

**LITERACY ACQUISITION AND NOISE POLLUTION:
Effects of Mobile Marketing on Learners in Aba and Onitsha, Southeastern Nigeria**

By:

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Abstract

As the World Health Organization and the United States Environmental Protection Agency recognize the harmful health effects of noise pollution on growing humans, especially its debilitating effects on children's acquisition of literacy, it becomes crucial to investigate the possible effects of noise from mobile marketing activities on literacy acquisition by learners dwelling in Aba and Onitsha, the commercial centres of southeastern Nigeria. In the present twenty-first century, literacy has been redefined to include alphabetical, the ability to read and write one's name; functional, the ability to read and write on the most elementary and basic levels of everyday life; social, the ability to communicate effectively, using the cultural language of a particular community—both dialectical and non-verbal; informational, the use of critical thinking skills to manage information and become an independent learner; and digital, the ability to make use of the multimedia of electronic communication. Recent studies have reported an alarming decline in literacy acquisition by learners dwelling in commercial cities in Nigeria, attributing the causes, mainly, to noise pollution. Adopting the survey design, this study aims to ascertain the extent of interference of noise pollution from mobile marketing businesses on learners' acquisition of literacy in Aba and Onitsha.

Introduction

The physical phenomenon that vibrates between 15 to 20,000 sensations per second to stimulate the sense of hearing in human beings is considered sound. Acoustically, however, this same sound becomes noise when its intensity is distorted or when it interferes with other sounds that are being listened to. In this state of noise, sound becomes a pollutant as humans consider it undesirable, objectionable, and unwanted. Such sounds normally have harmful effects on human and animal health, while, at the same time, depleting the environmental quality (Berg, 2013; Hart, 2015).

Hearing impairment has been identified as one of the significant health problems caused by noise pollution. In addition to causing hearing loss, excessive exposure to noise has also been

identified as a veritable cause of high blood pressure, mental fatigue, anxiety, nervous disorders, and insomnia. Noise also makes conversation difficult, interferes with concentration at work, and puts undue stress on animals, which in turn leads to a reduction in their survival rates (Eco-Healthy Child Care, 2010; Nathanson, 2013).

Urbanization and industrialization, the offshoots of 19th century global modernization, led to the disruption of traditional attitudes and lifestyles of many human societies. Different ethnic groups migrated to the urban centres to form stratified societies based on socio-economic status. This new social order differs widely from the traditional homogeneous ethnic settings (Henderson, 2002; Onwuegbuna, 2010). One of the features of the new social order is that it has become chronically noisy. Noise produced by automobiles, industry machines, factory equipment, electrical appliances, power generating sets, and horn speakers of religious and business marketing agencies have increasingly exacerbated the acoustic trauma of urban dwellers (Fadairo, 2013). Two such industrialized and commercialized urban societies in southeastern Nigeria are Aba, in Abia State and Onitsha, in Anambra State.

Mobile marketing consists in a type of public musical entertainment in which sets of high wattage loud-speakers, with heavy amplification, are mounted on cars, open-bodied vans and trucks as they blare out recorded music to the streets of the urban centres. Others include the wheel-barrow and truck pushing vendors of ice cream, drugs and audio compact discs, blaring music through their high-decibel speakers. Such musical entertainments are covers for public auction sales, driven by mobile entertaining-hawkers' displays. In the commercial cities of Aba and Onitsha, this form of mobile marketing can go on endlessly from as early as 5:00am to as late as 11:00pm. This activity alone exposes the urban dwellers of these commercial cities to 18 out of the 24 hours in a day of debilitating noise pollution.

Justification for the Study

As the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recognize the harmful health effects of noise pollution on growing humans, thus: (i) children who are exposed to noise pollution while learning are more likely to experience reading delays, (ii) children who suffer from noise pollution learn to tune out not only noise but also the teacher's voice, which can harm their reading and language skills, (iii) children have more difficulty understanding spoken language and distinguishing the sounds of speech when learning in a noisy environment, and (iv) children who spend time in noisier areas have higher resting blood pressure and higher stress levels; it becomes crucial to investigate the possible effects of noise from mobile marketing activities on literacy acquisition by learners dwelling in Aba and Onitsha.

