



A Cross-Sectional Study on Perceptions of Nigerian Secondary School Students towards Persistent Teacher Strikes: Analyzing Causes, Government Actions, and Teachers' Engagement

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Teacher strikes have been a persistent issue in Nigeria, causing significant disruptions to the education system and negatively impacting students' learning outcomes. This study aims to examine the perceptions of Nigerian students regarding the causes of teacher strikes, the government's response, and the teachers' interest in strike actions. A random sample of 25 schools in Bayelsa state, located in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria, was selected for this cross-sectional study. A total of 200 senior secondary students were randomly recruited to complete a questionnaire. The findings reveal that the majority of students attribute the causes of teacher strikes to delayed salary payments and other factors. Additionally, students hold a highly negative perception of the government's actions in response to strikes, perceiving a lack of attention and responsiveness. Students believe that the government has become desensitized to the impact of these strikes. Furthermore, the study suggests that students view teachers as beneficiaries of the strike, utilizing the opportunity to engage in private businesses, travel, and pursue further studies. Based on the study's results, it is concluded that students perceive teachers as having personal gains from the strikes. The study offers recommendations to address the issue of incessant strikes and change students' perceptions. These recommendations aim to reduce the occurrence of strikes and foster a more positive perception of teachers and the government's response to strike actions. In conclusion, this research underscores the need for proactive measures to address the causes of strikes and improve government intervention, while also addressing students' perceptions and fostering a conducive learning environment.

Keywords: Perception of students; strike; Government's actions towards strike; secondary school students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Strike action is referred to as the stoppage, the concerted refusal of employees to perform work that their employers have assigned to them in order to force the employers to grant certain demanded concessions, such as increased wages or improved employment conditions [1]. Strike action also called a Labour strike, is a work stoppage caused by the mass refusal of employees to work. A strike usually takes place in response to employee grievances. A work stoppage is generally the last step in labor-management disputes over wages and working conditions. Because employees are not paid when they go on strike and employers lose productivity, both sides usually seek to avoid it when negotiations have reached an impasse, however, a strike may be the only bargaining tool left for employees in another union.

Education has the universal function of contributing to the perpetuation of societies by transmitting ideals, values, and norms from generation to generation thereby preparing the youths for active roles in society. It also displays the value conflicts that exist between ideals and real norms that are typical of all cultures. The role of proper education in the expansion, and strengthening of the discipline of one's mind,

faculty, and character to prepare, as well as fit in any institution is immeasurable.

Presently, education in Nigeria has not been able to achieve its noble objective because it is in deep problems. Paramount among these problems is the incessant National Union of Teachers (NUT) strike, which has often disrupted academic activities. These strike actions always lead to the disruption of academic programs which may expose students to disjointed learning and it may encourage poor study habits among students. According to Odubela, [2], effective learning or enhanced academic performance is achieved by the successful coverage of the course outline before the examination. Maliki and Ekpekin-Ekanem [3] opined that the quality and quantity of students' learning are determined by individual study habits. During strike actions, most students become idle which pertinently is believed to be the devil's workshop thereby making students prone to engaging in unproductive activities such as sexual immorality, cyber scam, pool betting, playing video games, gossiping, watching films and reading comic materials for entertainment purposes rather than reading the school notes. These may affect their academic performance. According to Arukaimo [4], idling youths at home could cause security problems. Isagedighi [5] opined that the way a stimulus excites or impacts

an individual would trigger his/her responses. These are an indication that students may lose the skill for preparedness and readiness to learn at the time of the strike. Hence their educational attainment becomes adversely affected. Odubela [2] also observed that disruption in academic programs occasioned by strike action breeds disappointment, frustration, emotional and psychological trauma, unpreparedness on the part of the students, and lack of motivation, which sum up to a non-conducive environment for active learning in Nigerian secondary schools, a situation that dampens human development. Many teachers in some schools in Bayelsa State came up with the view that industrial strikes hurt the academic performance of students. The morale of both students and teachers is usually dampened by poor academic performance. The teachers' perception is in line with the study of Salami [6] who reported a negative impact of industrial action on students' academic achievement. It is buttressed that strikes among teachers cause the standard of education to fall. The syllabus is not always completed. The academic calendars of the school are disrupted, and poor performance in various examinations. Due to a lack of thorough teaching, Students are prone to various examination malpractices like cheating, looking for and buying examination papers, and impersonation. Teachers also have the views that students also emerge in societal ills of frivolous activities of rape, street hawking, gangsterism, etc.,

