

Defending the value of education: leadership, solidarity and collective power



By Tsogtgerel Zambal



Photo: Education International

Education is the backbone of social progress and national development, yet in Mongolia, those who dedicate their lives to teaching have long been undervalued. From classrooms to the frontlines of protests, through courage, resilience and collective action, teachers have secured historic victories. The Federation of Mongolian Education and Science Trade Unions (FMESU) has transformed struggle into solidarity, proving that when educators unite, they can reshape the future.

Campaigning to restore the dignity of the teaching profession

My own journey from a secondary school history teacher to president of the FMESU has been shaped by a deep belief that educators deserve dignity, fair compensation and a strong collective voice. This conviction has guided every step of our struggle to restore respect to the teaching profession and to secure the rights of those who sustain the education system.

The FMESU's mission is clear: to contribute to quality education for all, to create conditions for a dynamic increase in living standards and to defend the labour rights and interests of our members. These goals are not abstract, they are rooted in the lived realities of education personnel who face mounting workloads, declining mental health, illness and the consequences of the shortages of qualified personnel. The crisis in education is not only about teachers, but it also directly affects the quality of learning and the future of our children.

In 2023, the FMESU joined the *Go Public! Fund Education* campaign. The campaign provided a platform for advocacy, exchange of experiences and best practices with colleagues across the world, particularly in the North Asia sub-region, as well as valuable training in strategy development, planning, messaging and public engagement. It also provided capacity development and tools for effective communication with the public and decision-makers as well as campaign planning.

The campaign reminded us of a fundamental truth: when educators are organised, informed and united, real change is possible.

Our advocacy efforts centred on the implementation of the bilateral collective agreement signed with the [Mongolian] Ministry of Education, effective from January 2025. Throughout the year, we submitted proposals and formal requests, participated actively in national budget discussions and held several press conferences to highlight the urgent needs of educators.

In September [last year], we organised a nationwide protest involving 10,000 teachers and education support personnel. In October, to mark World Teachers' Day, the FMESU organised a peaceful sit-in at the main square in front of the Parliament building. Over five days, 5,000 educators participated, braving the cold and fatigue to demonstrate their unwavering commitment to defending teachers' rights and strengthening the public education system. This was not a symbolic gesture; it was a declaration that educators would no longer remain silent in the face of neglect and mounting depression of their purchasing power and professional value.

When these demands remained unresolved, members made the difficult decision to take industrial action. For 13 days, 40,000 teachers and education support personnel stood united across the country from urban to rural schools. This historic action demonstrated the true power of collective solidarity.

The strike was not easy. It required courage to withstand pressure, resilience to endure hardship and unity to maintain strength. Families of students and teachers provided food, encouragement and moral support. The public stood with education personnel, recognising that our struggle was not only for teachers but for the future of Mongolia's children.

Through solidarity to victory

As a result of this collective action, the basic salaries of teachers and education support personnel [will] have increased by 50 percent from January 2026 and by an additional 26 percent from November 2026. This victory was monumental. It proved that when educators unite, they can reshape the future.

On 12 November 2025, another milestone was achieved with the successful conclusion of the Collective Agreement for 2026–2028, between the Ministry of Economy and Development and the FMESU. Upon registration with the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Protection, the agreement entered into force, providing a stronger legal framework for protecting educators' rights.

These achievements were not the result of individual effort, but of unity. It was the culmination of lengthy negotiation, dialogue and collective struggle. It showed that persistence, resilience and solidarity can overcome even the most entrenched obstacles.

Throughout this journey, the FMESU and our members were not alone. Education International and our brothers and sisters around the world watched closely, sending solidarity and encouragement as the strikes unfolded. Their support reminded us that the struggle for education is global and that every victory in Mongolia contributes to a broader movement for justice and dignity in education worldwide.

Unity, solidarity and collective power revealed their true force. Despite the cold, the pressure and the workload, we emerged stronger, more resilient and more determined. We proved that courage is not the absence of hardship, but the ability to confront it together.

As president, my responsibility is to ensure that all agreements are implemented fully and without delay, that the rights of teachers and education support personnel are protected and that our union continues to grow. We remain committed to empowering our members through training, awareness-raising and education on their rights. Most importantly, we are strengthening and empowering our core foundation, the trade union committees at the school level.

Fair pay, safe working conditions and respect for educational labour are not luxuries; they are essential investments in the future of our society. The power of our movement lies in solidarity and together, we will continue to defend the value of education.


The story of the FMESU's struggle is one of courage, resilience and unity. It is a testament to the power of collective action and the strength of educators who refuse to be silenced. Our victories in salary increase, stronger legal protections and renewed respect for teachers are milestones on a longer journey toward justice and dignity in education.

The *Go Public! Fund Education* campaign has shown us that when educators stand together, they can change the course of history. We are proud as teachers, as union members and as a collective force. Stronger, united and determined, we will continue to fight for decent working conditions, for the empowerment of our members and for the recognition of education as

a national priority.

Go Public! Fund education – We are stronger together!

Tsogtgerel Zambal is the president of the FMESU/Mongolia. He began his career as a history teacher and later served as an organising officer for a secondary school trade union committee before being elected FMESU President in 2019. He is dedicated to promoting education and labour rights, championing solidarity, collective action and protecting of the value of education in Mongolia. The opinions expressed in this article are that of the author and do not necessarily reflect any official policies or positions of EI, the AEU or SSTUWA. This article was first published on the [Education International website](#) and has been reproduced here with permission.



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