Understanding the Issues Behind Religious Conversion: A Study on Changing Statistics of Religious Affiliation in Ebira Land of North Central Nigeria

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Abstract
This study examined the spate of Ebira Muslims renouncing Islam in recent times thereby causing a noticeable change in religious affiliation in the Ebira Muslim community of north-central Nigeria. To fathom what have happened as a build up to such an occurrence, the research asked six questions some of which are; what are the perceived strategies adopted by Christians for converting Ebira Muslims? What is the nature of Ebira Muslims renouncing Islam and what are their perceived reasons? Although religious conversion is an abstract spiritual experience that cannot be subjected to a laboratory analysis, nevertheless, it doesn't take place in a social vacuum. It is often the result of ordinary tangible human events, hence the quest to unravel why some people renounce their religious beliefs in favor of other faith persuasions. The study adopted the action-based research format involving intrinsic case study aimed at deeply understanding the unique qualities, intricacies and complexities of the subject under investigation. The study revealed that sustained aggressive missionary drive through organized crusades and public lectures with renown Christian experts and evangelists as guest speakers, charitable gestures and philanthropic engagements were some of the strategies adopted by the Christians to convert vulnerable groups among the Muslims which include. The poor and the destitute, the sick and the invalid and mostly female spinsters desperate to get married. It is recommended that towards perpetuating the Islamic identity of the Ebira Muslim community of north central Nigeria, Muslim parents should accord the Islamic education of their children the priority it deserves going beyond merely after "finishing reading the Qur'an". Similarly, the curriculum of the Islamiyya schools should include Aqeedah and Tarikh due to their relevance in laying a sound foundation of Islamic consciousness.

Key words: *Spate, Renouncing Islam, Ebira Muslims, Religious Conversion.*

Introduction

Over the last three decades there has been a noticeable progressive and continuous expansion of Christianity in Ebira land of north central Nigeria. Aside the influx of settlers of the Christian faith from other parts of Nigeria that seemed to swell the number of Christians inhabiting the region, there have been a rising wave of Ebira Muslims renouncing the Islamic religion in favor of Christianity. This is evident from the kind of names individuals bear in the study area. Here, there is no name bearing the attributes of Allah that has not been paired as either the name or surname of someone with hitherto a Muslim background. Such names are common and the names

of all the Muslim Holy Prophets and Messengers; from Adam to Muhammad and all his wives, children and respected Companions is found as either the first name or the surname of people bearing Peter, Emmanuel, Joseph, Samuel, Herbert, Alexander, Paul and any other famous Christian names. This at a glance is the consequence of Christian proselytism on a Muslim society. Although the pace of this incursion was initially slow, of recent it has gathered noticeable momentum due to activities of the Pentecostal Churches that are present in all nooks and crannies of Ebira Land today. It is against this background, that this study was contemplated in order to understand the reasons behind why so many Muslim Ebira renege and to also fathom why Christianity appeals to them.

Statement of the problem/justification

Christians acting as a group or as individuals remain resolute in winning souls not only among pagan Africans but even in Muslim dominated areas of northern Nigeria today. Their effort of converting Muslims to Christianity in Ebira land of north-central Nigeria is yielding fruits. There is no shortage of evidence pointing to this fact and such a trend provides an opportunity to further understand the issue of religious conversion as a phenomenon in the field of Humanities in our institutions of learning.

Objectives of the study

The specific purposes of the study are:
1. To determine whether Christianity is the preferred faith to erstwhile Ebira Muslims on renouncing Islam
2. To find out the perceived strategies adopted by particularly Christians for converting Ebira Muslims
3. To determine the nature of the Ebira Muslims renouncing Islam
4. To determine the perceived reasons for Ebira Muslims' renunciation of the Islamic faith
5. To determine the attitude of the Muslim Ebira towards his fellow Ebira Muslim who renounced Islam
6. To determine the strategies to be adopted by Ebira Muslims to maintain their Muslim identity.

Research questions

For the purpose of this research the following questions were asked:
1. Is Christianity the preferred faith to erstwhile Ebira Muslims after renouncing Islam?
2. What are the perceived strategies adopted by Christians for converting Ebira Muslims?
3. What is the nature of the Ebira Muslims renouncing Islam?
4. What are the perceived reasons for Ebira Muslims' renunciation of the Islamic faith?
5. What is the attitude of the Muslim Ebira towards his fellow Ebira Muslim who renounced Islam?
6. What are the strategies to be adopted by Ebira Muslims to maintain their Muslim identity?

Literature Review
Theoretical issues in religious conversion

Religious conversion, denoting a change in an individual's religious choice, has been a thoroughly discussed topic in scholarly circles. As a field of study, it has developed significantly

in recent times. Snow (2004) and Tracey (2012) have delved into it to uncover the various factors surrounding it especially its motivation and processes.

The rooted established theories to help understand religious conversion shows a great deal of variety of possibilities. Snook et al. (2019) attributed religious conversion taking place due to when one is seeking to cope with personal issues or desire to integrate socially. This view is reinforced by Valsiner (1999) and Simpson (1974) who propounded the cognitive and developmental theories, which portrayed the subject as a natural trait of human development impelled by mental and social forces that shape how individuals process information and experiences.

Barro, R., et al (2010) discussed how vulnerability of the individual in distressing socio-economic circumstances, such as penury, joblessness, and restricted social mobility, can influence religious conversion. These conditions can make the promises or support offered by religious groups attractive thereby leading to conversion.

Additionally, Sherkat (1997) and Fry (2003) theorized that the family, associates and religious leaders largely influence the decision to convert. They called it social influence theory in religious conversion. Its opposite is the rational choice theories, advocated by Spickard (1998) and Frank (2000) who are of the view that religious conversion decisions follow a calculation of the strengths and weaknesses of an alternative or the result of cost-benefit analysis.

Studies have also demonstrated that conversion motives vary across religious groups and cultural milieu. For example, research has proven that conversion to Christianity often involve personal crises, as Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) discovered. In contrast, conversion to Buddhism is more of a push to seeking spirituality, as revealed in studies by Sandage and Moe (2013). Furthermore, motives can differ between societies, suggesting a cultural dimension to the conversion experience in European and Asian countries.

While the existing literature offers various motives and processes behind religious conversion, it also shows the complexity and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon. As such, only some theories can fully explain all aspects of religious conversion, underlining the need for continued and diversified research in this field.

