

THE RELEVANCE OF THE 6-3-3-4 EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA: AN EVALUATION OF ITS OBSOLESCENCE OR SUITABILITY FOR EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT

¹OLUWO, MATHIAS KOLAWOLE & ²OLUWO, ABISOLA OLATUNDUN

¹Educational Foundations Department, Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. Oyo State.

oluwomathias@yahoo.com 08022937582/08139485977

²Business Education Department, Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. Oyo State.

abisola.oladiipo@gmail.com 08105047857

Abstract

This study critically examines the relevance of the 6-3-3-4 education system in Nigeria, with a focus on determining whether the system is obsolete or still suitable for the country's educational advancement. Introduced in 1982, the 6-3-3-4 system was designed to promote technical and vocational skills among learners and align education with national development goals. However, concerns have emerged over time regarding its implementation, effectiveness, and alignment with contemporary global educational standards. Using a qualitative research design, this study collected data through interviews and document analysis, targeting educators, administrators, and policymakers within selected institutions. The findings reveal significant gaps between the system's original objectives and its practical outcomes. Challenges identified include inadequate infrastructure, poor teacher training, insufficient curriculum updates, and a lack of political will. Despite these challenges, the study also highlights areas where the 6-3-3-4 system retains potential, particularly in fostering skill acquisition and technological literacy if properly restructured. The research concludes that while the system is not entirely obsolete, a comprehensive review and modernization are urgently required to enhance its relevance and effectiveness in meeting Nigeria's current and future educational needs.

Keywords: 6-3-3-4 Education System, Educational Reform, Vocational Training, Curriculum Evaluation, Educational Advancement

Introduction

The 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria, introduced in 1982, was designed to align with global educational standards and foster holistic development by emphasizing skill acquisition and technical education. It involves six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary education, three years of senior secondary education, and four years of tertiary education. While the system aimed to produce self-reliant individuals and reduce dependency on white-collar jobs, its effectiveness remains debated. Critics argue that poor implementation, inadequate funding, outdated curricula, and infrastructural deficits have hindered its objectives, making it less relevant to modern educational demands. Conversely, proponents assert that the system still holds potential if reformed and better supported. This paper evaluates whether the 6-3-3-4 system is obsolete or remains a viable framework for advancing Nigeria's educational goals in the 21st century.

Education in Nigeria is a pivotal sector influencing the country's social and economic development. Despite its significance, the system faces persistent challenges, including inadequate funding, high dropout rates, and infrastructural deficits. In 2024, Nigeria allocated approximately 7.26% of its budget to education, falling short of UNESCO's recommended 20-25% for meaningful educational advancement. The country struggles with over 20 million out-of-school children and significant tertiary dropout rates due to financial constraints. Furthermore, poor teacher welfare and under-equipped schools limit the quality of instruction. However, efforts such as increased allocations to agencies like TETFund and UBEC signal a commitment to improving the sector. Addressing these issues is crucial for Nigeria to meet global educational benchmarks and foster sustainable development

The 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria, introduced in 1982, was designed to align with global standards and foster the nation's development. This structure comprises six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary, and a minimum of four years of tertiary education. The primary stage focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy, while the junior secondary level introduces students to a broad-based curriculum, including vocational training. Senior secondary education allows for specialization in arts, sciences, or commerce, preparing students for higher education or vocational careers. The system's tertiary stage includes universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, offering various academic and professional programs.

Despite its comprehensive design, the implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system has faced challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and underqualified teachers, which have hindered its effectiveness. While the system aims to produce a skilled workforce and increase access to education, disparities between urban and rural areas and low literacy rates remain significant issues.

Educational advancement in Nigeria remains a critical focus as the country strives to improve access, equity, and quality of education. Despite modest improvements in budgetary allocations for education, Nigeria still faces challenges such as inadequate funding, with only 7.26% of the national budget allocated to education in 2023, far below UNESCO's recommended 20-26% benchmark. This funding shortfall has led to resource deficits, including insufficient textbooks, laboratories, and digital learning tools, as well as overcrowded classrooms. Initiatives such as the Nigeria Learning Passport, a digital platform developed with UNICEF, aim to bridge learning gaps and enhance educational accessibility, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with over 20 million out-of-school children and significant dropout rates in tertiary institutions, experts stress the need for comprehensive strategies to address systemic issues and align Nigeria's education sector with global standards (The Guardian, 2024; UNICEF, 2024).