With the government and teachers' interests being the center of focus, little attention is given to the impact of strike actions on the academic performance of students in secondary schools, therefore this study aims at analyzing the perceptions of Nigerian students in the causes, actions of the Government, and the teachers' interest in strike with a long-term goal of influencing the negotiation patterns between teachers and the government.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The philosophical underpinning of this study leans towards positivism, emphasizing objectivity, empirical evidence, and systematic data collection in order to describe the phenomenon being studied. This study adopted a descriptive research design involving data collection using a questionnaire. This study took

place in some randomly selected secondary schools in Bayelsa state. The choices were made on the basis to afford the researcher easy contact with teachers and students whose views were of great importance in this study.

2.2 Research Population

Senior secondary school students in Bayelsa State were recruited for this study. There are over 250 secondary schools in Bayelsa, however, 25 schools with a total number of 200 students chosen from the schools were randomly selected across the state. To ensure that well-thought responses were collected, students in the senior classes 1-3 were recruited for this study.

2.3 Inclusion Criteria

Senior secondary school students in classes 1-3 who were present in the school and were willing to respond to the questionnaires when recruited.

2.4 Exclusion Criteria

Students of other classes other than senior secondary classes 1-3, students of the included classes who were not present in school on the day of data collection, as well as students who did not consent to answer the questionnaires.

2.5 Sampling Technique

8 students each from the selected 25 schools were conveniently recruited to participate in this study.

2.6 Research Instrument

To gather useful and reliable information, the researcher considered it appropriate to use a questionnaire titled 'Student's perception of teachers strike action questionnaire [STUPTSAQUE]. The questionnaire is designed for data collection from students. It is in two sections. Section A and B. Section A deals with personal information like age, Class, gender, etc while section B dealt with students' views about teachers' strike action on a four-point rating scale as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD).

2.7 Validity of Instruments

The questionnaire used in this study was subjected to both content and face validation by two experts in the Arts Education Department of

the Federal University Otuoke. The instruments were shared with the selected experts for their evaluation and feedback. The experts assessed the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the instruments' items/questions in relation to the research objectives.

List 1. Rating scale

Scale	Score
SA	4
A	3
D	2
SD	1

2.8 Reliability of Instrument

Shanghverzy [7] defined reliability as the consistency of measurement and is frequently assessed using the test-retest reliability method. Reliability is increased by including many similar items on a measure, by testing a diverse sample of individuals, and by using information testing procedures. The instrument was administered to a sample of twenty students who are not part of the original sample for the study. A second administration of the instrument was conducted after a period of two weeks. The initial scores were compared with the score of the second administration using Pearson product correction; the coefficient obtained was 0.91 which confirmed the instrument's reliability for use in the study.

2.9 Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher personally administered the questionnaires to students in their respective schools. The students were encouraged to fill out

the questionnaire items and return same to the researcher. Two research assistants were used for the administration of the questionnaire.

2.10 Procedure for Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using frequency, Simple percentage mean and the results presented in tables and figures.

3. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

200 students from the 25 selected secondary schools met the inclusion criteria. 115 (57.5%) of the respondents were female, while 85 (42.5%) of the respondents were male from the Senior Secondary classes 1, 2, and 3, 50 teachers of senior secondary classes 1-3 from these selected schools were also randomly recruited

Table 1. Analysis of the participants' age

Age	Frequency	Percentage %
10 – 14Years	65	32.5
15– 18Years	70	35
19-24Years	45	22.5
24years &above	20	10
Total	200	100

Table 1 shows that 65 (32.5%) of the respondents were aged between 10-14years, 70 (35%) of the respondents were between the age range of 15-18 years, 45 (22.5) of the respondents were aged between 19-24years while 20 (10%) of the respondents were between the age range 24years&above.

