

Address of Hon L.D Dookun-Luchoomun
Minister of Education and Human Resources,
Tertiary Education and Scientific Research

Opening Ceremony

“Improving Students’ Performance in Secondary Schools”

MGI AUDITORIUM.MGI MOKA

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Good Morning to you all.

I would like, from the very outset, to thank the Managers of Private Secondary Schools Union for inviting me to the Opening Ceremony of this 2-day Seminar on *“Improving Students’ Performance in Secondary Schools”*. I am indeed very pleased to be in your midst today, especially since the emphasis during this Seminar would be on strengthening the capacity of Educators for classroom delivery.

You are certainly all of you fully aware that, in practically the entire literature on the subject of school effectiveness, teachers along with school leaders are considered the two most important factors contributing to enhanced student learning and performance.

I am glad that, increasingly, importance is now being attached to ways and means that serve to unlock the potential of teachers.

Let us just remind ourselves, Ladies and Gentlemen, how important this is today.

Allow me to take up two central features.

One: many of you are familiar with what UNESCO has called a “Learning Crisis”. You know that many countries had been focusing on increasing access to education—and they have well succeeded in the process.

However, one major failing has been that many students leave school without being functionally literate or numerate.

I would be important to note that the education sector worldwide has been facing three major challenges, those of access to education, equity and quality.

Today, it is essential that we realize that in a rapidly evolving world, we have to regularly adapt ourselves and it has been noted that sometimes, following adverse reports some of us tend to be pessimistic. And this should not be the case. I make an appeal, that we keep on believing and be forceful in such moments to improve the system. Stressing on the need for education is one thing, but the most important remains quality education.

The World Bank's ***World Development Report 2018 entitled 'Learning to Realize Education's Promise'*** argues that, without learning, extreme poverty will never be eliminated and that social gaps are most likely to widen instead of getting narrowed.

Even for us, in Mauritius, the challenge today is to provide quality learning opportunities for all children, and ensuring that low performers, do acquire sufficient and necessary competences to grow socially as individuals and develop skills that will help them face the challenges of the 21st Century.

So, the learning crisis is one major issue.

The **second one** is Student performance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The reform agenda that is today being implemented by my Ministry advocates the holistic development of all of our learners. We want to ensure their socio-emotional balance.

We want all their faculties and not simply the cognitive one to be catered for.

Above all, we want them to emerge from the world of education as young adults equipped to assume their socio-economic and civic responsibility and fulfil their role as citizens of both local and global society.

But this does **not** mean—**repeat, NOT MEAN-** that they have to slow down on or decelerate their efforts at school.

The system should enable us to allow the full potential of each child to be tapped and the effort should be there as well. The reform is already ensuring that they come out of school with developed soft skills and also as creative and solution driven individual but the most important remains the fact that they should be able to work together with others. This is where we need to teach them to put in efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Overcoming this learning crisis and enhancing the performance of all students calls for a multi-pronged approach.

And one constant that emerges from this new contemporary scenario is that a premium that has to be continuously placed on CPD—on Continuous Professional Development.

Building up the capacity of teachers has a huge impact on student performance—and we are now forcefully moving CPD from behind the arras and making it take center stage.

Teaching has become, now more than ever, a Learning Profession.

Allow me here to extend a warm welcome to our Resource Persons who have generously agreed to take time off their busy professional schedules to be with us here.

Thank you Prof Jyotsna Vijapurkar and Prof Razia Patel as well as Mr Ali Saeed for enhancing the pedagogical capabilities of our Educators. You will certainly see that, despite the different contexts of our countries, the problematic to encourage and facilitate student learning is the same universally.

I must also express my appreciation that private providers of secondary education like the Managers of Private Secondary Schools' Union (MPSSU) should be embarking on similar ventures. After all, nothing works like a synergy between all providers of education, whether Private or Public.

Apart from courses delivered by the MIE and other stakeholders, the ministry of education is also engaged in making continuous professional development of our educators and staff a main feature in its mission. This is where we are heading for.

On the other hand, we do not want students to rely exclusively on what they get during classroom lessons or through private tutoring. Self-directed learning has to become the norm—and the sooner, the better.

We have accordingly started a process that students are eagerly responding to—because we are using a medium that they are much familiar with.

Thus, my Ministry has initiated the Special Support Program, a digital platform launched with the expertise of the NCERT, India, in collaboration with the MIE and the Open University of Mauritius for lessons to be accessible to Grade 7 pupils. We have over 425 digital pedagogical resources on the SSP platform. Next year, our aim is to extent the same facilities to students in Grade 8 through more videos, pdf readers and links to additional resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The professionalization process has to be **institutionalized** in the system.

You will agree that accountability is central to all our endeavors to improve performance. Equally, the relevant quality assurance mechanisms have to be in place.

As you are aware, the PSEA has already set up its Quality Assurance Unit that is in the process of being reinforced. Internal and external audits are central to any educational system not simply for increased accountability but also for institutions to set their own performance benchmarks and aspire to meet them.

I am glad that the Ofsted of the UK is equally willing to engage with us for an intense capacity building program in that domain.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I believe this 2-day seminar will prove to be a seminal one for you. No matter how experienced you are as teachers, you must realise that the context of our classrooms has changed. Today an educator's role is not only limited to give knowledge but it consists of guiding the learner as a friend and helping him/her develop his/her sense of discernment. We need to equip them. Our students' way of thinking and attitude to schooling are undergoing major transformations—and as Educators, you can least afford to sideline these.

The challenge is there and the PSEA is here to assist and help. We should not forget that Private Schools, since years have a strong link and privileged and respectful relationship/partnership with government. We will have to keep on working together to further strengthen these ties.

One of the questions we are all called upon to answer in our lives as Educationists is this:

“What have we done that has made –or can make--a difference in the lives of all our students around you?”

Let me once again congratulate the MPSSU for this laudable initiative of holding this Seminar and express my deep appreciation to the Resource Persons for helping our Educators get closer to the answer of this question.

Thank you for your kind attention.