The 6-3-3-4 education system in Nigeria, introduced in 1982, has been increasingly criticized as outdated and insufficient for addressing contemporary educational and societal needs. While it aligns structurally with global standards—comprising six years of primary, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary, and four years of tertiary education—it has faced implementation challenges. These include underfunding, teacher shortages, infrastructure deficits, and a lack of alignment with 21st-century skills requirements, such as digital literacy and critical thinking.

Critics argue that the system fails to adequately prepare students for modern global demands, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Furthermore, disparities between urban and rural education exacerbate inequalities, leaving many students without access to quality education. There are calls to overhaul the system to emphasize practical, skill-based education, improve funding, and adopt more inclusive policies that cater to Nigeria's diverse population and economic needs.

The 6-3-3-4 education system in Nigeria, introduced in 1982, remains a foundational structure suitable for driving educational advancement when adequately implemented and funded. It provides a broad-based curriculum that allows students to gain foundational knowledge at the primary level, explore diverse subjects and vocational training in junior secondary, and specialize in senior secondary before advancing to tertiary education. This framework aligns with global educational standards and emphasizes skill acquisition, preparing students for higher education or the workforce. Advocates highlight its potential for producing well-rounded graduates who can contribute to national development, particularly if vocational and technical education is emphasized at the secondary level.

Efforts to improve the system have focused on enhancing teacher training, increasing investment in infrastructure, and integrating technology to address global educational demands. The adaptability of the 6-3-3-4 system to incorporate modern pedagogical practices and support diverse learning pathways is seen as a key strength, provided challenges such as funding deficits and uneven implementation are addressed. Proponents argue that with the right policy adjustments, the system can meet the needs of a rapidly changing world and foster economic growth through skilled human capital

Previous researchers like Adeyemi (2021) researched on evaluation of the Implementation of the 6-3-3-4 System of Education in Nigeria. The study found significant gaps in infrastructure and teacher training, particularly in the vocational and technical aspects of the junior secondary curriculum. Concluded that 6-3-3-4 system, while comprehensive in design, suffers from inadequate funding and uneven implementation.

Adekunle (2023) researched on sustainability of the 6-3-3-4 Education Model in Nigeria's Development Agenda. Despite its ambitious goals, the 6-3-3-4 system has not kept pace with global educational trends due to outdated curricula. Concluded that the curriculum requires modernization to meet 21st-century educational needs. Based on these previous researchers gap left, this study investigate present system of Education (6-3-3-4), obsolete or suitable for educational advancement

Statement of the Problem

Conducting a research study on the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria is essential because it directly impacts the nation's educational outcomes and its potential for development. This system, introduced to provide a balanced structure between academic, vocational, and technical education, has faced criticism over the years due to its inconsistent implementation, especially in rural areas. By examining its relevance or obsolescence, a study could highlight the discrepancies between its theoretical objectives and practical outcomes, offering a clearer understanding of whether it remains a viable framework for modern educational challenges in Nigeria.

The study is necessary to address the growing demands of the 21st-century global economy, which emphasizes digital literacy, critical thinking, and technical skills. Critics argue that the current curriculum under the 6-3-3-4 structure does not adequately prepare students for these demands, limiting Nigeria's ability to compete globally. Research into the system's alignment with global educational trends can inform policymakers on needed reforms, ensuring that the education system evolves to meet modern needs while maintaining cultural and national relevance.

A study would provide evidence-based recommendations for addressing the systemic challenges of funding, teacher training, and infrastructure that have hindered the system's success. By identifying these gaps and proposing actionable solutions, the research could serve as a foundation for educational policies aimed at bridging the gap between policy design and implementation. This would not only enhance the quality of education in Nigeria but also strengthen its role in fostering sustainable development and reducing inequalities in access to quality education. Based on these views, this study investigates present system of Education (6-3-3-4), obsolete or suitable for educational advancement

Purpose of the Study

This study investigates present system of Education (6-3-3-4), obsolete or suitable for educational advancement while the specific objectives are to:

- i. determine the present (6-3-3-4) system of education, as obsolete for educational advancement
- ii. determine the present (6-3-3-4) system of education, as suitable for educational advancement

