

Submission date: 9/01/2021

Accepted date: 3/04/2021

ISLAM IN EGGONLAND: ITS HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPECTS

Muhammad Maga Sule¹ Atiku Garba Yahaya²

Department of Islamic studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria.

¹mohammed.maga@yahoo.com²agyahya@yahoo.com

Abstract

Little has so far been discussed or written about Islam and Muslims in Eggonland. The aim of this paper is to ascertain the development of Islam in Eggonland and its prospects. It has been found that unlike the Eggon Ero clan which has almost 97% of its population being Muslims, Muslims are not much among Anzo and Eholo clan compared to that of Eggon Ero. This paper attempts to provide the much-lacking information on the spread and development of Islam in Eggonland, and the establishment of Muslim communities in Eggonland, it also shows to the world the true picture of Islam among the Eggon people. The paper paid attention to factors that aided the spread of Islamic teachings in Eggonland. Equally important in this paper is the contributions of Muslim organizations in the development of Islamic education in Eggonland where schools that combine both Islamic and Western education were established. The paper found that the prospects of Islam lies on the young generation in learning of Islamic knowledge with the establishment of Islamic schools that produces Du'at who can speak Eggon language fluently. The paper adopted qualitative methodology and desk review where In-depth Interview were conducted with few personalities to obtain data for the research.

Keywords: Eggonland, Islam, history, development, prospects.

¹ Ph.D. Candidate at Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria.

² Professor, of Islamic History and Research at Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of Islam in Nigeria dated back to the eleventh century when it first appeared in Borno in the northeast of the country. Later Islam emerged in Hausaland in the northwest and its influence was evident in all the states in northwest Nigeria and later spread to other parts of the country including the Eggonland. Islam was for quite some time the religion of the court and commerce and was spread peacefully by Muslim clerics and traders. Increasingly, trans-Saharan trade came to be conducted by Muslims.

A new impetus to the spread of Islam was provided by Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of Northern Nigeria before the Nigerian independence in 1960, with his Islamization program that led to the conversion of over 100,000 people in the provinces of Zaria, Niger, and Eggonland (Mahmud, 1994). The military coup in 1966, which claimed the lives of many politicians including Sir Ahmadu Bello, brought his Islamization program to an abrupt end but the 1970s saw continued government policy favouring the dominance of Islam. History has shown that Islamization was easier under military rule and Islam spread quickly under General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1985-1993).

Following the same path, Islam penetrated the Eggonland through contact with people from far Northern Nigeria, where traders and teachers from Hausaland entered Eggonland, especially in the 1950s. As usual, the spread of Islam met stiff resistance from Traditional Religion worshipers and Christian missionaries in the Eggonland. The major challenge faced by the earliest Muslim scholars in the area was the language barriers between the Islamic teachers and the Eggon people.

Eggon People

The Eggon land lies to the South of the Southern division of the former plateau province of central Nigeria. The area has savannah type vegetation with occasional rain forest type vegetation found mostly in the river banks of Mada and Arikya Rivers. The area falls within the larger geographical location formerly called plateau province, which forms part of what is today called Nasarawa state. The Nasarawa area is approximately 2, 906 square kilometres (Ombugunawu, 1984; Kigbu, 1996). The area is bounded to the north by the Mada and Rindre ethnic groups, to the east and south by the Lafia Chieftdom, and to the west by Keffi Chieftdom. One of the special features of the area is the Eggon hills, rising in a block from the surrounding plains to form the centre of the area. The hills form the watershed between the basins of the Mada River to the west and Arikya River to the east. Both rivers flow in a generally southerly direction, the former meeting the Benue River west of Makurdi and the latter west of Ibi. The Arikya River forms the Eggon-Wamba boundary and its innumerable tributaries flow from the hills to the east areas. The area lies within the savannah zone,

although occasional patches of rain forest type of vegetation are formed in close vicinity to the rivers, especially in the southern part of the plain. The hills and the plateau are at present almost deforested, doubtless due to intensive cultivation. The hills still present one of the most picturesque features of the area (Enna, 2015).