McCleary (2008) addresses explicitly how financial circumstances can drive conversion, especially if the new religion is perceived as offering better economic opportunities. This aspect suggests that pragmatic considerations of financial well-being can sometimes influence the decision to convert. This is broadly classified as socio-economic motivation in religious conversion.

Religious texts, teachings, and practices also play a big role in the conversion process. Cahill (2005) have noted how exposure to the doctrines and rituals of a particular religion can profoundly influence an individual's decision to convert. This exposure may occur through interactions with friends, family, or other community members, as Gombrich (2006) and Cahill (2005) noted.

In a review of reasons for Africans acceptance of alien religious beliefs undertaken by European historians, Clarke (1986) noted that trade has been important in terms of introducing and even attracting West Africans to Islam. However, according to Pearson (1963) not all conversions motivated by the desire to participate in the Trans-Saharan trade were "lasting and permanent". It is for this reason that Levtzion (1979) observed that to regard the whole expansion and development of Islam in West Africa as simply a by-product of trade could be a distortion of facts. He concluded that while it was true that it was in the pursuit of trading interests that some West

Africans became Muslims and the same is true for some Christians too, there were a variety of reasons for some African cases of conversion to the Abrahamic religions. Davidson (1966) mentioned one of such reasons as, Islam for some of those who embraced it, was seen as a "highly prestigious" religion because Muslims were "literate and they have a formal system of education" and were therefore seen as "a modernizing force..." Dia (1980) speaking along the same line, noted that Islam became an attraction because it offered something new in terms of its vision to life, of the world, of man and his destiny, and skills and techniques considered to be essential for progress and development.

Fisher (1963) also contributing on African conversion to foreign religious persuasions, pointed to a correlation between the Islamic and African views on certain issues as a possible factor in facilitating African conversion to Islam. For instance, he pointed to the notion of a Supreme Being, which was widespread in African religion. However, while it was possible certain affinities between Islamic and African world views and orientation to life make possible a correlation and might have facilitated African conversion to Islam, there is a tendency to over-emphasize the similarities.

Agbebi, mentioned in Clarke (1986) suggested that Islam adapted itself better than Christianity to the African condition. Watt (1979) on the basis of this suggested that many Africans embraced it simply because "it is a soft option".

Christian missions' interest in the Muslim North

Several attempts have been made to establish Christianity in northern Nigeria, Bunza and Shehu (2018) noted that "northern Nigeria from the 1840s stated receiving varying waves of Missionary attempts to evangelize and win souls for Christ". The initiative was started by Samuel Ajayi Crowther under a group with the name Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1841. This was followed by the activities of the 'Sudan Party', a zealous Missionary organization working around 1890. The organization made the conversion of the Muslim areas of northern Nigeria their principal objective. However, the Missionaries were met with stiff resistance in particular from the Hausa-speaking Muslims that dominated the region. This was attributed to the deeply rooted Islamic background of the Hausas. More so, the colonial government was for some reasons reluctant to allow Christian Missionaries to work in the main Islamic centres of northern Nigeria, this made the Missionaries to emphasize what Clarke (1986) termed 'halting the advance of Islam' or putting a stop to the growth of Islam in Africa. It was in line with the proposal arrived at the Edinburgh and Lucknow World Missionaries Conferences, that took place in the first half of the 20th century where it was stressed that the 'whole strategy of the Christian missions in Africa should be viewed in relation to Islam' (Grimley & Robinson, 1966). This view of Islam and the efforts to limit its expansion and perpetuation were to persist in Christian missionary circles for a long time to come from the pre-colonial, colonial and even in post-colonial Africa.

The Ebira speaking people

Ohiare (1985) linguistically defined Ebira as those who speak the language or dialect called Ebira or those who recognize themselves as one but have lost touch of the ability to speak the language as a result of some historical development. Describing their location, Ozigi (2004) said that Ebira are predominantly in the Niger–Benue confluence area and scattered in locations as Okene, Okehi, Adavi and Ajaokuta. These are the Ebira Tao group of the central senatorial District of Kogi State. There are also the Ebira kotos found in Koton-Karfe of Kogi Local Government

Area of Kogi State. There is also the Ebira Mozum of Bassa Local Government Area of same Kogi State. However, there are large Ebira settlements outside Kogi State in places as Umaisha, Toto, Lafia District of Nassarawa State and the Federal Capital Territory. There is also Ebira Agatu in Benue State, Ebira Etuno in Igarra, Edo State.

Statistical figures of religious followership in Ebira land

Islam arrived Ebira land much earlier than Christianity (Salami, 2011). There are however, other views as those held by Sani (1993) claiming that Christianity preceded Islam in the area. Sani (1993) wrote: "the three dominant religions embraced by the Ebira are the traditional religion "Ori", Christianity and Islam *in that order of arrival in Ebiraland.*" He gave the population size of the religious groups in the area as 70% Muslims, 20% Christians and 10% traditionalist.

Methodology

Research varies according to the type of data needed, the method of data collection, analysis and interpretation of results or the objectives of the research. Accordingly, Akuezuilo, (1993) identified three broad classes of research as basic research, applied research and action research. This work is action-based research involving intrinsic case study which seeks to answer the question: 'What is?" through describing events and situations as they appear to the researcher. Yin, (2003) noted that a case study is a story about something unique, special, or interesting. Such stories can be about individuals, organizations, processes, programs, neighborhoods, institutions, and even events. The case study gives the story behind the result by capturing what happened to bring it about, and can be a good opportunity to bring attention to a particular challenge. Cases might be selected because they are of special interest as in this particular one.

Yin, (1994) and Stake, (1995) listed direct observation, Interviews, documents, archival records, physical artifacts and participant observation as sources of information used in a case study. All means mentioned above were exploited. While the data generated from the questionnaire was presented in tables answering each of the six research questions raised and the simple frequency mode of analysis was used in analyzing the data. The bar chart displaying statistical data from the survey was presented for each question. The heights or lengths of the bars is proportional to the quantities they represented.

