun) when it is joined by other words to form a participle phrase.

Being such a lazy oaf, Chinedu often drives to the nearby shops.

(*Being such a lazy oaf* is a participle phrase that describes Chinedu.)

In the expression “for the time being,” it means “the present.”

We’ll leave him in charge for the time being.

**Being** can be used after verbs such as: avoid, enjoy, can’t stand, don’t mind, look forward to, practice, spend time, stop, etc.

The following are examples

Stop **being** lazy and help me wash the dishes.

I enjoy **being** in a position of leadership.

She can’t stand **being** lied to.

**Being** can be used after prepositions as shown in the following examples,

He was in the hospital for a month **after being** in a car accident.

That’s the problem **with being** late all the time – people stop trusting you.

The best part **of being** a teacher is interacting with the students.

She got an award **for being** the best salesperson in the company.

#### 4. The Study

The population of the study comprised all the 2090 students in two secondary schools in Minna metropolis. The chosen secondary schools are Limawa Secondary School, Minna (government school) and Abu Turab Secondary School, (private school). From the population, JSS3 and SSS3 students from each of the two schools were sampled for the study. This implies that from Limawa Secondary School, Minna and Abu Turab Secondary School 30 students were sampled from JSS3 and 30 from SS3 respectively from the two schools. This gave a sample of 120 students. Questionnaires containing 30 test items were administered on the sampled students from each of the classes. The questionnaires contained objective questions that demanded respondents to choose between ‘been’ and ‘being’ in the spaces provided in the given sentences. The responses were administered by the researcher with the assistance of a research partner on a face-to-face basis and were collected immediately after responding



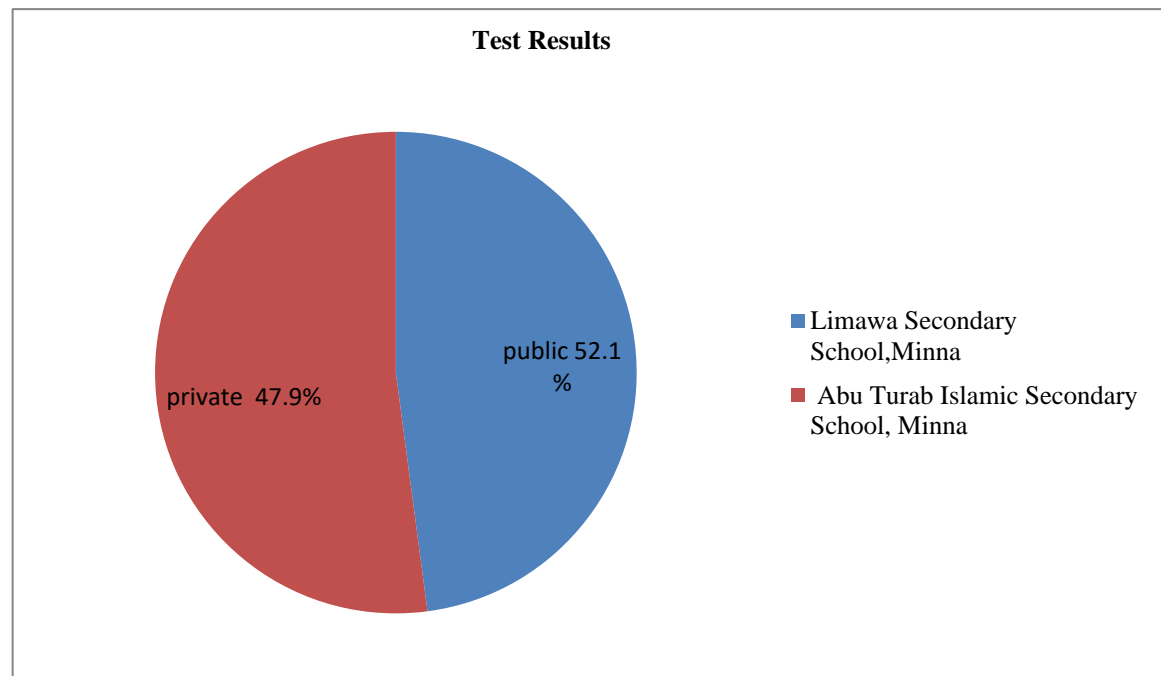
to them. The responses were analyzed using tables and percentages. In the analysis, any score that is above 50% is significant.

### 5. Analysis of Findings

**Research Question One:** Is there confusion in the use of ‘been’ and ‘being’ by students in government and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis?