The rainy season begins in March and ends in November each year. Other prominent landmarks include the south-eastern line of the Nigerian railway which runs through the western part of the land. In the north and east part, a trunk road from Jos passes through Akwanga, Nasarawa-Eggon, Lafia and finally to Makurdi in Benue state.

The people of Eggon are "one of the largest ethnic groups in the former Nasarawa State. The Eggon ethnic group had a majority population of about 47 per cent of the entire Nasarawa State". Manga (2012) affirms that "the Eggon people are found in almost all the local government areas of the state but densely in places like Nasarawa-Eggon, Lafia, Obi, Akwanga and Doma respectively". According to Ombugunawu, (1984) colonial officials stressed the importance of Eggon people "in terms of their population and economic activities. Ombugunawu further asserts that "a great deal of the Eggon people lives outside of what they refer to as *Obein-Eggon* (Eggon land) now. This is due to the population explosion. Many among the Eggon people went off to other places in search of fertile soil being mainly agriculturalists. The Eggon indigenous people especially men are well built, tall and black with prominent checks and the women are sturdy, averagely tall and hardworking" (1984).

Etiologically, the word Eggon denotes "gifted sensitivity", According to Mallam Usman Abbo Angbolo says that the term according to the Wana-Eggon clan means "Stone" or "highlanders" but to Eggon-Erro, it is a word derived from an ancient place from east-west migration. This was because history informed us that during slave raiding and wars, there was a tribe called Eggon-Erro that settled in a place (cave) called Likya (Tijani, 1996). Anthropological evidence shows that before the arrival of the colonialist, Eggon were on the move. This migratory nature of the people of Eggon showed that the Eggon people came to their present location from the East (Yemen) through the old city of Ngazargamu the present Yobe State of Nigeria (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1972). They migrated and joined the Kwararafa Kingdom, after the dissipation of the kingdom they crossed the Benue River at Ibi. In their journey, they stopped at various settlements (this is the predominant reason for their dispersed distribution within North-Central Nigeria), they finally arrived at Eggon hill of Nasarawa State, Nigeria and were known to be settlers on a hilltop before coming down to the grasslands toward urbanization (Its Chrisdfirst, 2016).

The Eggon people are divided into three major clans namely: Anzo, Eholo, and Eggon Erro. The Anzo clan were mostly found around Alogani Galle, Wakama, Ogba,

AGunji, Angbaku, Ogbagi, Ubbe, and Wogna while the Eholo clan were in villages like Kagbu Wana, Wangibi, Ikka, Alushi, Ginda, Wulko, Wowyen, Endeho, Gaji, Ungwashuru, Lambaga, Bori and Lizzin Keffi. The Eggon Erro are mostly around Umme, Nassarawa Eggon, Alizaga, Bakvano, and Arugbadu, Sako, Arikyia, and other small settlements in Lafia Local Government Area. However today, these clans have spread and inter-woven with each other in the quest for fertile farmland among other tribes such as the Alago, Kambari, Gwandara and Mighili (Nasara, 2011). What is unique about these clans is that Anzo and Eholo have the largest concentration of Christian population whereas Eggon Erro have the largest number of Muslim population but most of the authors who wrote the history of Eggon people tend to neglect this vital aspect of Islam in Eggonland.

Furthermore, these clans have different tribal marks. The Anzo and Eholo have fifteen lines on each cheek running from the temple. The Eggon Erro have nine marks on the face. This group is also called Madan Tara (nine marks). They both have patterns of lizards and birds on the neck, while some choose to draw drums or arms and other objects. Marks are also cut on other parts of the body like the belly, sometimes even the legs, and women's backs (Nasara, 2011). Both men and women in Eggon land traditionally pierced their ears, but only women pierce one nostril. All these marks were for decoration and to prove how brave those who had them were, to have endured the pain of making them.