Table 2. Analysis of the students' responses to their perceived causes of the strikes

S/N	Variables	Respondents Responses					
		SA	A	D	SD	Total	
1.	Delay in payment of teacher's salary	F	90	85	15	10	200
		%	45	42.5	7.5	5	100
2.	Poor infrastructure	F	75	70	32	23	200
		%	37.5	35	16	11.5	100
3.	Delay in promotion	F	73	78	35	14	200
		%	36.5	39	17.5	7	100
4.	Non-implementation of promotions.	F	82	76	24	18	200
		%	41	38	12	9	100
Average Total		F	80	77.25	26.5	16.25	200
		%	40	39	13	8	100

Table 2 This table shows the students' responses to their perceived causes of the strike. 87.5% of the students affirmed the statement that delay in payment of salary is the cause of the strike, while 12.5% said the contrary. It was also observed that 72.5% of the students affirmed the statement that poor infrastructure is a cause of the frequent NUT industrial action, while 27.5% disagreed with this. In addition, 75.5% of the students were in support of the statement that delay in the promotion of teachers is also the result of strike actions, while 24.5% felt the contrary. Lastly, 79 % of the respondents affirmed non-implementation of promotion as a reason for the strike actions, while 21% said they do not. Considering the average summary, it was confirmed based on the majority of responses of the student (79%) that delay in payment of salary, poor infrastructure, delay in promotion, and non-implementation of promotion are the causes of strike actions.

Table 3: Responses on statements regarding the action of the government towards strike actions; it was summarized in Table 4. It was observed that 89.5% of the respondents affirmed the statement that the government has developed a thick skin towards strike actions, while 10.5% said the contrary. It was also observed that 31% of the respondents affirmed the statement that government responds to strike actions with immediate effects, while 69% said they do not. In a similar form, 50% of the respondents affirmed the statement that government increases teachers' salaries and promotions after the strike, while 50% said it does not. Lastly, 30.5% of the respondents were in support of the statement, while 69.5% felt contrary. The average summary confirmed based on the majority responses of 50% revealed that government responds to strike actions with immediate effect.

Table 3. Analysis of the students' perception of the government's action towards the strike

S/N	Variable		Respondents Responses				
			SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	It implies that the government has developed a thick skin toward strike	F	95	84	12	9	200
		%	47.5	42	6	4.5	100
2.	Government responds to strike actions with immediate effect	F	25	37	62	76	200
		%	12.5	18.5	31	38	100
3.	Government increases teachers' salary and promotion after strike actions	F	50	50	62	38	200
		%	25	25	31	19	100
4.	The government provides adequate infrastructure after strike actions	F	25	36	80	59	200
		%	12.5	18	40	29.5	100
	Average Total	F	48	52	54	46	200
		%	24	26	27	23	100

Table 4. Analysis of students' perception of the teachers' interest in the industrial actions

S/N	Variable		Respondents Responses				
			SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	Teachers are always happy during strike actions	F	20	28	70	82	200
		%	10	14	35	41	100
2.	Strike actions give teachers the chance for further studies	F	35	28	82	55	200
		%	17.5	14	41	27.5	100
3.	Strike actions give teachers opportunities to embark on private business	F	100	85	10	5	200
		%	50	42.5	5	2.5	100
4.	Strike actions give teachers opportunities to go farming or travel.	F	87	78	15	20	200
		%	43.5	39	7.5	10	100
	Average Total	F	60.5	55	44	40.5	200
		%	30	28	22	20	100

Table 4 Responses to statements on the teacher's interest in strike actions, it was summarized in Table 4. It was observed that 24% of the respondents affirmed the statement that teachers are always happy during strike actions, while 76% said the contrary. It was also observed that 31.5% of the respondents affirmed the statement that strike actions give teachers chance for further studies, while 68.5% said the contrary. In addition, 92.5% of the respondents were in support of the statement that strike actions give teachers opportunities to embark on private business while 7.5% said otherwise. Lastly, 82.5% of the respondents were in support of the statement that strike actions give teachers opportunities to go for farming or travel, while 17.5% felt contrary. The average summary confirmed based on the majority responses of 58% revealed that teachers benefit from strike actions.