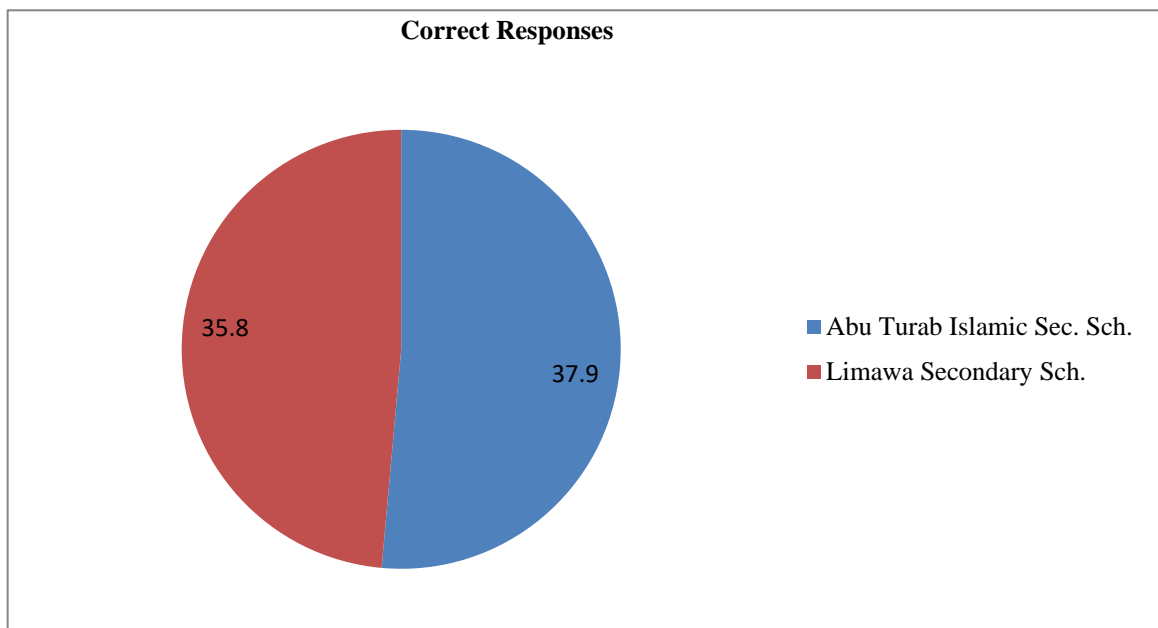
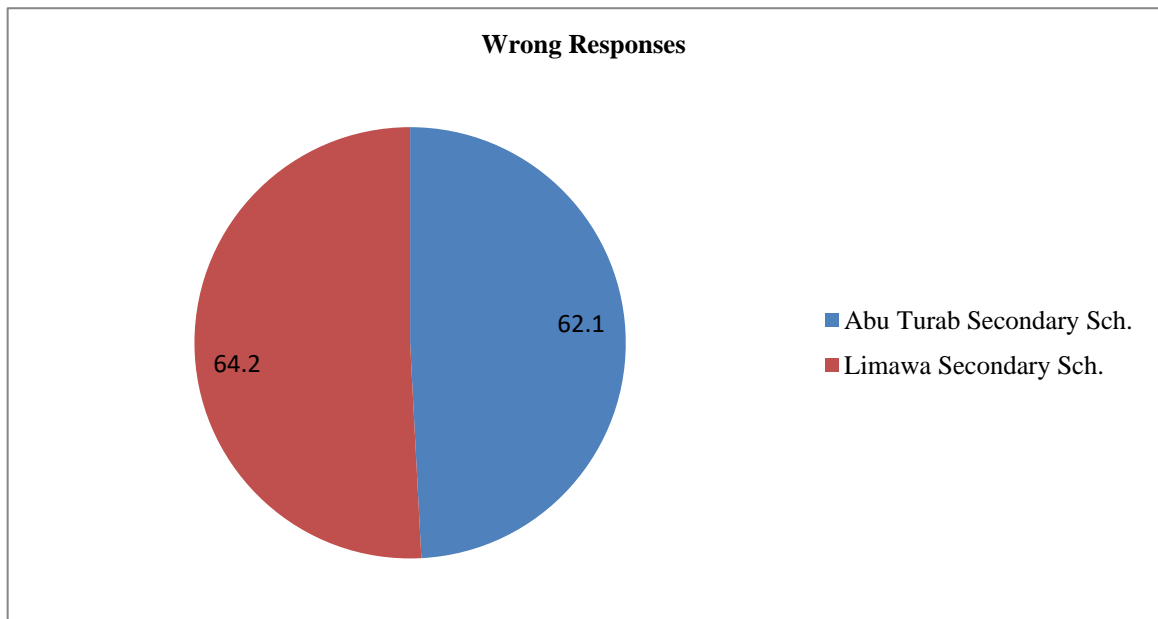
**Table 1. Results of Performance of Students in Public and Private Schools on the Use of ‘Been’ and ‘Being’**