According to Blench, (2008) that it appears the dispute surrounding the grouping of the language rages because of the existence of the dialect of the Eggon Erro which is not mutually intelligible to that spoken by the Eggon Eholo and Anzo clans. However, the latest classification of the linguistic family of Eggon is that it forms its own family along with Ake, a group in Lafia East and Lafia Local Government Areas, under the *Eggonic* group.

The history and origins of the Eggon appear to also share in the debate. Three major traditions of the historical account appear popular. These are the mythological explanation, traditions of migration from the Kanem Bornu Empire and dispersal from the Kwararafa Empire as a result of its collapse in 1700 A.D (Enna, 2004).

Following an analysis of the various sources, Enna, (2004) relied on cultural and linguistic authorities to conclude that there is a very high probability that the Eggon migrated from Apa in Jukunland to their present locations.

The Eggon people are from Nasarawa State in North-Central Nigeria. They are mainly located in Nassarawa Eggon, Lafia, Akwanga, and Keffi Local Government Areas of the state. They can also be found in Kokona, villages around Doma, Obi, Keana and

Wamba Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State, Nigeria (https://joshuaproject.net/people_group/11721/). It is currently estimated that the Eggon people are about 950,000 in population. They are also found in the lower fringes of Kaduna State and the Federal Capital Territory (Enna, 2015).

Most of the Eggon people that are living outside the Eggonland embraced Islam earlier than their relatives in the village, though some held their traditional and Christianity beliefs. According to oral history, there is a general belief in the Supreme Being, who is found beyond the sky. He is called *Ahogben*. He owns everything, knows everything and is everywhere and does anything. He is the Creator and is very far from man. Therefore man communicates with him through *Ashim* or other objects kept by the people. The Eggon people differentiate the name of the sun (*onomo*) from *Ahogben*. They also believe that since *Ahogben* is everywhere, he will judge and punish all wicked people after death through *Angbashim*. In other words, he rewarded all good for people (Blench, 2015).

They attach more importance to the god found under the ground because he blesses their land, and gives them a good harvest. Also, it is this god, people who die see and not the high god. Therefore this cult is consulted or appeased before planting season, harvest season and before festivals commence. This god is known as *Angbashim*. When consulting this god libation is poured on the ground seven times with some confessions by the elder or the priest and some prayers are made to this god (Blench, 2015).

The *Ashim* cult is believed to ward off wicked or evil spirits from the land. The cult is physically represented by the leaves of the tree called *mijikadenya* in Hausa. These leaves are kept on a farm to ward off thieves. The victims of this cult are afflicted with severe sickness until they confess (Blench, 2015). No one has the right to play with *Ashim* and if one eats *Ashim's* food unworthily one is afflicted by *Ashim* in such a way that one's stomach will become swollen. Women are not allowed to go near nor see *Ashim*. However, women past menopause may be introduced to the cult. They are warned strictly never to disclose the secrets to younger ones and such old women are not allowed to eat *Ashim's* food. The Eggon Erro people also have their own *Ashim* called *likya* which are being feared by all (Enna, 2015).

Apart from *Ashim*, there are other cults kept by individuals, families or clans. Among such cults are Akuk, Gango, Yamba and Arikya. These cults are represented by objects like pots, stones, sticks or cowries. They are believed to function in various ways, that is, to make the soil fertile for a good harvest, to protect the family or clan from any misfortune or evil, to bless the wombs of women so that they might give birth, and to ward off sicknesses and diseases of all sorts. That is why sacrifices of

chicken, goat, and beer are made to these gods to appease them and to maintain a good relationship with the gods of the land. A related cult known as *Yambu* is found in the Tashan-Mada area. From January to April, offerings are made to the gods before the planting season during which people plead for sufficient rainfall and blessings on their farms. In September, they again appease these gods and give sacrifices in thanksgiving. The cult shrines are kept sacred, and away from people. Only the priest and those involved are allowed to go there (Blench, 2015).