4. DISCUSSION

The impact of delayed payment of teachers' salaries on strike actions has been extensively examined by several researchers, including Subiri et al. [8], Offem et al. [9], and Ezeagba et al. [10]. These studies have consistently highlighted the correlation between salary delays and teacher strikes, with a significant proportion of the population acknowledging this relationship. For instance, a study found that 87.5% of students identified delayed salary payment as a primary cause of strike actions. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure was reported as a contributing factor to strikes by 72.5% of respondents. These findings align with previous research conducted by Mugho Steven [11], which similarly emphasized the role of poor infrastructure.

Moreover, the study revealed that both the delay in promotion (75.5%) and non-implementation of promotion (75%) were recognized as reasons for strike actions. These results are consistent with the findings of Oloyede [12], who identified irregularities in teachers, non-payment of salaries, indiscipline among students, and lack of dialogue between the government and the Nigerian Union of Teachers as underlying causes of strikes.

While strikes primarily aim to safeguard the interests of teachers or the government, it is crucial to consider the perceptions of students regarding the government's responses to such actions. A majority of students (89.5%) perceived

the government as indifferent to teachers' concerns during strikes, potentially influenced by the duration of the industrial action. Additionally, students expressed that the government often lacks an immediate response to strikes (69%) and increases teachers' salaries only after the strike (50%). However, a higher percentage of students (69.5%) believed that the government provides adequate infrastructure post-strike. These findings highlight the need for further exploration of government-teacher interactions and the effectiveness of dispute resolution mechanisms in the education sector.

Recommendations derived from the research, including attractive remuneration, adequate financing, adherence to collective bargaining, provision of sufficient educational facilities, infrastructure, and the utilization of dialogue for conflict resolution, are consistent with the conclusions of Oloyede [12]. Notably, student perceptions indicate that teachers may engage in other activities during strikes, such as establishing private businesses (92.5%) or engaging in farming or travel (82.5%). This suggests that teachers may have less at stake during strikes, influencing their negotiations with the government. These findings emphasize the complexity of factors influencing teachers' experiences during strikes and emphasize the importance of understanding the motivations and outcomes associated with teacher participation in such actions.

5. CONCLUSION

Our study thereby concludes that the students' prevalent perception of the causes of the NUT industrial actions is a Delay in payment of teachers' salaries, Poor infrastructure, a Delay in promotion, and non-implementation of promotions. There exists a very negative perception of the government's action towards the NUT strikes among students, as the majority feel that the government has developed a thick skin towards the strikes. With these growing perceptions, students may always feel insecure and hopeless when the strike occurs, as well as develop a poor understanding of the point of context in negotiations between the two bodies. The students' perception of teachers' interest in the NUT strike, concluded that the students perceive the teachers as benefactors of the strike, as most of them maximize this opportunity to embark on establishing their private businesses, travel, and further their studies.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The government should see to it that the agreements made with the teachers are carried out. To uphold teachers' rights and obligations and strengthen their statuses and personalities in society.
2. Since a conducive learning environment is a sine qua non for quality education, and the failure to pay teachers' salaries is one of the causes of the strike, education should be properly and adequately funded to encourage effective teaching and research, prevent ongoing strike actions, and ensure that students receive a high-quality education.
3. To avoid being left in the dark, students should be fully informed about the reasons behind the strike and the scope of the negotiations.
4. To avoid situations of ongoing strikes, the government and teachers should plan alternative strategies for productive discussions and ensure effective communication.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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