This study covers the Ebira Muslim community of Kogi central senatorial district of Kogi state, Nigeria. They are known as the Ebira Tao (or EbiraEhi) inhabiting the present day Okene, Ajaokuta, Okehi and Adavi local government areas of Kogi state. Ogori/Magongo communities and the Igala-speaking people living in Ajaokuta, have, therefore, been automatically excluded.
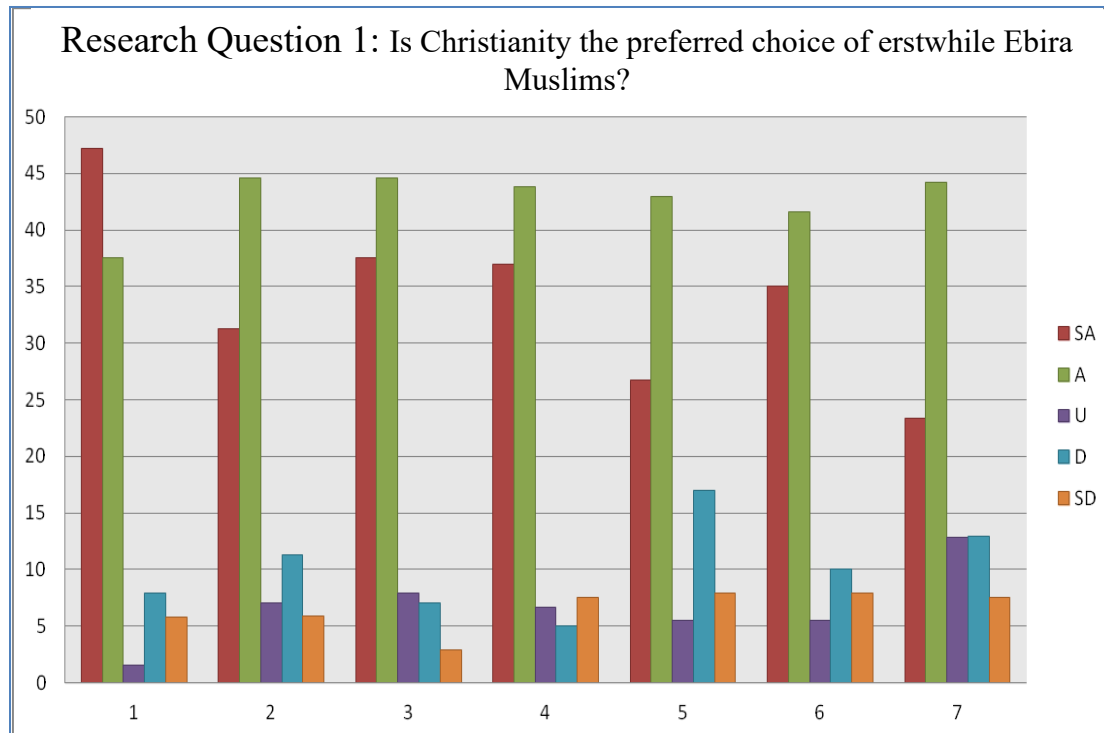
Presentation and analysis of data

Research Question 1: Is Christianity the preferred choice of erstwhile Ebira Muslims?

S/N	ITEMS	OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Most Ebira Muslims have family members who changed to Christianity in the last few years	SA	113	47.2
		A	90	37.5
		U	4	1.6
		D	19	7.9
		SD	14	5.8
		TOTAL	240	100
2	Some of the incidence occur within their nuclear family	SA	75	31.3
		A	107	44.6
		U	17	7.1
		D	27	11.3
		SD	14	5.9
		TOTAL	240	100
3	Majority of the conversions affects relatives in their extended family	SA	90	37.5
		A	107	44.6
		U	19	7.9
		D	17	7.1
		SD	7	2.9
		TOTAL	240	100
4	Only a few Ebira Muslims have Christian relatives that have a long history of Christianity that is more than 50 years.	SA	89	37
		A	105	43.8
		U	16	6.7
		D	12	5
		SD	18	7.5
		TOTAL	240	100
5	Majority of the conversions from Islam to Christianity happened in the last 20 years	SA	64	26.7
		A	103	42.9
		U	13	5.5
		D	41	17
		SD	19	7.9
		TOTAL	240	100
6	Cases of conversion to Christianity that are between 10-15 years old among Muslim Ebira are many	SA	84	35
		A	100	41.6
		U	13	5.5
		D	24	10
		SD	19	7.9

		TOTAL	240	100
7	There are many cases of conversion to Christianity in Muslim Ebira families that are not more than 5 years old	SA	56	23.4
		A	106	44.17
		U	29	12.08
		D	31	12.92
		SD	18	7.5
		TOTAL	240	100

Source: field survey 2025

Research Question 1: Is Christianity the preferred choice of erstwhile Ebira Muslims?

Research Question 2: What are the perceived strategies/ activities adopted by Christians for converting Ebira Muslims?

S/N	ITEMS	OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
8	Ebira land has witnessed increased visits of both famous national and international Christian experts/evangelists in recent years.	SA	84	35
		A	107	44.6
		U	13	5.5
		D	18	7.5
		SD	18	7.5
		TOTAL	240	100
9	There is a sharp rise in the number of Churches across Ebira land	SA	99	41.3
		A	120	50
		U	8	3.3

		D	7	2.9
		SD	6	2.5
		TOTAL	240	100
10	There are both Church owned schools and schools established by Christian individuals oriented towards their faithwhich Muslim children patronize due to quality instruction being offered	SA	65	27
		A	136	56.7
		U	33	13.8
		D	5	2.1
		SD	1	0.4
		TOTAL	240	100
11	Besides regular schools there are specialized educational institutions established by Christian bodies in Ebira land today	SA	56	23.3
		A	139	57.9
		U	10	4.2
		D	27	11.2
		SD	8	3.3
		TOTAL	240	100
12	There is a noticeable rise in Christian programs on radio and television aired across Ebira land today	SA	70	29.2
		A	127	52.92
		U	8	3.3
		D	23	9.58
		SD	12	5
		TOTAL	240	100
13	Pamphlets and other periodicals are being offered freely and generously to all by Churches that educate people on Christianity and its values in Ebira land.	SA	67	27.92
		A	135	56.25
		U	15	6.25
		D	15	6.25
		SD	8	3.3
		TOTAL	240	100
14	Many Ebira are holding positions of authority and influence in their Churches today in a bid to indigenize them	SA	70	29.2
		A	137	57.1
		U	18	7.5
		D	8	3.3
		SD	7	2.9
		TOTAL	240	100
15	Through the use of charity and material gifts, the Christians are increasingly gaining more converts in Ebira land	SA	71	29.6
		A	138	57.5
		U	14	5.8
		D	10	4.17
		SD	7	2.92

