

ATHENA PULSE

POLICY BRIEF



Breaking the cycle: policy options to end public primary school teachers' strikes in FCT Abuja

Published by the Athena Centre for Policy and Leadership May 2025

Executive Summary

Public primary school teachers in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, boycotted classes twice in December 2024. The teachers who are protesting the non-implementation of N70,000 minimum wage, among other grievances, embarked on strike in February 2025. Yet again, the tutors have shut down classes in another strike action, making it the 4th time of abandoning teaching and learning in four months! The public primary schools in FCT Abuja that employ 8,321 teachers are currently locked down owing to the lack of teachers from their duty posts. At the heart of the crisis are wage disputes, poor working conditions, and government inaction. These strikes deepen educational inequality, diminish public confidence in the system, and families. This Policy Pulse outlines the consequences of this recurrent disruption and presents actionable policy options to stabilise the system and prevent future occurrences.



The Problem

Public primary education in the FCT is in crisis. Incessant strikes by 8,321 teachers—protesting non-implementation of the new N70,000 minimum wage and other welfare issues—have shut down schools multiple times within four months. The situation threatens foundational learning, widens socio-economic gaps, and undermines the credibility of public education.

Key Implications

1. Academic Disruption:

One of the most direct consequences of the teacher strikes is the disruption to pupils' education. The prolonged closures of schools result in the loss of valuable instructional time, hindering children. The FCT is home to a diverse population, and its public primary schools cater to children from various socio-economic backgrounds. As such, the consequences of lost instructional time can vary. The impact may be somewhat mitigated for children who already have access to additional educational support, such as private tutors or after-school programs. However, for wards who rely solely on formal education within the school system, the loss of teaching hours significantly disrupts their academic development.

In the public primary school setting, children are introduced to foundational skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Any interruption in this early stage of their education can have lasting effects, leading to gaps in knowledge that become more difficult to address as the child advances in their education. The loss of these essential building blocks can result in poor performance in subsequent years, reducing the chances of education.

Moreover, for children in public schools in FCT Abuja, the strike exacerbates the educational disparity between them and their counterparts in private schools, where classes often continue without interruptions. This disparity in educational opportunities further entrenches the divide between the affluent and the underprivileged.

2. Teacher Morale and Public Perception

Another significant consequence of the incessant strikes is the effect on teacher morale and professionalism. Teachers typically decide to go on strike because of unresolved grievances with their employers, often related to salary arrears, poor working conditions, and the lack of adequate teaching resources. While strikes are meant to highlight these concerns, they also have negative repercussions for the teaching profession as a whole.

The frequent strikes diminish the public perception of teachers and their professional standing. Teachers who are continuously engaged in industrial actions may be seen as unprofessional or unreliable, which could undermine the public's respect and trust in the teaching profession. Additionally, long periods of striking may cause a breakdown in the relationship between teachers, their students, and their communities. Teachers who strike for extended periods are seen as abandoning their core responsibility of educating the nation's youth, which creates a perception of irresponsibility.

For teachers themselves, the cycle of strikes and negotiations can lead to frustration and burnout. The strikes reflect a deeper issue in the sector: the lack of adequate investment in teachers' welfare. Teachers often find themselves caught in a cycle of discontent and uncertainty, which erodes their commitment to their profession and the education system. Consequently, this dissatisfaction can lead to a decrease in the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of the education system as a whole.

3. Economic Burden on Families

The economic consequences of the strikes are felt deeply by families and communities. For parents, particularly those in lower-income brackets, the closure of schools means that they must find alternative arrangements for their children. This could involve hiring private tutors, sending their children to private schools, or organizing informal learning environments within the community. While these solutions may offer temporary relief, they often come at a significant financial cost. For families struggling to make ends meet, the added burden of paying for private tutoring or other educational alternatives can be financially crippling.

Moreover, nightmare. Parents may need to arrange alternative childcare, leading to lost work hours or additional costs associated with hiring babysitters or other caregivers. In many cases, this affects women more acutely, as they are often the primary caregivers in Nigerian households.

4. Social and Psychological Impact on pupils

Teacher strikes' social and psychological impact on pupils cannot be overstated. For children, schools are more than just places of academic learning. They are vital social environments where children learn important life skills, such as discipline, teamwork, and conflict resolution. The prolonged closure of schools denies children these opportunities for socialisation, which can affect their emotional and psychological development.