Recent studies have reported an alarming decline in literacy acquisition by learners dwelling in commercial cities in Nigeria, attributing the causes, mainly, to noise pollution. The delimitation

of the geographical scope of this study to Aba, in Abia State and Onitsha, in Anambra State is based on the fact that these cities are the heavily industrialized and commercialized urban centres in southeastern Nigeria. These cities are reported to have highly-rated evidences of dropouts and other out of school children.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to ascertain the extent of interference of noise pollution from mobile marketing businesses on learners' acquisition of literacy in Aba and Onitsha. The specific objectives include:

- i. To ascertain the nature of mobile marketing businesses that exist in Aba and Onitsha,
- ii. To ascertain the modes of literacy delivery in the areas,
- iii. To determine the areas of interference by noise pollution,
- iv. To ascertain the extent of interference on learners' acquisition of literacy, and
- v. To strategize ways of curbing the menace of noise pollution and forestalling its interference on learners' acquisition of literacy.

Review of Related Literature

Concern for human health and environmental quality has given impetus to a growing body of research on sound and noise pollution in Nigeria. A rapid increase and improvement in industrial, commercial, and social activities in the urban areas has equally resulted in an increase in noise pollution. According to Anomohanran (2013), "People in Nigeria do not pay significant attention to the seriousness of noise pollution and its dangerous environmental consequences" (p.470); this high degree of ignorance and lackluster attitude have exposed the Nigerian urban dwellers to various degrees of acoustic trauma (Fadairo, 2013; Ogunmosunle, 2014; Oyedepo, 2012). Ogunmosunle (2014) reports that Lagos, with a population in excess of 20 million people and great intense economic and social activities, naturally faces the greatest challenge of environmental abuse and degradation, resulting from noise pollution. A considerable volume of literature exist to show that varied sources of noise pollution in Nigerian urban areas can be categorized under industrial, commercial, socio-cultural, religious, and domestic (Fadairo, 2013; Ijaiya, 2014; Ogunmosunle, 2014; Oyedepo, 2012; Ugwuanyi, Ahemen & Agbendeh, 2005). Considering the statutory provisions of noise pollution in Nigeria, Ijaiya (2014) reports that the legal regime exists in two streams: the Common Law and the Policy and Statutes; however, poor implementation and enforcement of the environmental laws contribute to frustrate government efforts at noise control.

Methodology

The survey design is adopted for this study. The study involves pupils and teachers randomly selected from five primary schools in Aba, Abia State and five primary schools in Onitsha, Anambra State of southeastern Nigeria. Observation, focus group interview and questionnaire are the instruments for gathering data. The purposive sampling technique is used to pick the

schools that are prone to noise pollution. The schools that are located within the commercial centres of Aba and Onitsha serve as the target population.

Findings

In the commercial cities of Aba and Onitsha, the media of mobile marketing include cars, open-bodied vans and trucks fitted with high wattage loud-speakers, with heavy amplification. Others are wheel-barrow and truck pushing vendors of ice cream, drugs and audio compact discs. Modes of the literacy delivery systems in these commercial cities are mainly public and private schools, located within the urban centres. These schools are exposed to mobile marketing-generated noise pollution throughout the week, starting from the morning assembly time at 8:00am to dismissal at 2:30pm. The areas of interference include learning instructions, reading, phonic drills, recitals, and comprehension. Literacy crises caused by these interferences manifest in various degrees of learners' apathy towards school tasks, loss of interest in reading and language skills, and abandonment of schooling. Installation of acoustic dampers, made up of quilts, carpets and cork boards, on the walls and ceilings of the classrooms, can help to absorb the interfering noise; but it will take a serious, efficient and effective legal regime to curb the menace of noise pollution in the urban centres.

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