		TOTAL	240	100
16	The Churches are spreading anti-Muslim sentiments among the populace through propagation of suppositions and invention of falsities	SA	59	24.6
		A	145	60.4
		U	19	7.92
		D	16	6.67
		SD	1	0.4
		TOTAL	240	100
17	There are orphanages run by Christians in Ebira land through which they exert some tremendous influence on the people	SA	17	7.1
		A	8	7.5
		U	72	30
		D	98	40.82
		SD	35	14.58
		TOTAL	240	100

Source: field survey 2025
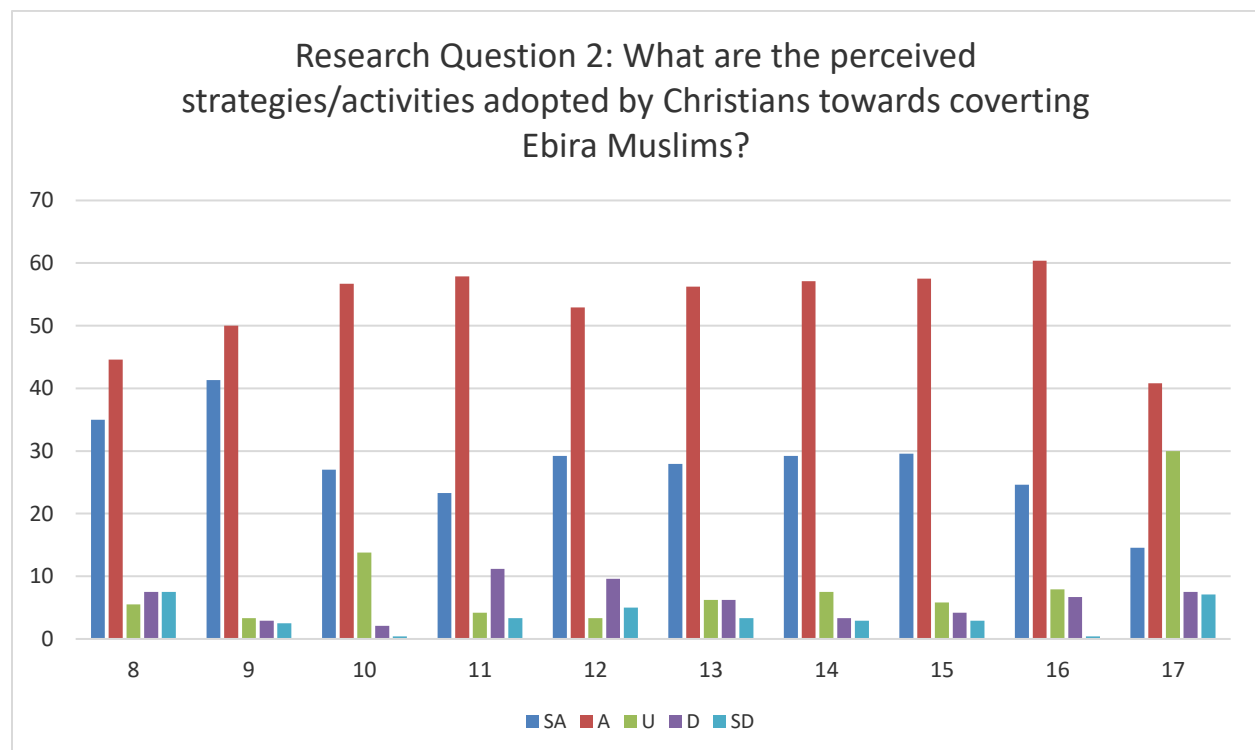
Research Question 2: What are the perceived strategies/activities adopted by Christians towards coverting Ebira Muslims?
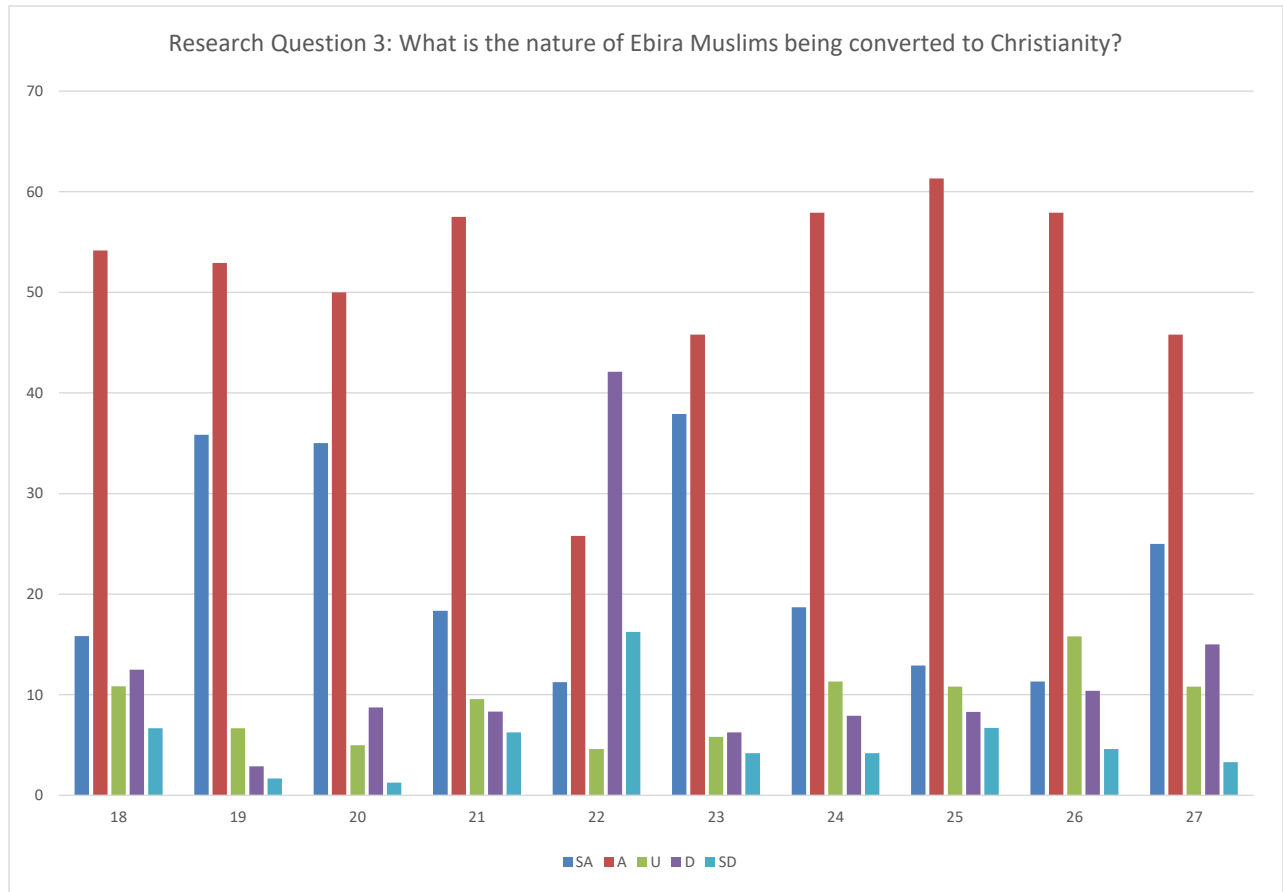
Research Question 3: What is the nature of Ebira Muslims being converted to Christianity?