In honour of these gods, important festivals are celebrated. An example is the *Ashimu* festival celebrated in March/April annually. During the ceremony, only men who have been initiated into the *Ashim* cult can participate in the feast. The ceremony lasts for about a week. This period is marked by much beer drinking and feasting. The *Arashim* dance is done during the ceremony (Blench, 2015).

Witchcraft is greatly feared in Eggon land. Many people spend money seeking protection against witchcraft. Witches discovered or suspected are forced to confess or be killed. Witch doctors in Eggon make a lot of money. An example is Mrs Maryamu, whose fame had reached all over Eggon land. This woman is believed to have the power to see and catch witches, especially those who kill people. She is also believed by the Eggon to have herbs that can disengage one from witchcraft. This woman is not just consulted; she is worshipped. Her influence is so strong that even church leaders consulted her at a time. In essence, there is a great fear of witches amongst the Eggon (Blench, 2015). Today Islam and Christianity were the major religions in the land.

DISCUSSION

The Coming of Islam to Eggonland

Historical facts proved that Islam as a religion started to enter into the lives of the Eggon people from the beginning of the 20th century. This is relatively late compared to places like Lafia and Keffi Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State, this is due to some factors, by their geographical location, historical and ethnic relationship with Kanem Bornu Empire and the Sokoto Caliphate respectively, the Eggon people had no direct trade link with the two Great Empires in the Northern Nigeria that contributed to the spread and development of Islam which would have to attract immigrant Muslim traders and preachers in their midst to introduce the religion of Islam (Focus on Nassarawa Eggon, 1993). It is a fact that there were Eggon people who are Muslims even during the reign of the Aren Eggon Allumbuğu Tsewhi, a Non-Muslim (the Chief of the Eggon people).

However, the rapid acceptance of Islam in Eggonland was when in 1953 Sir Ahmadu Bello visited Nassarawa Eggon during the reign of Alhaji Abdullahi Idde, a Muslim

Aren Eggon (the Chief of the Eggon people). The visit attracted a lot of Eggon people to embrace Islam as their religion (Focus on Nassarawa Eggon, 1993). In the Glorious Qur'an Allah had spoken the truth when He declares;

When comes to the help of Allah and conquest, and you see that people enter Allah's Religion in Crowds (Qur'an 110:1-2).

It has been observed by the researchers that Mallam Aliyu Kotsa and Mallam Umaru Egbu all of the Eggon ethnic group were Muslims even before the reign of Alh. Abdullahi Idde. Not only that Mallam Umaru Egbu had established the traditional Islamic school in his house in Akwanga, while Mallam Aliyu Kotsa moved to Hanwa in Zaria, Kaduna and became an Imam in that settlement in the early 1950s.

It has also been asserted by Umar Abdullahi Galle, (2020) that before the establishment of the present-day Nassarawa Eggon, Mada Station have been a stronghold for Islam and Muslims, this is because Mada Station has been a host to different ethnic nationals at the cause of trading along the railway shorelines. This happened between the mid-twenties and early thirties, which gave the Eggon people early contact with Islam. It is also on record the Barkin Kuza, Kuba (Tin Settlement) Kuba in Nassarawa Eggon Town played a significant role in the spread of Islam among the Eggon people. This is because it played host to Muslim Miners from different parts of Northern Nigeria before the establishment of Nassarawa Eggon.

It has been observed by the researchers, that Barkin Abdullahi (B.A.D) is another reference of the Islamization that took place in Eggonland. This is also attributed to the fact that Barkin Abdullahi, a rail station which was constructed between the early thirties and forties (1930s-1940) played host to people of different religious faiths hence due to the construction work and subsequent operation of the rail line the Eggon people came into contact with the labour force at that particular time.