Schools	Number of Students per Class	Correct Responses	%	Wrong Responses	%	Total Responses	Remarks
Limawa Secondary School, Minna (public school)	30	431	47.9	469	52.1	900	Significant
Abu Turab Islamic Seconadry School, Minna (private school)	30	436	48.4	464	51.6	900	



**Table 2. Showing Performance of SS3 Students in Public and Private Schools on the Use of ‘Been’ and ‘Being’**

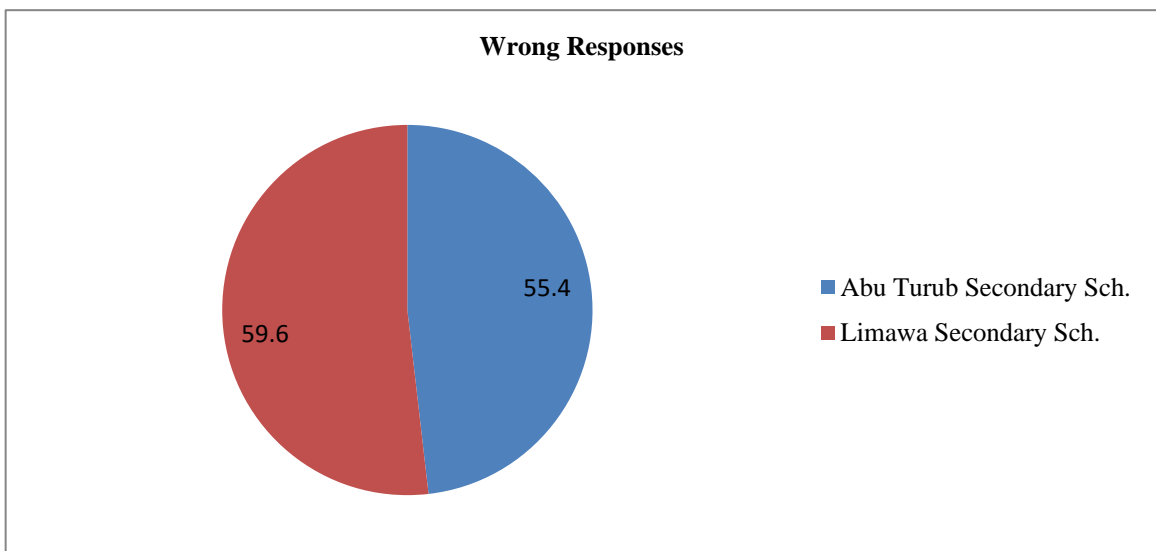
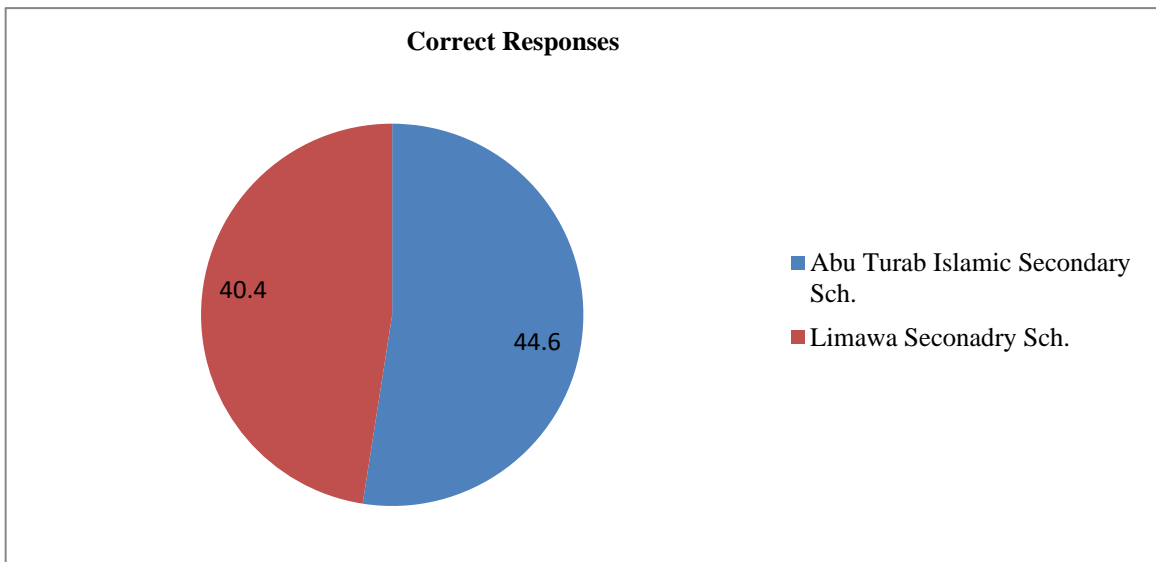
Schools	Class	Correct Responses	%	Wrong Responses	%	Total Responses	Remarks
Abu Turab Islamic Secondary School, Minna (Private)	SS3	341	37.9	559	62.1	900	Significant
Limawa Secondary School, Minna (Public)	SS3	322	35.8	578	64.2	900	