S/N	ITEMS	OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
18	Conversion to Christianity from Islam among the poor and lower ranks in the society is rampant	SA	38	15.83
		A	130	54.17
		U	26	10.83
		D	30	12.5
		SD	16	6.67
		TOTAL	240	100
19	Those who changed from Islam to Christianity are particularly female and mostly spinsters	SA	86	35.83
		A	127	52.92
		U	16	6.67
		D	7	2.9
		SD	4	1.67
		TOTAL	240	100
20	Conversions to Christianity among Ebira Muslims cut across all classes of gender	SA	84	35
		A	120	50
		U	12	5
		D	21	8.75
		SD	3	1.25
		TOTAL	240	100
21	The sick and the infirm constitute the bulk of those who left Islam for Christianity among the Muslims in Ebiraland	SA	44	18.33
		A	138	57.5
		U	23	9.58
		D	20	8.33
		SD	15	6.25
		TOTAL	240	100
22	Those who have a thorough knowledge of Islam also convert to the Christian faith	SA	27	11.25
		A	62	25.8
		U	11	4.6
		D	101	42.1
		SD	39	16.25
		TOTAL	240	100
23	The majority of those who changed to Christianity from Islam that I know have poor knowledge of Islam	SA	91	37.9
		A	110	45.8
		U	14	5.8
		D	15	6.25
		SD	10	4.2
		TOTAL	240	100

24	Muslim children and mostlythe youths are among those that are mostly influenced	SA	45	18.7
		A	139	57.9
		U	27	11.3
		D	19	7.9
		SD	10	4.2
		TOTAL	240	100
25	There are also cases of conversions from Islam to Christianity among people that are elderly	SA	31	12.9
		A	147	61.3
		U	26	10.8
		D	20	8.3
		SD	16	6.7
		TOTAL	240	100
26	There are also cases of conversion to Christianity from Islam among Ebira Muslims who can be described as fortune-seekers, greedy and discontented	SA	27	11.3
		A	139	57.9
		U	38	15.8
		D	25	10.4
		SD	11	4.6
		TOTAL	240	100
27	Those who convert most are people who have no specific calling	SA	60	25
		A	110	45.8
		U	26	10.8
		D	36	15
		SD	8	3.3
		TOTAL	240	100

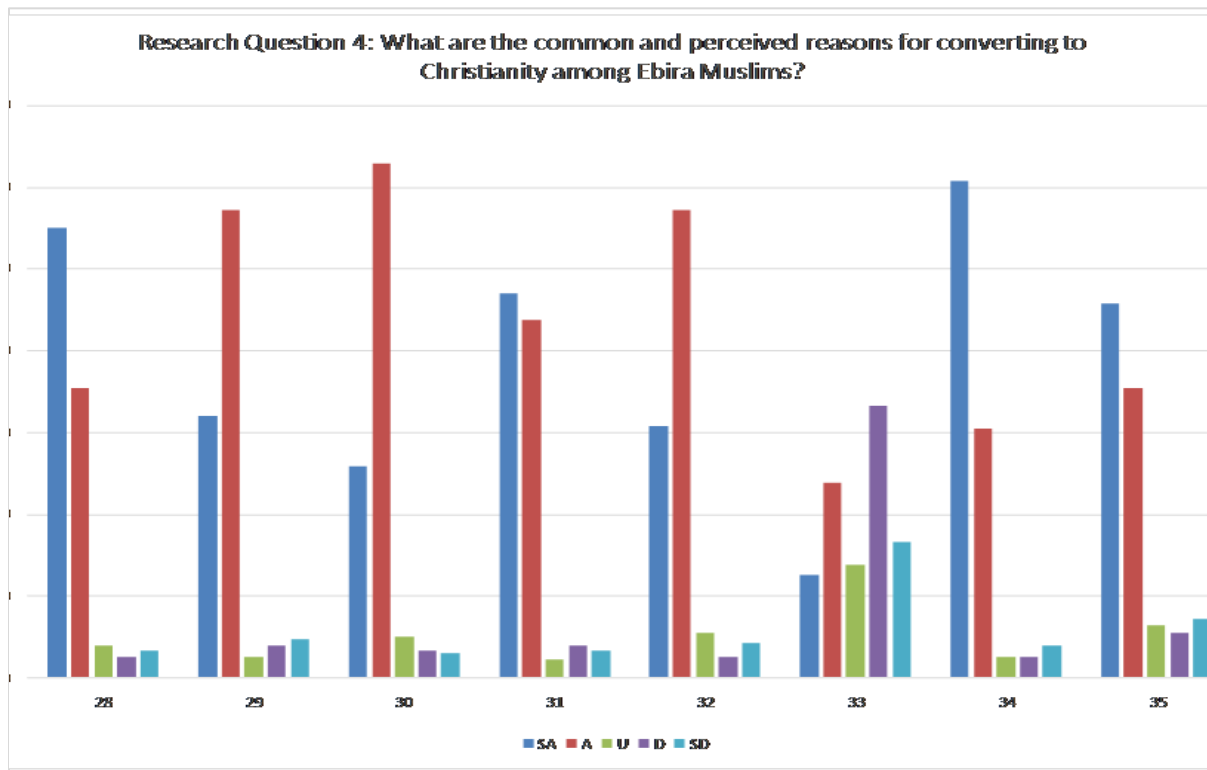Research Question 3: What is the nature of Ebira Muslims being converted to Christianity?