Due to the visit, many Hausa traders and scholars became acquainted with the area and started to establish their business and at the same time propagate the teachings of Islam in Nassarawa Eggon. Thus a Qur'anic school was established in the Palace of the Aren Eggon and which helped in the spread and dissemination of the teachings of Islam amongst Eggon people far and wide which led to the conversion and acceptance of many Eggon people to Islam. This visit was the turning point in the development of Islam in Eggonland because a lot of people migrated from the villages to the newly established Nassarawa Eggon town and accepted Islam. Thousands of elderly men and women refused to accept Islam but allowed their children to embrace Islam but this is rarely captured in most of the historical literature of Eggonland written by Christians. Therefore, an attempt would be made to deconstruct and debunk most of

the historical fallacies anchored by the Christian writers who deliberately want to establish that Eggon is synonymous with Christianity.

The exact percentage of the Muslim community in Eggonland is uncertain, for several reasons, because Christianity and traditional religion had deeply entrenched amongst the Eholo and Anzo clan of the Eggon people, anything regarding Islam was degraded and given no priority and as such record about Islam and Muslims was of no concern. Similarly, in Nassarawa Eggon, the government has not to keep records or statistics on the number of Muslims in the local government. Unlike in many other parts of the world, religion is not considered an important demographic factor in Nigeria. It is deemed as a matter of an individual's choice and religious freedom. But oral information has it that 60 per cent of the population of the Eggon people are Muslims.

It against this backdrop of the state of happenings, this paper would examine the circumstances that led to the entrance and development of Islam in Eggonland, and how Islam drew most of its followers and other non-Muslims in understanding the teachings of the religion of Islam. Hence, the Islamic *Da'wah* has been playing a significant role in promoting peaceful co-existence in Eggonland and Nasarawa State in general. One of the major challenges that stunted the expansion of Islam to neighbouring villages was the lack of adequate indigenous Islamic teachers that would enter rural areas to teach in the local dialects. Again, associating Islam with Hausa was another reason why some people refused to accept Islam, citing fear of the domineering effects of the Hausa language, that is why to date among the Christians in Eggonland, they tagged Eggon that are Muslim as Hausa. These factors have culminated into a major threat to the religion of Islam in Eggonland until the revival of Islam especially under the auspices of Sunni organizations. This would be discussed below as Islam today in Eggonland.

An In-depth interview with Imam Jibril Danladi Yusuf, (2020) revealed that ethnicity is a major setback to the development of Islamic *Da'wah* in Eggonland. People refused to embrace the teachings taught by someone that is not from their ethnic group especially in rural areas where inhabitants understand only the Eggon language. Early Islamic missionaries and preachers faced stiff resistance especially Hausa people that came to preach Islam because the Eggon see Hausa as an alien language and they are there to spread the dominance of the Hausa hegemony on the minority ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria. It was also observed that lack of enough Islamic scholars who can conduct the contemporary *Da'wah* programs in the area and regular training and re-training of scholars to update their knowledge as far as *Da'wah* is concern have greatly contributed to the low rate of people embracing Islam.

Islam Today in Eggonland

As of now, Islam in Eggonland seems to be gaining ground, especially in places like Arugbadu, Bakyano, Galle, Mada Station, Alogani, Endehu, Alizaga Arikya, Barkin Abdullahi (B.A.D), and Nassarawa Eggon. The researcher has observed that the activities of the *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah Wa'iqamatis Sunnah* (JIBWIS) (the Islamic Organization for the Eradication of Innovations and the Establishment of the Sunnah) also contributed to the spread of Islamic teachings among the Eggon people through their weekly preaching in villages in the area. This is because its *Da'wah* activities cut across all the villages and areas within the area of the Eggon people. This Islamic organization does organize lectures to sensitize the people of the real teachings of Islam, this mass awareness and orientation as an outreach to rural areas has been profitable considering the number of people embracing Islam.