Research Question

- i. How obsolete is the present (6-3-3-4) system of education for educational advancement in Nigeria?
- ii. How suitable is the present (6-3-3-4) system of education for educational advancement in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Education

Education in Nigeria serves as a cornerstone for national development, providing individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for personal growth and societal advancement. The Nigerian education system is structured into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, governed by policies designed to promote universal basic education, improve literacy rates, and foster skill acquisition. Despite significant efforts, the system faces numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, a lack of qualified teachers, outdated curricula, and regional disparities, particularly between urban and rural areas. Research highlights that while enrollment rates have increased due to initiatives like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, the quality of education remains uneven, with infrastructure deficits and teacher shortages undermining its effectiveness (Adediji & Olaleye, 2018; UNESCO, 2020).

Technological advancements and policy reforms have aimed to address these challenges, yet gaps persist in implementation and monitoring. The emergence of e-learning platforms and digital resources has shown promise in bridging educational inequalities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored the need for resilient educational systems (Olayemi, 2021). However, systemic issues such as corruption, insufficient investment in vocational education, and limited access to technology for marginalized communities continue to hinder progress. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that prioritizes equitable resource distribution, curriculum modernization, and teacher capacity building to ensure the education system meets the demands of a dynamic global economy (Okon & Akpan, 2022; World Bank, 2023).

System of Education (6-3-3-4)

The 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria, implemented in 1982, was designed to provide a comprehensive and diversified education model that could equip students with both academic and vocational skills. This structure consists of six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary, and a minimum of four years of tertiary education. Its introduction aimed to address the country's developmental needs by integrating technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial skills into the curriculum, especially at the junior secondary level. However, despite its ambitious goals, the system has faced significant challenges in its implementation. Research highlights gaps in teacher training, inadequate facilities, and poor funding, which have undermined the practical and vocational components of the curriculum (Adedokun et al., 2020). Additionally, regional disparities in educational resources have led to uneven adoption and effectiveness, particularly in rural and northern areas of Nigeria (Okojie, 2019).

Reforms and interventions have sought to modernize the 6-3-3-4 system to align with global educational standards. While the framework remains relevant, critics argue that its rigid structure and outdated curriculum fail to meet the dynamic demands of the 21st-century economy, such as digital literacy and critical thinking (Okafor et al., 2021). Emerging studies advocate for integrating digital tools and modern pedagogical strategies into the system to enhance learning outcomes. Efforts to strengthen vocational education have also been recommended to bridge the gap between education and the labor market, ensuring that graduates are equipped with employable skills (Adewuyi & Fashola, 2022). However, for

these reforms to succeed, systemic issues such as corruption, policy inconsistency, and insufficient funding must be addressed comprehensively. The 6-3-3-4 system, though robust in theory, requires significant recalibration to fully realize its potential as a catalyst for national development.

Educational Advancement

Educational advancement in Nigeria is a critical factor for national development, as it underpins economic growth, societal progress, and innovation. In recent years, efforts have been made to address historical challenges in the education sector, such as poor infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and regional disparities in access. Initiatives like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program and partnerships with international organizations have led to modest improvements in enrolment rates and literacy levels, particularly among marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2020). However, significant gaps remain in aligning the education system with 21st-century needs, including integrating digital skills and fostering innovation-driven learning. Studies highlight that while tertiary education has expanded, there is still a mismatch between the skills imparted to students and the demands of the labor market (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2019).

Technological advancements have presented new opportunities to accelerate educational progress in Nigeria. The proliferation of e-learning platforms and mobile technologies has increased access to education, particularly in remote areas, during events like the COVID-19 pandemic (Ogunleye et al., 2021). However, a lack of infrastructure and high costs of technology remain barriers to equitable access. For educational advancement to be sustained, experts recommend increased government funding, a focus on teacher capacity building, and curriculum reforms that emphasize critical thinking and vocational training (Akinwale & Salami, 2023). Moreover, private sector involvement and public-private partnerships could play a pivotal role in fostering innovation and improving the quality of education. These measures are necessary to ensure that Nigeria's education system evolves to meet both local and global challenges, driving sustainable development and economic competitiveness.

