

# Prioritise teachers' pay promises

Teachers' strikes have become a common feature defining Uganda's education sector. Recently, it has mostly been about government's failure to meet the promised salary enhancement for the Arts teachers.

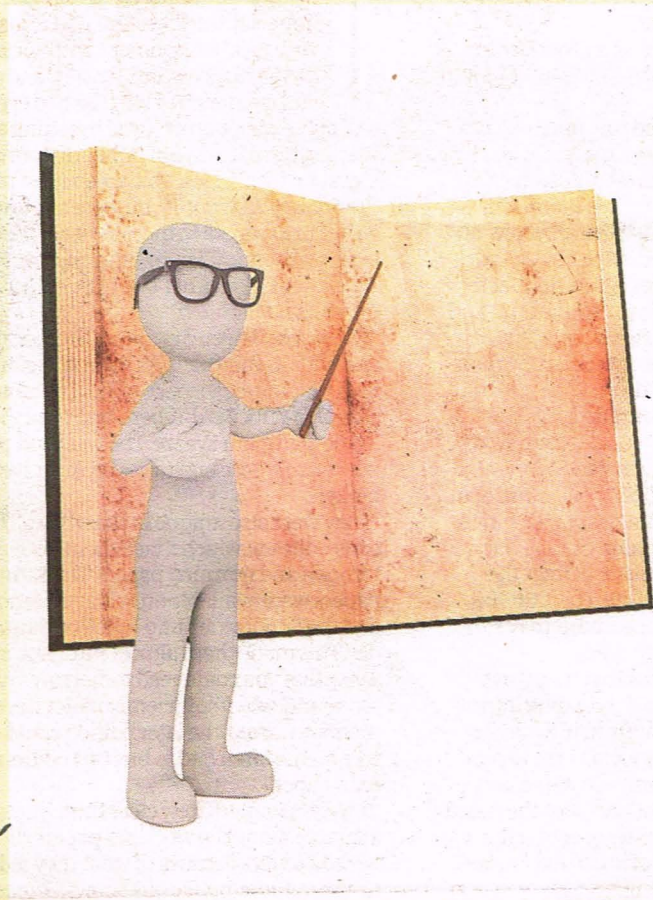
In 2022, President Museveni pledged a phased 25 percent salary increase for Arts teachers, along with staff housing and free education for teachers' children, a commitment that temporarily halted earlier waves of industrial action.

Nearly four years later, the promised raise remains largely on paper for Arts teachers while their science counterparts continue to enjoy the only substantive pay uplift from the 2022/2023 financial year. This has deepened perception of institutionalised inequality, dampened morale and led to walkouts for some teachers.

Last month, media reports indicated that effective July 2026, Arts teachers in government-aided schools and on payroll would receive a 25 percent salary enhancement, the first trench of the phased increment.

If fulfilled, it will mark a first step in mending relations between government and Arts instructors. Even then, studies have shown that the disparities between Arts and Science teachers' pay in the last four years has caused serious damage to wholistic education that a learner should be receiving.

Strikes over salary enhancement that had become common means learners lost time. Last school term (September to December 2025), many schools didn't have serious learning until later in the term during exams. These disruptions have translated into incomplete syl-



labus coverage and weaker examination performance in the short term, while the medium-to-long-term implications threaten foundational literacy and numeracy skills essential for Uganda's Vision 2040 and the National Development Plan aspirations.

A study by Makerere University and Public Service found strong divisions between science and arts teachers, noting that whereas science teachers reported high motivation, strong perceived performance, greater retention intent, arts teachers experienced lower motivation and weaker learner outcome.

Another impact has been that some teachers have decided to retire early from teaching, translating into loss of experienced trainers.

Looking ahead, it is important that government meets its part of the promise. Acting otherwise means periodic strikes will become routine, and education quality will erode slowly but inexorably. The worst-case scenario envisions sustained teacher dissatisfaction fuelling repeated strikes, accelerating attrition from the profession, and widening inequality as affluent households turn to private schooling while poorer learners fall further behind.

A reform-oriented scenario, anchored in transparent budgeting, explicit phased salary adjustments and continuous dialogue with teachers, could stabilise the system, restore morale and improve learning outcomes over time.

Translating the 25 percent pledge into a concrete, budget-backed line item for the 2026/2027 fiscal year is the first necessary step. A dedicated, ring-fenced fund would signal that the government is serious about delivering on its word and would give teachers a clear timetable for when the promised increments will be received.

Beyond financing, the Ministry of Public Service should publish a detailed implementation schedule, co-created with teachers' associations, that outlines the phases of salary harmonisation, the criteria for eligibility and the mechanisms for monitoring compliance. Such transparency would rebuild the shattered trust that currently fuels industrial action.

Equally important is addressing the broader welfare promises that accompanied the salary raise. The pledged staff housing, free education for teachers' children and other non-salary benefits remain largely unrealised, perpetuating the sense that teachers are undervalued.

If the government hesitates, the cost will be far greater than the modest budget outlay required to honour its promises. Prolonged strikes will continue to deprive millions of children of quality instruction, erode the nation's human capital development.

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