In addition to socialisation, schools often provide a sense of structure and routine, which is essential for children's well-being. The disruption of this routine can cause feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and stress among students, particularly those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. For some children, school is a place of stability, where they receive an education and a sense of security and care. Without the school system, these children may experience a sense of loss and disorientation.

5. Public Perception of the Nigeria Union of Teachers and Government Response

Teacher strikes often bring to the forefront the relationship between the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), the government, and the public. NUT, which represent the interests of teachers, play a critical role in advocating for better working conditions, salaries, and benefits for their members. However, their involvement in strikes can lead to polarized opinions within the public.

Some members of the public may sympathise with the teachers' plight, acknowledging that the government has neglected the welfare of educators for years. They may argue that teachers have a right to demand better pay and working conditions, especially given the importance of education in national development. However, other members of the public, particularly parents, may view the strikes as an inconvenience, as they affect their children's education and disrupt their daily lives. This creates a tension between the needs of the teachers and the needs of the broader society.

Government's response to teacher strikes is sometimes seen as inadequate or dismissive. The lack of timely and effective action in resolving the issues that lead to strikes can further deepen public frustration and erode trust in the government's ability to address the sector. In many cases, the government offers temporary solutions or promises that are not fully implemented, exacerbating the disillusionment among teachers and the public.

Comparative Analysis of Teacher Salaries: South Africa and Nigeria

In 2025, the economic landscape of South Africa and Nigeria shows a huge difference, reflected notably in the salaries of teachers at various career stages. The following comparative analysis examines the disparities in teacher salaries between these two African nations, contextualised within their respective economic capacities.

Country	Career Level	Local Salary	USD Equivalent
South Africa	Entry Level	R210,000/year	\$13,650
South Africa	Experienced Level	R840,000/year	\$54,600
Nigeria	Entry Level	N597,000/year	\$465
Nigeria	Experienced Level	N1,200,000/year	\$936

Economic Context:

As of 2025, South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is projected to be \$410 billion USD. The country's economy, among the largest in Africa, supports relatively higher teacher salaries compared to many other African nations. In contrast, Nigeria, with a GDP estimated at \$585.9 billion USD in 2025, faces significant economic challenges despite its larger GDP compared to South Africa. This discrepancy is reflected in the lower salaries of teachers, even at the experienced level, in dollar terms.

The disparity in teacher salaries between South Africa and Nigeria underscores broader economic differences and educational priorities within these nations. South Africa, despite its economic challenges, maintains higher educational funding relative to Nigeria, which impacts the remuneration of its educators. In contrast, Nigeria's lower teacher salaries reflect both economic constraints and competing budgetary demands.

Policy Options

- 1. Implement Minimum Wage Promptly:** Fully apply the N70,000 minimum wage and create a salary review mechanism indexed to inflation.
- 2. Improve Work Conditions:** Upgrade infrastructure, provide teaching materials, and expand professional development programs.
- 3. Institutionalise Dispute Resolution:** Create a standing, independent grievance committee and negotiation framework involving teachers, FCTUBEB, and neutral third parties.
- 4. Boost Education Funding:** Raise the education budget, prioritise primary education, and promote transparent use of allocated funds.
- 5. Leverage Technology:** Develop virtual learning tools and broadcast lessons to reduce learning loss during disruptions.
- 6. Strengthen Community Engagement:** Empower parent-teacher associations to monitor school performance, support teachers, and escalate issues constructively.
- 7. Accountability and Political Will:** Hold education leaders responsible for delivery and implementation. Require annual reporting on teacher welfare and school conditions.

Recommendations

FCT Universal Basic Education Board (FCTUBEB) is overseeing primary education in FCT Abuja. Below are several permanent and actionable solutions that could address the underlying issues and bring lasting stability to the education sector in FCT Abuja:

Immediate: Implement the minimum wage and initiate dialogue with teachers

The key reason for teachers' strikes in FCT Abuja primary schools is dissatisfaction with salaries and benefits. For a permanent resolution, FCTUBEB must immediately implement the N70,000 minimum wage for public servants as approved by the Federal government. The agency must initiate dialogue with teachers and regularly review the salary structure to ensure it aligns with inflation rates and the increasing cost of living. This review should also take into consideration the value of teaching as a profession and ensure that teachers' salaries are competitive with those in other sectors.

