

Address by Hon L.D Dookun-Luchoomun
Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education
and Scientific Research
Launching of Office 365 in Education
5 June 2017

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

I am pleased to be here today for the launching of Office 365 in Education. I am all the more so delighted since I know for sure that I am here in the midst of converts, of persons who share our drive for education, and who are convinced, like I am, that modern tools can and must inevitably be the means to improve our education system further.

This drive to make education better through emerging and innovative technologies places us squarely today in a spirit of public-private partnership and I wish to thank Microsoft and all partners in Education and ICT who are working to progressively make this dream of digital transformation of our education system happen.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One thing is definite. There is a universal realisation that we live in a world where ICT has made it possible to have an unprecedented ease to access, generate and share ideas. ICT is transforming the way we communicate more than ever before. In view of this, it would be passing by a wonderful opportunity if we do not consider how our education system can maximise these new possibilities. It would be even inconsiderate of us if we do not create the enabling conditions that

would strengthen the hands of our teachers in the use of contemporary digital tools and learning methods.

The equation is simple: in today's advancing technological environment, quality education rhymes with making our schools work smarter and better.

That is why today's launching is a milestone in its own right. By giving opportunities to the Cloud in education, we are working smarter and better and preparing our students, teachers and educational institutions to the realities of a connected world.

When I started out as an Educator, education technology was limited to slides and overhead projectors. Now, classrooms are becoming unrecognizable, given the changes in the tools available to the teaching profession. The changes, you will have noticed, picked up momentum very fast. The educational TV channel of the MCA became a video recording in a videocassette, then a floppy disk, then a DVD. Knowledge is no longer stored in a set of encyclopedia on a bookshelf or in a series of dusty videocassettes in a cupboard. Knowledge in the form of Open Educational Resources is now available literally at our fingertips from the ubiquitous smartphone.

With each new technology, there is a quantum leap in expanding access to knowledge to new groundbreaking and unprecedented areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are now at the verge of another such quantum leap in Mauritius as we proceed to provide information to one and all through the Cloud. The global face of school education is changing, and we cannot afford to let the change slip by us.

The time to combat digital obsolescence and prepare for the new models of Education is now!

Education in Mauritius must be resilient by moving and evolving with global trends, and the time to do it, I repeat, is right now.

I thank Microsoft for providing this first platform to help to make this cultural shift happen at a time where teachers and students already have their smartphones and other devices with them to access the platforms from home. With this suite, which is part of Microsoft Education Solutions, teachers can sign-in and access multiple applications that will assist them in their tasks.

Indeed, the benefits are numerous, as you will have understood by now. Teachers will be having access to enabling tools to prepare, plan and synergize content, build class notebooks, create interactive reports and presentations, collaborate on documents using any browser or device.

I feel all the more elated because this technology will make one of my major wishes come true: teaching, I strongly believe, can no longer be done in an isolated and cut-off setting and behind closed doors. Professional development means that Educators must create collaborative classrooms; it means they must connect in professional learning communities. No one of us has, alone, the monopoly of knowledge or pedagogical wisdom – sharing has to become the new mantra of our educational settings.

Hence, this system will mean that our schools will be able to join through a simple and free registration process that you will be guided through in the next few days.

Let me also add that the Ministry of ICT is equally working with us to make this content event more accessible by giving connectivity through SchoolNet II in all secondary schools.

Obviously enough, my Ministry is not stopping there. We are working to put up a set of Online Student Support Systems to assist our Grade

7 to 9 students in getting access to educational contents that will enable access to courses from any location after school hours. As from January next year regular lessons online at any time for Grade 7. We are also working with the Ministry of TCI in developing mobile apps for schools that will enable even faster access to and from schools on attendance, events and notifications. We live, ladies and gentlemen, at a time where information must be fluid and we are contributing to make this happen, with platforms such as the Office 365 cloud and through such other initiatives.

This culture of change in our system cannot be done in isolation, and this is why I am grateful for the support that we are getting in this endeavour from all partners.

Microsoft is one of these major partners—and has always been so. Microsoft has always accompanied us in leading and supporting teachers through networking in the “*Partners in Learning*” programme for more than 10 years now. Microsoft has also supported professional development through the “*Innovative Teachers Programme*” by encouraging teachers to use ICT technology by themselves and by training educators in better embedding ICT within the Curriculum. Through the enhanced use of technologies in Education, some of those institutions have even become Microsoft Mentor Schools.

As you can see, this partnership has been a sustained one and we are now taking it one step further with the use of the evolving technologies of the day.

You will allow me to also avail of this privilege to inform you that my Ministry is equally engaged in other well-meaning and forward-looking partnerships.

One such partnership is with the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) of India which is going to assist us in

building repositories of educational content that we will be able to adapt and use. Both the Open University of Mauritius and the MIE are currently working on that program.

On the other hand, we are also getting the support of the UNESCO International Institute of Technology in Education as they plan to assist us this year with training on ICT for disabled students and in building competency of our teachers in ICT.

I believe such collaborations and networking from all areas are critical, because ICT makes it easier for people to get together. True, for many, this is already a reality through the social media such as Facebook or Twitter. But we should be aiming far and wide. We also need to work towards increased cooperation and synergy within the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me reiterate that the moment is timely for all these initiatives to position themselves into our system. I am confident that, through all these measures, we can most definitely showcase our good practices to and share these with our region as well as the rest of Africa and small states. I genuinely believe that we will continue to improve our education sector by building international collaborations in all innovative educational pedagogies and avail ourselves of sound practices that exist worldwide.

I hope that teachers will make full use of the immense opportunities that this Office 365 Cloud is placing before them, and also use the other new platforms that will come their way, to make Education more fluid, more creative and certainly more adapted to the digital realities of the connected 21st century world in which we all live.

I look forward to you and your teams taking best advantage of the awareness sessions that are being held, and I am impatient to see these

new approaches being progressively in use when I visit institutions in the future.

With this, I wish to thank again Microsoft for supporting us, and I would like to see other partners in technology in Education assisting us with a similar commitment.

Thank you for your kind attention.