Source: field survey 2025

Research Question 4: What are the common and perceived reasons for Ebira Muslims converting to Christianity?

S/N	ITEMS	OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
28	Many of those who converted to Christianity lacked parental guidance and supervision in an Islamic way when they were growing up.	SA	132	55
		A	85	35.4
		U	9	3.8
		D	6	2.5
		SD	8	3.3
		TOTAL	240	100
29	Most Ebira Muslim children that were brought up by their Christian relatives/mentors ended up being Christians	SA	77	32
		A	137	57.1
		U	6	2.5
		D	9	3.8
		SD	11	4.6
		TOTAL	240	100
30	A few Ebira Muslims became Christians due to the influence of their friends and people they are very close to.	SA	62	25.8
		A	151	62.9
		U	12	5
		D	8	3.3
		SD	7	2.9
		TOTAL	240	100
31	Most Ebira Muslim women changed to Christianity because of marriage to Christian men.	SA	113	47
		A	105	43.8
		U	5	2.1
		D	9	3.8
		SD	8	3.3
		TOTAL	240	100
32	There are also instances where the husband changed from Islam to Christianity due to the influence of his wife	SA	74	30.8
		A	137	57.1
		U	13	5.4
		D	6	2.5
		SD	10	4.2
		TOTAL	240	100
33	Most Ebira Muslims convert to Christianity as a result of sound belief and conviction in Christian values and traditions	SA	30	12.5
		A	57	23.8
		U	33	13.8
		D	80	33.3
		SD	40	16.6

		TOTAL	240	100
34	Most conversions to Christianity from Islam were due to health challenges	SA	146	60.8
		A	73	30.4
		U	6	2.5
		D	6	2.5
		SD	9	3.8
		TOTAL	240	100
35	Some converted from Islam to Christianity due to economic hardships and the prospect of getting financial assistance and support from members of their new faith	SA	110	45.8
		A	85	35.4
		U	15	6.3
		D	13	5.4
		SD	17	7.1
		TOTAL	240	100

Source: field survey 2025

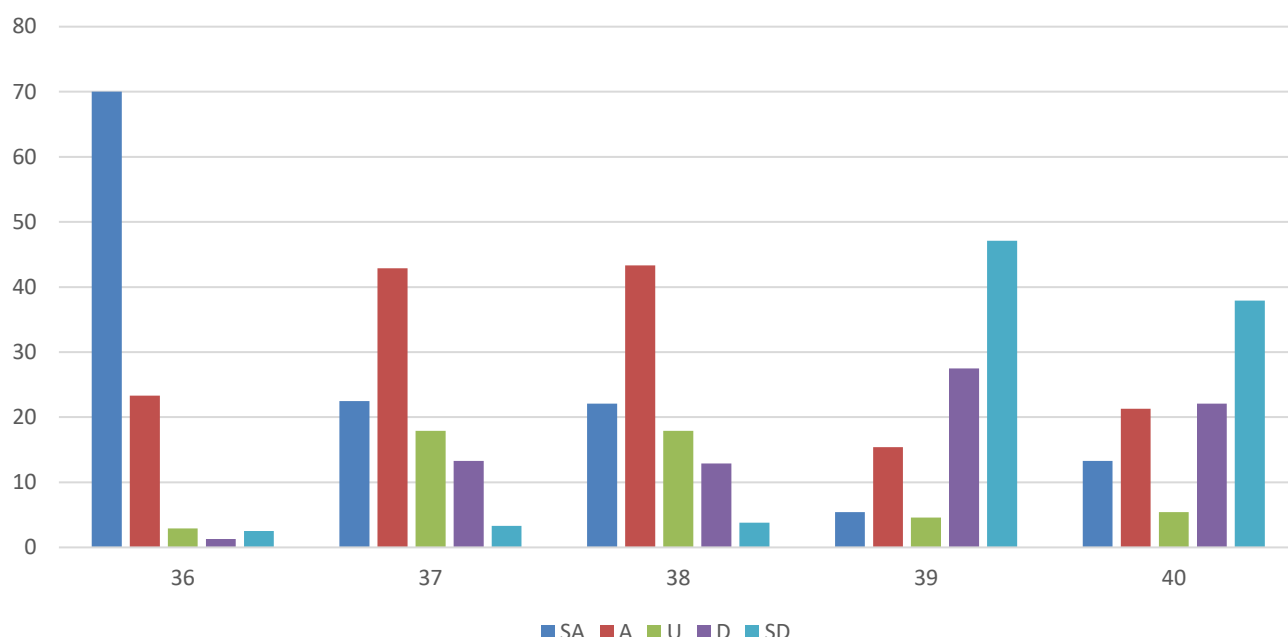Research Question 4: What are the common and perceived reasons for converting to Christianity among Ebira Muslims?

Research Question5: What is the attitude of the Muslim Ebira towards his fellow Ebira Muslim who converted to Christianity?

S/N	ITEMS	OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
36	I am always upset whenever I hear of my relative leaving Islam for Christianity	SA	168	70
		A	56	23.3
		U	7	2.9
		D	3	1.3
		SD	6	2.5
		TOTAL	240	100
37	I treat with respect and adoration any of my relatives regardless of his/her religion	SA	54	22.5
		A	103	42.9
		U	43	17.9
		D	32	13.3
		SD	8	3.3
		TOTAL	240	100
38	My relationship with my Christian relative suffered a set-back after he/she chose to leave Islam for Christianity.	SA	53	22.1
		A	104	43.3
		U	43	17.9
		D	31	12.9
		SD	9	3.8
		TOTAL	240	100
39	I can encourage my relative to take a Christian spouse	SA	13	5.4
		A	37	15.4
		U	11	4.6
		D	66	27.5
		SD	113	47.1
		TOTAL	240	100
40	I believe religion is a personal and private affair and one can be whatever he/she likes	SA	32	13.3
		A	51	21.3
		U	13	5.4
		D	53	22.1
		SD	91	37.9
		TOTAL	240	100