**Research Question Three:** Is there confusion in the use of ‘been’ and ‘being’ by JSS3 students in public and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis?

**Table 3. Showing JSS3 Students’ Performance on the Use of ‘Been’ and ‘Being’ in Private and Public Schools**

Schools	Class	Correct Responses	%	Wrong Responses	%	Total Responses	Remarks
Abu Turab Islamic Secondary School, Minna	JSS3	401	44.6	499	55.4	900	Significant
Limawa Secondary School, Minna (Public)	JSS3	364	40.4	536	59.6	900	



**Hypothesis Testing**

**Hypothesis One:** there is no significant difference in confusion in the use of ‘been’ and ‘being’ by students in Public and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis.

**Table 4.**

Schools	Wrong Responses	%	Total Responses	Remarks
Abu Turab Islamic Secondary School	469	51.6	900	Significant
Limawa Secondary School	464	52.1	900	

Table Four shows the level of confusion in the use of been and being between private school (Abu Turab secondary school and Public school (Limawa Secondary). The table shows an insignificant relationship in the level of confusion between the two schools. It however shows an appreciable level of confusion in the use of been and being by the two schools i.e. 51.6% and 52.1%. The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

**Hypothesis Two:** there is no significant difference in confusion in the use of ‘been’ and ‘being’ by senior secondary students in government and private-owned secondary schools in Minna metropolis.

**Table 5.**

Schools	Wrong Responses	%	Total Responses	Remarks
Abu Turab Islamic Secondary School	559	62.1	900	Insignificant
Limawa Secondary School	578	64.2	900	

Table five shows the number and percentage of wrong responses between senior secondary three students in Public and Private schools. In the table, Abu Turab (private school) has 559 wrong responses representing 62.1% and Limawa (public school) has 578 wrong responses representing 64.2%. This shows an insignificant level of relationship between the two schools. The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

**Hypothesis three:** there is no significant difference in confusion in the use of ‘been’ and ‘being’ by junior secondary students in government and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis.

**Table 6.**

Schools	Wrong Responses	%	Total Responses	Remarks
Abu Turab Islamic Secondary School	499	55.4	900	significant
Limawa Secondary School	536	59.6	900	

Table six shows the level of confusion in the use of been and being by junior secondary schools in public and private schools. The table shows that, Abu Turab Islamic secondary school (private) has 499 wrong responses representing 55.4% and Limawa secondary school has 536 wrong responses representing 59.6%. The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

## **6. Summary of Findings**

The results of the preceding analysis show the following major findings

1. The verb forms, 'been and being' are confusing to English as second language learners especially at secondary school level.
2. There is significant difference in the level of confusion in the use of been and being by students in public and private secondary schools in Minna metropolis.
3. There is significant difference in the level of confusion in the use of been and being by senior secondary school students in public and private schools.
4. There is significant difference in the level of confusion in the use of been and being by students in junior secondary schools in public and private schools.

## **7. Conclusion**

The study has looked at the problem encountered by some learners and users of English as second language in the use of the verb forms, been and being. The study has helped to ascertain the fact that some learners of English, irrespective of school type, confuse 'been' and 'being' in speaking and writing English language. It is common to hear or read expressions such as: the book is been read; English is been known as the only official language in Nigeria etc. In fact, the use of being is even more problematic to learners as they rarely use it. These problems might not be unconnected with improper teaching resulting in lack of adequate exposure to the language forms, among others. There is therefore the need to adopt proper method in teaching English language so as to improve the students' performance in the language as a whole.

## **8. Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study

1. The teaching of language forms should be accompanied by numerous real life examples.
2. Language teaching should progress from known to unknown
3. It is essential to use substitution tables to provide the learner with enough practice on language use.
4. Qualified English language teachers should be employed to teach English language.
5. English language should be given adequate allocations on the timetable.

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