Present System of Education (6-3-3-4) as Obsolete for Educational Advancement

The 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria, while innovative at its inception in the 1980s, is increasingly viewed as outdated for achieving educational advancement in the modern era. Critics argue that the system's design, which emphasizes a combination of academic and vocational training, has not been adequately implemented, leading to a mismatch between the skills taught and the demands of Nigeria's dynamic economy (Adedokun et al., 2020). The vocational components at the junior secondary level, intended to prepare students for immediate employment or entrepreneurship, remain underdeveloped due to a lack of funding, poorly trained teachers, and insufficient infrastructure. Consequently, the system fails to produce graduates equipped with the practical skills needed to thrive in today's technology-driven and knowledge-based economy (Adewuyi & Fashola, 2022).

The rigid structure and outdated curriculum of the 6-3-3-4 system are ill-suited to address global educational trends such as digital literacy, innovation, and critical thinking. Studies have shown that while countries worldwide are incorporating STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and ICT (information and communication technology) into their education frameworks, Nigeria's curriculum still prioritizes rote learning over experiential and inquiry-based methods (Okafor et al., 2021). The system's inability to integrate contemporary teaching methods and technologies has widened the gap between Nigerian students and their international counterparts. For Nigeria to achieve significant educational advancement, experts recommend transitioning to a more flexible, globally relevant system that aligns with 21st-century skills and addresses persistent issues like regional inequalities, inadequate teacher training, and resource allocation (Okojie, 2019).

Present System of Education (6-3-3-4) as Suitable for Educational Advancement

The 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria remains suitable for educational advancement, provided its potential is fully harnessed through proper implementation and reforms. Designed to cater to diverse learning needs, this structure introduces foundational education through six years of primary schooling, skill-oriented development in three years of junior secondary education, and a more specialized approach in three years of senior secondary education before higher education. Advocates argue that the system's emphasis on vocational education at the junior secondary level is a significant step toward producing self-reliant graduates equipped with practical skills (Adedokun et al., 2020). Furthermore, its flexibility allows students to transition to higher education or entrepreneurial endeavors, promoting diverse career pathways crucial for national development (Akinwale & Salami, 2023). Despite challenges such as uneven resource distribution and implementation gaps, the framework's adaptability makes it relevant to Nigeria's socio-economic needs.

Supporters also highlight the system's alignment with global educational trends, emphasizing the incorporation of technical and vocational education. The recent efforts to digitize learning platforms and integrate ICT into the curriculum demonstrate the system's ability to evolve with modern demands (Ogunleye et al., 2021). With adequate investment in teacher training, curriculum updates, and infrastructural development, the 6-3-3-4 structure can effectively address Nigeria's developmental challenges and foster educational progress. By prioritizing regional equity and strengthening partnerships with private and international stakeholders, the system can bridge existing gaps and remain a robust framework for nurturing the human capital needed for economic growth and innovation (Okafor et al., 2021). Thus, when implemented effectively, the 6-3-3-4 model stands as a cornerstone for educational advancement in Nigeria.

Empirical Study

Previous researchers like Adeyemi (2021) researched on evaluation of the Implementation of the 6-3-3-4 System of Education in Nigeria. The study found significant gaps in infrastructure and teacher training, particularly in the vocational and technical aspects of the junior secondary curriculum. Concluded that 6-3-3-4 system, while comprehensive in design, suffers from inadequate funding and uneven implementation.

Musa and Balogun (2020) researched on challenges and Prospects of the 6-3-3-4 Education Policy in Nigeria. The study highlights discrepancies in adherence to policy goals, particularly in rural areas, where resources are severely limited. Concluded that without equitable distribution of resources, the system will continue to underperform. Nnamdi (2019) researched on the Impact of the 6-3-3-4 System on Nigeria's Educational Landscape. A significant decline in science and technical education uptake was attributed to poorly equipped laboratories in junior and senior secondary schools. Concluded that the intended focus on practical and technical education has not been achieved. Okeke and Eze (2022) researched on comparative Analysis of the 6-3-3-4 and 9-3-4 Systems in Nigeria. Transitioning to the 9-3-4 system in some regions has led to confusion about policy goals, creating administrative bottlenecks. Concluded that a clear distinction between the two systems and consistent implementation is needed to avoid disruptions. Adekunle (2023) researched on sustainability of the 6-3-3-4 Education Model in Nigeria's Development Agenda. Despite its ambitious goals, the 6-3-3-4 system has not kept pace with global educational trends due to outdated curricula. Concluded that the curriculum requires modernization to meet 21st-century educational needs. Based on these previous researchers' gap left, this study investigate present system of Education (6-3-3-4), obsolete or suitable for educational advancement