Source: field survey 2025

Research Question 5: What is the attitude of the Muslim Ebira towards his fellow Ebira Muslim who converted to Christianity?
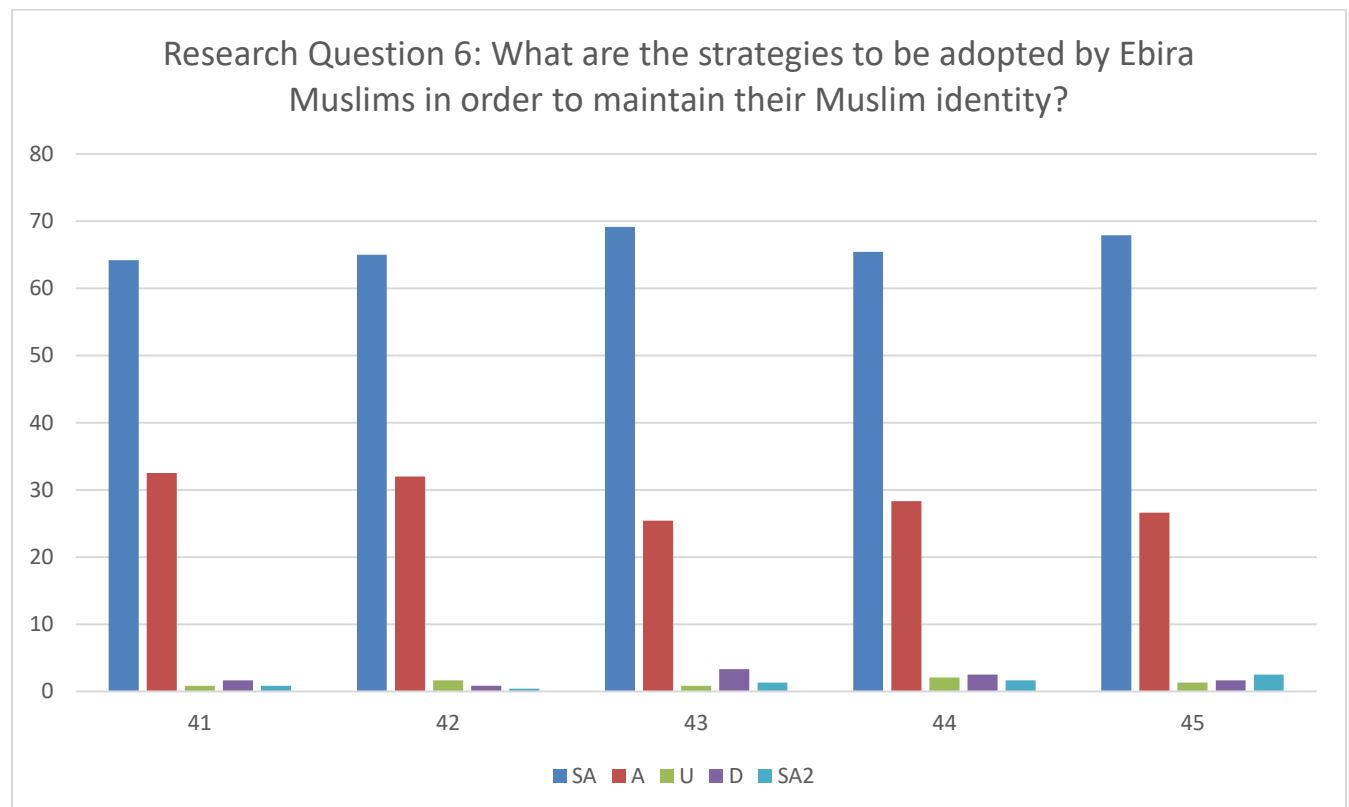
Research Question 6: What are the strategies to be adopted by Ebira Muslims in order to put in Check Christian missionary activities?

S/N	ITEMS	OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
41	Islamic education and enlightenment needs to be given more attention	SA	154	64.2
		A	240	32.5
		U	156	0.83
		D	77	1.67
		SD	4	0.83
		TOTAL	2	100
42	Muslims are to do more to empower and assist their relatives both of the immediate and extended family economically	SA		65
		A		32
		U		1.67
		D		0.83
		SD	1	0.41
		TOTAL	240	100
43	Muslim professional health workers should from time to time render free medical service to the less privileged Muslims	SA	166	69.16
		A	61	25.4
		U	2	0.83
		D	8	3.3

		SD	3	1.3
		TOTAL	240	100
44	Muslim organizations and wealthy individuals should establish Muslim orphanages where orphaned Muslim children would be catered for	SA	157	65.42
		A	68	28.33
		U	5	2.08
		D	6	2.5
		SD	4	1.67
		TOTAL	240	100
45	Muslim traditional rulers and other leaders of thought are to do more to support Islam	SA	163	67.9
		A	64	26.6
		U	3	1.3
		D	4	1.67
		SD	6	2.5
		TOTAL	240	100

Source: field survey 2025

Research Question 6: What are the strategies to be adopted by Ebira Muslims in order to maintain their Muslim identity?

Results/ findings

1. Christianity was found to be the preferred choice of Muslim Ebira Tao who renounced Islam. The spates of conversions from Islam to Christianity though initially slow, it became more pronounced in the last one and half decade. Today, it is hard to find a Muslim Ebira who is not related to a Christian convert from Islam. Thus, there is a general awareness of the changing religious affiliation among Ebira Muslims in favour of Christianity within the Ebira Muslim community.