However, the misunderstanding of Islam among the Eggon people today is mainly caused by the inaccurate or distorted information conveyed by the Christian missionaries with the assistance of some Eggon locals who penetrate villages in Eggonland and preach in Eggon language and thereby building schools, hospitals, and churches. They also donate foodstuff and clothing materials to the villagers and in turn spread hatred about Islam and Muslims to them. These humanitarian services have culminated to paint Islam black because the villages view the assistance rendered by the missionaries as part of salvation.

At the forefront in the propagation of Islam in Eggonland is the *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah Wa'iqamatis Sunnah* (JIBWIS) that conduct *Da'wah* across villages within Nassarawa Eggon calling people to the true teachings of Islam. This due to the registration and recognition were given to religious organisations in the country by the previous military regime of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1985-1993). This help in the development and spread of Islamic teachings in Eggonland. Also involved in the spread of true Islamic teachings in Eggonland is the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN), its programmes and *Da'wah* activities for secondary school students and other members of host communities. The activities of the (MSSN) got to areas where Islam faces resistance from Christians and traditionalists. In an In-Depth Interview with Ishaq Muhammad Idde, (2020) asserted that the programs are aimed at educating the students and members of the host communities on the various teachings of Islam, most especially the issue of morality.

Other Muslim groups are involved in the spread of Islam in Eggonland like the Muslim Sisters of the Medical and Health Workers in Nassarawa Eggon. This group has succeeded in organizing *Da'wah* lectures for women during the weekend and normally pays visit to hospitals and less privilege. According to Mairo, (2020) the Ameerah (President), that the organization is also involved in the organization of

Qur'anic Recitation competition for children from formal Islamic schools to keep them busy and up to date about their religion and sharpen their memory.

In explaining the reason for the number of Muslims among the Eholo clan of Eggonland, some people tend to point to the slow progress of Islamic *Da'wah* in villages that formed the Eholo clan of the Eggon people. The Christian missionary activities added to ethnicity in villages of the Eholo clan also contributed. Ustaz Nasir Al- Qasim, (2020) observed that unlike in some other areas where the number of Muslim converts reached few hundreds per year and is growing, the recorded number of Muslim converts among the Anzo and Erro clans of Eggonland are encouraging.

Furthermore, in looking at the problems facing the spread of Islamic teachings in Eggonland, some factors are worthy of discussion. With the progress of Islam among the Eggon people, a large proportion of the people of Eggonland is ignorant of the true teachings of Islam as practised by the Noble Prophet Muhammad (May peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In villages unlike the township, they know very little about Islam and whatever they know, are either sketchy or misleading because of the inadequate Islamic teachers in the area (Ustaz Nasir Al- Qasim, 2020). And even the non-Muslims have little or no knowledge about the religion of Islam. This misconception led them to develop hatred against Muslims and Islam. All these were a result of their misunderstanding of Islam, lack of interest in source authentic knowledge about Islam, ineffective programs conducted by Muslim groups to acquaint the non-Muslims with Islamic teachings and lack of Muslim preachers who are fluent in the Eggon language.

More so, one of the major challenges for the spread of Islam in Eggonland is in the intellectual sphere. Most of the earliest and recent writers of Eggon, particularly Christian writers tend to align the history of the Eggon with Christianity. In virtually all books, articles, journal or cultural ceremonies of Eggon people, the picture that those writers such Ayuba Anyuabuga, Prof. Dauda Musa Enna, Philip Adigizi try to depict is that Eggon people are exclusively Christians and their root is from Israel. In this regard, literature regarding religion in the Eggonland neglected Islam and prominent Eggon people that accepted Islam since the 1950s. This has slow down the development and spread of Islam in the area studied (Envuladu, 2014). Their writings were fallacious in the sense that, they have not tendered any anthropological and scientific evidence that linked Eggon with Christianity because the European missionaries arrived Eggon Hills in the 18th century. Before the arrival of missionaries, there was no Christianity and Islam, when the colonialists arrived, they had earlier contact with Eholo and Anzo clans this has been the reason till 2016, a significant majority of those clans are Christians while the Eggon Erro clan had no

contact with the Europeans like their compatriots, that is why most of the Eggon Erroh people are either Muslims or traditional religion worshipers.