Short-term (3–6 months): Launch an infrastructure audit, deploy teacher support kits, and begin grievance mechanism setup

Teachers in FCT Abuja often report poor working conditions, such as inadequate classrooms, a lack of teaching materials, and insufficient professional development opportunities. These conditions contribute significantly to teacher dissatisfaction. To address this, the government and FCTUBEB should upgrade public primary school infrastructure and provide necessary teaching aids. Teacher strikes often arise from unresolved grievances. To ensure strikes are avoided in the future, the government must establish an independent grievance resolution mechanism, develop a transparent negotiation framework and teachers' unions in policy decisions.

Medium-term (6–12 months): Operationalise teacher professional development framework and digital learning pilots mechanism setup

To achieve this in primary schools across FCT Abuja, a phased, inclusive, and data-driven approach is essential. First, conduct a baseline assessment to identify teacher capacity gaps, infrastructure needs, and digital literacy levels. Engage key stakeholders - FCTUBEB, head teachers, Nigeria Union of Teachers, and development partners - to co-design a context-appropriate TPD framework aligned with national curriculum standards. The TPD framework should adopt a blended model combining in-person workshops, online modules, and school-based peer learning, focusing on pedagogy, ICT integration, and inclusive education. Certification, incentives, and mentorship programs will enhance teacher motivation and retention. Simultaneously, select pilot schools representing urban, rural, and underserved communities. Equip them with solar-powered digital devices, offline content servers, and localised digital learning resources. Teachers in pilot schools must receive hands-on training in digital pedagogy and classroom technology management.

Long-term: Institutionalise education reforms through legislation and budget guarantees.

The chronic underfunding of the education sector is a systemic issue that contributes to the ongoing strikes in FCT Abuja. To provide a permanent solution, the government must increase the education budget, ensure efficient use of allocated funds and promote public-private partnerships. A permanent resolution to the strikes in FCT Abuja's primary schools requires sustained political will and accountability from the government. Leaders must demonstrate a genuine commitment to improving the education sector.



Political leaders must prioritise education and demonstrate a long-term commitment to resolving the issues affecting teachers. This could involve public declarations, policies, and the allocation of necessary resources to education.

Government officials responsible for education should be held accountable for the effective management and improvement of the sector. This includes ensuring that promised reforms and policies are implemented and deliver tangible results for teachers and students.

Addressing the root causes of the incessant teacher strikes in FCT Abuja requires a holistic and multi-pronged approach. By improving teacher salaries, working conditions, professional development, and educational resources, and by fostering a culture of collaboration between the government, teachers, and communities, a permanent solution to the strikes can be found. Furthermore, by prioritising long-term investment in education, Nigeria can build a more robust and resilient education system that meets the needs of both teachers and students, while ensuring that frequent disruptions in their schooling do not compromise the future of the nation's youth.

Conclusion

The cycle of strikes in FCT Abuja is beyond just a wage issue, it is a governance challenge. Without decisive and sustained policy action, the consequences will cascade beyond the classroom into Nigeria's future workforce, social cohesion, and economic competitiveness. A resilient public education system demands prioritising teacher welfare, building institutional trust, and investing in long-term solutions. Addressing the root causes of these strikes will require a collaborative effort from all sectors – FCTSUBEB, government, Nigeria Union of Teachers, parents, and communities. Ensuring that teachers are adequately compensated, working in favourable conditions, and provided with the resources they need to teach effectively is essential for stabilising the education sector and safeguarding the future of Nigeria's children.

AUTHOR: DR. UZOR NGOLADI
SENIOR FELLOW, HEAD OF RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS
ATHENA CENTRE FOR POLICY AND LEADERSHIP

Disclaimer:

The insights, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Athena Centre, its affiliates, or its Board of Trustees. The information contained in this publication is believed to be based on sources that are accurate and reliable; however, Athena Centre makes no claims or guarantees regarding the completeness, accuracy, or timeliness of the data and assumes no legal liability or responsibility for any errors or omissions.

This report is intended for educational and informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or an endorsement of any specific policies, individuals, agencies, or entities. Decisions based on the content of this report are the sole responsibility of the reader. Athena Centre advises readers to seek independent verification and professional counsel before making any decisions based on the information herein.

Athena Centre operates as an independent, non-partisan think tank in compliance with Nigerian laws and regulations, committed to promoting good governance, transparency, and accountability. Our mission is to conduct rigorous research and provide evidence-based recommendations that contribute to the development of a prosperous and forward-looking society in Nigeria.

Athena Centre for Policy and Leadership

info.centre@athenacentre.org