2. Some of the perceived strategies deployed by the Christians in converting Muslim Ebira to Christianity include:
   (a) Organized crusades and public lectures with renown national and international Christian experts and evangelists as guest speakers
   (b) Popularization of Christian places of worship that made the religion visibly active
   (c) Use of educational institutions that provide relatively quality education
   (d) Setting up of theological seminaries to consolidate their grip on the converts
   (e) The use of both print and electronic media alongside the internet
   (f) Indigenization of Churches through the appointment of the natives into positions of authority and influence in their churches
   (g) Charitable gestures and philanthropic engagements
   (h) Use of propaganda against the Muslims
   (i) Use of orphanages in getting people to convert at a tender age

3. The nature of Ebira Muslims that seems to be the most vulnerable were:
   (a) The poor and the destitute in the society
   (b) Females generally; and spinsters in particular
   (c) The males too; though at a relatively lower rate
   (d) The sick; found to be the most affected
   (e) The youths is another vulnerable group at great risk of conversion
   (f) The greedy and discontented individuals looking for bounty through claims of miracle by the pastors
   (g) Those with a good knowledge of Islam were found not to be at risk of converting

4. The common reasons for spates of conversion to Christianity among Muslim Ebira are found to be:
   (a) Lack of proper guidance and nurturing of children in an Islamic way
   (b) Fosterage of Muslim children by non-Muslims
   (c) Friendship
   (d) Marriage to a Christian spouse
   (e) Sickness and the belief in the efficacy of Christian prayers to ward off evil and afflictions
   (f) Economic hardship and the thought of getting financial help and support
   (g) Conviction not found to be the reason in most cases

5. Most Muslim Ebira do not like the idea of their relatives renouncing Islam. However, despite the religious differences the Muslim Ebira still maintains good relationship with his/her kin

6. As a way of perpetuating Ebira Muslim identity, most Ebira were found to be in support of:

(a) Islamic education and enlightenment be given the desired attention it deserves in Ebira land
(b) The less privileged among them should be catered for by the wealthy Muslims
(c) Muslim health professionals both local and international should be rendering free medical assistance to the Ebira Muslims from time to time.
(d) Establishment of Muslim orphanages across Ebira land to take care of the vulnerable Muslim children.
(e) Those in positions of authority should be seen to be doing more to support Islam in areas of especially education and philanthropy

Discussion of major findings

➢ People may turn to new religious beliefs in response to significant historical changes in their lives as in the case of one not growing up with his Muslim biological parents due to either the death of one or both; or just the parents' choice of allowing their son or daughter to be raised by a non Muslim Uncle or Aunt or someone with whom they have any other form of relationship. It is a common practice among the Ebira Tao. This agrees with Sherkat (1997) and Fry (2003) who theorized that the family and associates largely influence the decision to convert.

➢ Personal experiences are significantly related to religious conversion. It illustrates that personal trajectories, including encounters with challenging life circumstances can influence religious belief and conversion (King, 2019; Taylor, 2007). This account for the reason why the poor and the destitute; the sick and the invalid; female spinsters desperate to get married and a host of others "with challenging life circumstances" constitute the bulk of the nature of Muslim Ebira leaving Islam thereby shifting the dynamics of religious affiliation in the Ebira Muslim community.

➢ The study also demonstrated a positive relationship between religious influence and conversion motivation. This is evident from the strategies adopted by the Christians in converting the Ebira Muslims of organized crusades and public lectures with renowned Christian experts and evangelists as guest speakers. The outcome confirms the view that interactions with religious teachings, communities, and leaders influence an individual's propensity toward a particular faith. It highlights the persuasive power of religious engagement and doctrine in guiding religious preferences (Toni U Ebari & Inusa, 2009).

➢ Furthermore, the study indicated a significant relationship between socio-economic factors and religious conversion. This finding points to the influence of economic status and education in adopting new religious affiliations. It suggests that conversions might be sought for social betterment and economic advancement, This agrees with Barro, R., et al (2010) who pointed how vulnerability of the individual in distressing socio-economic circumstances, such as penury, joblessness, and restricted social mobility, can influence religious conversion. These conditions can make the promises or support offered by religious groups attractive thereby leading to conversion.

➢ Finally, the research comprehensively illustrated that religious conversion to Christianity in the Muslim Ebira community of north-central Nigeria was a function of a complex interplay of personal, religious, psychological, and socio-economic reasons. As both Clarke, (2004) and Castles, (2003) noted each of these reasons contributes distinctly to

shaping the dynamics of religious conversion, reflecting the intricate interplay of individual, societal, and cultural elements in the context of changing religious affiliation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Ebira Muslim community has in recent years witnessed a growing number of ex-Muslims due to changing religious affiliation from Islam to Christianity. This is a fact that no one who knows anything about the subject, can deny. Evidence abounds in the nuclear and the extended family of nearly every Muslim Ebira across the length and breadth of the community. Broad factors under Socio-Economic, Psychological, Religious Influence and historical reasons were the driving force behind those religious conversions at such an alarming scale. Various strategies were deployed by the Christians to achieve this including sustainable aggressive missionary drive to extending material and moral support to vulnerable Muslim groups as the poor, destitute, the sick, orphans, desperate female Muslims yearning for marriage, ignorant Muslims etc. To stem the growing trend, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Muslim parents should accord the Islamic education of their children the priority it deserves by ensuring that children their tenure in the Islamiyya schools is extended beyond merely after "finishing reading the Qur'an".
2. The lessons in the Islamiyyah schools for Muslim children should include other areas as of most especially Aqeedah and Tarikh due to their relevance in laying a sound foundation of Islamic consciousness.
3. Teachers in the Islamiyya schools should be made to acquire competency in handling all subject areas of Islamic studies not just the art of reciting and rehearsal of the Qur'an.
4. Development assistance to developing countries in especially the health sector should be given to the Ebira Muslim community by both local and international Muslim organizations.
5. Relationships between the opposite sexes outside the Islamic faith circle should be discouraged.
6. Male Muslims are to be encouraged to marry as soon as they possess the means to do so.
7. The Ebira Muslim traditional rulers are to rekindle the friendship with the northern Emirs and tap from their experience in supporting and advancing the course of Islam especially in the education and cultural spheres.
8. Ebira Muslims should re-think their attitude of giving out land for the building of places of worship at no matter what price to members of other faiths different from theirs.
9. Christian crusades of the Reinhard Bonnke type in Ebira land should be opposed by Muslim leaders through peaceful legitimate means.
10. Muslims should re-think their attitude of sending their children/wards to Christian oriented schools under the supposition that they offer more quality education; rather they should strive to establish similar institutions that can compete favorably with them.
11. Muslims should shun all acts that would dent the image of Islam particularly violent extremism in all it known forms.
12. Ebira Muslims should re-think their habit of allowing their children to be brought up under the care of their non-Muslim relatives for fear of their benefactors exerting some influence over them.
13. Ebira Muslim *Ulama* should direct their focus on winning the remnant traditionalists among them.

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