In an oral interview with Ustaz Nasir Al- Qasim, Umar Abdullahi Galle, Muhammad Abdullahi Maigari and Jibrin Yusuf Danladi confirmed that the number of Muslims in Eggonland as at date outnumber that of other religious faiths. That the Muslim population among the Eggon people is more than 60 per cent of the total population of the Eggon tribe of Nasarawa State.

The Prospects Islam in Eggonland

There is light at the end of the tunnel regarding the future of Islam in Eggonland, the prospect as a whole is promising. While some problems related to the spread of the true Islamic teachings such as the fear of being isolated as encountered by new converts to Islam will remain, some would subside and the situation improves with time especially as the Muslims and Non- Muslims continue to understand the true teachings of Islam, and some of the villagers doing away with the *Ombatse* Cult and embrace what Islam has said as a result of the influx of Islamic preachers to hitherto restricted areas.

However, despite the increasing number of Muslims among the Eggon people and understanding of the teachings of Islam, the proliferation of modern and formal Islamic schools have been encouraging, this portends that Islam is steadily growing not only in numbers but devoted Muslim notably among the young generation is pumping up among the Eggon people, this evident by the number of converts among youths, women and elderly. Based on a statistic from an Islamic organization *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah Wa'iqamatis Sunnah* (JIBWIS), that over 70 per cent of the total Muslim population belong to the 25 – 35 and 36 – 45 age groups (JIBWIS, 2013). With the rapid increase in the number of Muslims in Nassarawa Eggon and the existing development brought by the formal Islamic schools in the area, it has created an avenue for contacts between Muslims and Non- Muslims either at workshops, seminar or other public places to facilitate understanding of the Islam and hatred developed by the Christians in the area. This has substantially accelerated the spread of Islam to areas that previously have no single Muslim worshiper. In this sense, the influx of Islamic teachers teaching with the formal Islamic schools in Nassarawa Eggon is fast-tracking the awareness of the religion Islam to the population in the villages to have a better understanding of Islam.

The researchers attributed the increase in the number of Masjids based on the increasing population of the Muslims in the area, Islamic Schools and a Muslim organization, which have been enhancing and facilitating the *Da'wah* process further, is expected to increase in no distant time. It has been further observed that *Masjid*

could be found in almost all the villages in Nassarawa Eggon except for Kagbu, Arikpa, Aguji, Lizzi Keffi, Alushi and Ubbe/ Ogba villages out of the 34 villages under Nassarawa Eggon. One of the progresses Islam is having Islamic Scholars that are now preaching and calling people to Islam in the Eggon dialect. Alhaji Ayuba Kwakibi revealed during an In-Depth Interview that, contrary to the opposition early Islamic preachers that were not from Eggon in their quest to spread Islam, now there are a lot of indigenous scholars who are well-versed in both Islamic and Western education that are entering the nooks and crannies of Eggon land preaching the words of Allah in Eggon language without fear of tribalism and attack. People are embracing Islam after understanding the explanations in the Eggon dialect (Alhaji Ayuba Kwakibi, 2020).

Another area in which Islam will be prospecting is the establishment of Islamic Schools that ran both Islamic and Western educational programmes in Nassarawa Eggon today. Muhammad Abdullahi Maigari, (2020) revealed that these schools were built to bring up the young ones who would assist in doing *Da'wah* in the future. He mentioned the Islamic schools, for example, the Al-Iman School, Alogani build by a Syrian Nurudeen al- Rawi. Also, the (JIBWIS) builds and run schools in Eggonland, Ummul Qura schools, and Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gummi School both of which enrolls students into the nursery, primary and secondary sessions. It is also observed that the (JIBWIS), also owned and run the Assasul Islam nursery and primary school. Other Islamic schools also run Western educational programs like Hayatul Islam, Al-Ikhlās, and al-Bayan schools.