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for evaluating whether the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria is obsolete or suitable for educational advancement hinges on key variables: **educational outcomes**, **systemic implementation challenges**, and **alignment with 21st-century demands**. The relationships between these variables determine the relevance and efficacy of the 6-3-3-4 structure.

i. Independent Variables:

- **Curriculum Content:** The relevance of the curriculum to contemporary global and local skill demands, such as STEM and ICT integration, vocational training, and critical thinking (Okafor et al., 2021; Adedokun et al., 2020).
- **Educational Infrastructure:** Availability and adequacy of facilities, such as laboratories, ICT tools, and vocational equipment, to support effective learning (Akinwale & Salami, 2023).
- **Teacher Capacity:** The training and expertise of educators to deliver quality instruction in alignment with the system's objectives (Ogunleye et al., 2021).

ii. Mediating Variables:

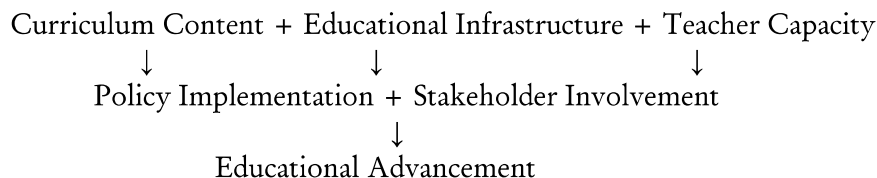
- **Policy Implementation:** The extent to which government policies address regional disparities, funding, and monitoring mechanisms (Adewuyi & Fashola, 2022).
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Collaboration among educators, policymakers, and private organizations in addressing systemic gaps and adapting to technological advancements (Okojie, 2019).

iii. Dependent Variable:

- **Educational Advancement:** Measured through indicators such as literacy rates, employability, innovation, and alignment of skills with economic demands (Adedokun et al., 2020).

The framework assumes that the current 6-3-3-4 system's potential for fostering educational advancement is moderated by effective implementation and regular reform. Poor execution and outdated practices lead to obsolescence, while strategic reforms enhance its suitability.

Diagram Representation



Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for analyzing the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria draws upon **Human Capital Theory**, **Systems Theory**, and **Change Theory**. These theories provide insights into the system's relevance and its capacity to advance education in alignment with national and global objectives.

Human Capital Theory

This theory, proposed by Becker (1964), posits that education is an investment in human resources, enhancing individuals' productivity and economic contributions. Applying this to Nigeria's 6-3-3-4 system, the structure's emphasis on vocational and technical education at the junior secondary level

aims to create a skilled workforce. Educational advancements are achievable if the system aligns with contemporary labor market demands by fostering practical skills and critical thinking (Akinwale & Salami, 2023). However, outdated curricula or inadequate implementation could render the system obsolete, undermining its potential to boost Nigeria's economic growth (Okafor et al., 2021).

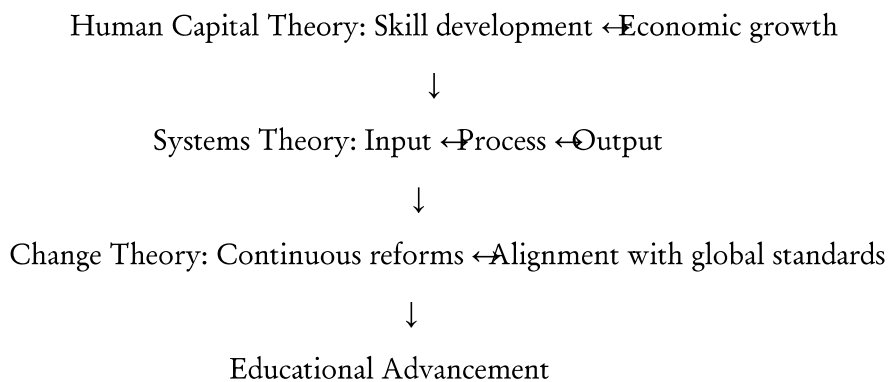
Systems Theory

This theory views education as an interconnected system where input (resources, policies, and curriculum), process (teaching and learning), and output (graduates and societal impact) are interdependent (von Bertalanffy, 1968). For the 6-3-3-4 system, successful educational advancement requires sufficient resources, trained educators, and infrastructure to support skill development and innovation (Adewuyi & Fashola, 2022). Systemic gaps, such as regional disparities and underfunding, disrupt these connections, hindering the system's suitability for educational advancement (Ogunleye et al., 2021).

Change Theory

Developed by Lewin (1951), this theory emphasizes the need for educational reforms to adapt to evolving societal and technological contexts. For the 6-3-3-4 system to remain relevant, ongoing reviews and reforms must ensure alignment with modern global educational standards, such as integrating ICT and promoting inclusivity (Okoro et al., 2023). Resistance to change or lack of policy enforcement could perpetuate its obsolescence.

Diagrammatic Representation



Conclusion

The analysis of Nigeria's present system of education, the 6-3-3-4 structure, reveals mixed outcomes regarding its suitability or obsolescence for educational advancement. The findings highlight that while the system was designed to promote technical and vocational skills, foster academic growth, and prepare students for higher education, its practical implementation faces numerous challenges. Key findings include:

- i. **Strengths of the 6-3-3-4 System:** The structure theoretically aligns with global trends in education, emphasizing skill acquisition through vocational training at the junior secondary level and specialization at the senior secondary stage. These provisions cater to diverse student aspirations and national development goals. The framework also encourages foundational education (primary level) and critical engagement at the tertiary level.
- ii. **Challenges in Implementation:** Despite its potential, the system struggles with underfunding, inadequate infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, and regional disparities in resource allocation. These systemic flaws undermine its ability to meet the dynamic demands of modern education and

global competitiveness. Moreover, curriculum content is often criticized for being outdated and misaligned with current technological advancements.

- iii. **Educational Advancement Considerations:** For the system to drive educational advancement, it must undergo periodic reforms that address implementation gaps, integrate ICT tools, and ensure equitable access to quality education nationwide. Countries with similar frameworks but better execution serve as examples of how the system can yield optimal results.

The 6-3-3-4 system is not inherently obsolete; however, its current state fails to fully support Nigeria's educational advancement. Its potential lies in its design, which fosters academic flexibility and skill development, but systemic issues and lack of reform render it less effective. To harness its strengths, Nigeria must adopt innovative policies, invest in educational infrastructure, and align its curriculum with global standards. Without these improvements, the system risks further obsolescence, hindering the nation's progress in education and economic development. Thus, the 6-3-3-4 structure, while conceptually suitable, requires significant modifications to truly advance Nigeria's educational landscape.

Recommendations

To ensure that the 6-3-3-4 system of education fulfills its potential for advancing education in Nigeria, several critical recommendations are necessary:

- i. **Curriculum Reform and Modernization:** The educational curriculum at all levels of the 6-3-3-4 system should be reviewed periodically to align with contemporary global standards, technological advancements, and the evolving demands of the labour market. This includes integrating ICT, STEM education, and practical skill-building courses tailored to industry needs.
- ii. **Investment in Infrastructure and Resources:** Addressing the issue of inadequate infrastructure is vital. The government and private stakeholders should prioritize funding to improve school facilities, provide learning materials, and equip vocational and technical education centers with modern tools.
- iii. **Teacher Training and Development:** The quality of education hinges on the competency of teachers. Continuous professional development programs, competitive remuneration, and adequate support for educators will enhance their effectiveness and commitment to delivering quality instruction.
- iv. **Policy Enforcement and Monitoring:** Effective policies supporting the goals of the 6-3-3-4 system must be enforced rigorously. Establishing monitoring and evaluation frameworks will ensure that schools comply with educational standards and that resources are utilized efficiently.
- v. **Equity and Access:** Bridging regional disparities in education by ensuring equitable distribution of resources and opportunities is essential. Special attention should be given to underserved and marginalized communities to promote inclusive education.
- vi. **Encourage Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborations between the government and private sector can foster innovation and resource mobilization. Partnerships can also support initiatives in teacher training, digital learning, and infrastructure development.

By addressing these recommendations, the 6-3-3-4 system can evolve from a theoretically sound but poorly implemented framework into an effective mechanism for educational advancement in Nigeria.

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