The researchers also observed that, Islam and Muslims in Eggonland are on the verge of getting a befitting centre which is expected to give Muslims a lead and make the prospect of Islam a good one, is the building of an Islamic centre that includes a training centre in Nassarawa Eggon. This training centre is intended to train Eggon sons and daughters in various areas of the religion of Islam and most importantly Islamic *Da'wah*. Added to this, is the establishment of the Islamic Society of Eggonland that offers scholarships to students learning in tertiary institutions at home and abroad. This will also boost and give Muslims led intellectually giving the importance Islam attached to the acquisition of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, statistics have shown that the number of Muslims has increased in Eggonland as compared to years back and there is neither record nor a clear history of the first coming of Islam in Eggonland. There are rather various oral accounts and views concerning Islam and the number of Muslims in Eggonland. That close to 60 per cent of the Eggon people are practicing Muslims. In brief, the substantial impact of Islam on these areas was not promising until recent times, that the Muslim

population undoubtedly increasing almost on daily basis. Regardless of these facts, Islam is fast growing in Eggonland and its environs. With little challenges and problems in spreading the true Islamic teachings are expected to continue or persist, yet, over time, Islam hopefully would find a better place in the hearts of the Eggon people and become the leading religion in Eggonland. With the recent developments in Eggonland, i.e. the increasing number of Muslim converts, especially young people and the growing number of Muslim organizations and Islamic institutions such as masjids and schools, etc. the future of Islam in Eggonland is certainly looking bright.

REFERENCES

- Blench, R. (2015). *A dictionary of Eggon language*. Cambridge, UK: Kay Williamson Foundation.
- Eggon in Nigeria. https://joshuaproject.net/people_group/11721/. Retrieved 17/05/2020.
- Enna, D. M. (2015). Resurgence of ethnic minority identity through performance: A Case of the Eggon. *International Journal of African Society, Cultures, and Tradition*, 2(3), 13-33.
- Envuladu, A. (2014). *Eggon nation from 11th century to date*. Jos, Nigeria, Np.
- Focus on Nassarawa Eggon Local Government. (1993). A Pamphlet of the Local Government Information Unit. Jos: Ombile Press.
- Its Chrisdfirst, (2016). Eggon: People, Lifestyle and Culture. <https://itschrisdfirst.blogspot.co.ke/2016/04/eggonpeople-lifestyle-and-culture.html?m=1>. Retrieved 12/04/2020.
- JIBWIS, (2013). A Document of the *Jama'atu izalatil bid'ah wa'iqamatis sunnah* (JIBWIS). Kaduna: Amana Press
- Kigbu, K. A. 1996. The Eggon people: An early history. In: Enna M. D. ed. *The Eggon of central Nigeria*. Jos: Andex Press.
- Mahmud I.B. (1994). *Islam in North-Central Nigeria: The Islamization programme of Sir Ahmadu Bello*. Kaduna: Amanawa Press.
- Manga, M. (2012). *The Eggon and Influences of Christianity*. Jos: Enoch Press
- Ministry of Internal Affairs and Information Jos. (1972). The Twelve Administrative Divisions of Benue-Plateau State of Nigeria. Akwanga Division.
- Muhammad, M.K and Al- Hilali, M.T., (2011). *The Interpretation of the Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*. Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Press.
- Nasara M. (2011). *Eggon and the power of the ancestors*. Lafia: Sakpa Press.
- Ombugunawu, E. S. 1984. *Major themes in the history of Eggon people, from the late nineteenth century to the present day*. BA Project, University of Sokoto, Nigeria.
- Tijani, D.A., (1996). The problem of syncretism in Islam: A case study of Nassarawa Eggon local government area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. M.A Dissertation University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria.