



## **SPEECH**

**His Excellency Mr Dharambeer Gokhool G.C.S.K.,  
President of the Republic of Mauritius**

**EVENT: DISTANCE EDUCATION AND TEACHERS'  
TRAINING IN AFRICA CONFERENCE 2025**

**VENUE: OCTAVE WIEHE AUDITORIUM  
REDUIT**

**DATE: 22 JULY 2025**

**TIME: 14:00 HOURS**

## **Protocol**

Dr. (Mrs.) Aruna Ankiah-Gangadeen, Deputy Director, Mauritius Institute of Education

Professor Johan Wassermann, Deputy Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria

Mr. Innocent Nkata, Chief Executive Officer, South African Institute for Distance Education

Dr Folake Ruth Aluko, Chairperson of the Steering Committee, DETA Conference, University of Pretoria

Dr. Mary Ooko, Manager, Unit for Distance Education, University of Pretoria

Senior Officials

Representatives of Ministries and Colleagues from Higher Education Institutions

Professor (Dr.) Sanjeev Sobhee, Vice-Chancellor, University of Mauritius

Esteemed conference delegates from across Africa and beyond,

Distinguished guests,

All Protocol Observed.

## **Introduction**

Good afternoon.

It is with a great pleasure and a deep sense of commitment to Education that I join you today at the opening of the **2025 Distance Education and**

**Teachers’ Training in Africa (DETA)** Conference, hosted once again by the **Mauritius Institute of Education** in collaboration with the **University of Pretoria** and the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE).

I extend a very warm and cordial welcome to our overseas guests, and wish that you find some time to do some sightseeing and to enjoy our Mauritian hospitality.

This **DETA conference**, initiated by the University of Pretoria in 2005 for providing leadership and capacity building opportunities, has grown into a significant **Pan-African Platform** for deliberation and innovation in Teacher Education.

I commend the University of Pretoria and its partners for sustaining this laudable initiative.

This year’s conference is especially meaningful, as it coincides with the *20th anniversary of the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* (TESSA) initiative- an initiative that has left an indelible mark on teacher development across Africa.

### **Timely and Transformative Theme**

Let me begin by congratulating the organizers for convening this year’s conference under the timely and transformative theme: **“Education for Empowering the Global South: Technologies and Pedagogies for Distance Teacher Education.”**

And for providing a collaborative learning platform for those involved with Distance Education.

We meet at a time when the **Global South** is reclaiming its voice, redefining its narrative, and leveraging technology to chart a new course for education.

It therefore captures the urgency and opportunity that lie before us: to harness emerging technologies and pedagogical innovation for the inclusive advancement of **Education across Africa**.

This theme also aligns very well with our National Vision for the Education sector.

In January 2025, I had the honour to present the Government Programme 2025-2029 to the nation, and on 26 May 2025, I had the honour of launching the **Digital Transformation Blueprint 2025–2029**, a visionary document that lays the foundation for transforming Mauritius into a **Hi-Tech Intelligent Island**—one that is **inclusive, ethical, resilient, innovative, and** environmentally sustainable.

At the heart of this ambitious vision lies a critical enabler: Technology enabled **Human Capital in the education sector**.

Quality education depends on quality teaching and learning, and quality teaching and learning cannot be dissociated from technological innovation.

Technology-enabled quality education is not only important but essential for meeting nation's agenda for progress and prosperity for all.

## **Strategic Importance of Distance Education**

In a fast-changing ecosystem, over the **past two decades**, Distance Education has evolved from a marginal, alternative mode of delivery to a Central Pillar of Education systems -especially across Africa.

It has helped transcend geographical isolation, economic barriers, and even post-pandemic challenges to reach learners everywhere—from remote villages in the Sahel to inner cities and island states of the Indian Ocean.

The COVID-19 pandemic, disruptive as it was, accelerated the digital transition, exposing both the potential and the inequities in education systems.

It highlighted the vital need for **digital infrastructure, teacher preparedness, and learner support systems**.

In Mauritius, we are proud of the strides we have taken in integrating **online and hybrid pedagogies**, building **digital campuses**, and enhancing **e-content** development.

The Mauritius Institute of Education has been a pioneer in these efforts, shaping not only national policy but also contributing meaningfully to continental dialogues.

Today, distance education is not merely a mode of delivery-it is a vehicle for ***inclusion, equity, lifelong learning, and human capital development***.

## **Repositioning the Teacher: Pedagogy for the first 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

As we meet to discuss teacher training in distance education in Africa, it is essential to restate an enduring truth: **no education system can be better than the quality of its teachers.**

The transformative potential of distance education hinges on how we empower our teachers-intellectually, professionally, and digitally.

This requires moving beyond content delivery to fostering communities of practice, peer support networks, and learner-centric pedagogies.

We must rethink teacher education curricula to embed digital fluency, pedagogical resilience, and socio-emotional competencies.

DETA 2025 offers an opportunity to collectively rethink and redesign frameworks for **blended, flexible, and scalable** teacher development pathways that recognize the diversity of our contexts.

## **Technology: The Accelerator of Educational Justice**

Today, Africa is on the threshold of a new educational era, powered by technologies that are more accessible, more affordable, and more adaptable than ever before.

Internet penetration is deepening, mobile connectivity is expanding, and cloud-based platforms are reshaping the virtual classroom.

But technology, in and of itself, is not a panacea.

What matters is **how we use technology to humanize education, democratize knowledge, enhance, and contextualize learning experiences.**

Here in Mauritius, initiatives such as the national digital learning platforms and the integration of learning management systems in teacher training institutions have illustrated the power of technology to reshape teaching and learning and transform educational experiences and outcomes.

### **Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Distance Education**

Perhaps the most transformative force in the Education Sector today is **Artificial Intelligence (AI).**

With the advent of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, we are entering a new educational ecosystem which has begun to redefine how we teach, learn, assess, and support students.

The **Digital Transformation Blueprint 2025–2030** recognizes this shift and positions Mauritius as a hub for **AI-enabled public services, data-driven decision-making, and human-centric innovation.**

One of its four strategic pillars- **Digital Skills for All-** seeks to equip citizens with the tools to thrive in a digital society.

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) has opened up exciting possibilities for reimagining educational possibilities.

These technologies can transform the distance learning experience into something more immersive and interactive, from personalized learning journeys and intelligent tutoring systems to predictive analytics that identify at-risk learners.

**AI holds immense potential to enhance distance education.**

However, we must proceed with clarity and caution.

While AI promises efficiency, it must **never substitute the human touch** that defines Quality Education.

We must ensure that **AI tools are ethical, transparent, inclusive, and tailored to local needs.** AI must serve educators-not replace them.

As policymakers and practitioners, we must build **digital literacy for teachers** to engage meaningfully with these emerging technologies.

And we must equip learners with the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate an AI-mediated world.

### **Digital Equity and Ethics**

While digitalization promises tremendous potential, we must also recognize its challenges.

- **Digital divides** persist across rural and urban zones, within and between countries.
- **Resistance to change**, especially among senior educators, can slow down adoption.
- **Cybersecurity, misinformation, and data ethics** are increasingly pressing concerns.



These are not reasons to retreat.

They are calls to **lead with foresight, inclusivity, and innovation.**

Above all, we must remember that **technology must never be a barrier, but always a bridge.**

### **Empowering the Global South: A Collective Mandate**

Ladies and gentlemen,

The **Global South** has the talent, the creativity, and the will to shape its own educational future.

But we must do so together- ***through South-South collaboration, policy alignment, knowledge sharing, and capacity building.***

This **DETA conference** is a testament to that spirit of solidarity.

Since its inception in 2005, the DETA Conference has embodied the spirit of **South-South cooperation, knowledge exchange, and collective capacity building.**

**Over the past two decades,** it has brought together researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and innovators from across the continent to forge **a common vision.**

Its collaborative model, co-hosted across Africa from **Uganda to Nigeria to Mauritius,** reflects the unity and strength of academic work across Africa.

This year, with over 100 participants from 13 countries, including virtual attendees, DETA continues to amplify the voices of African educators and researchers.

Projects such as **TESSA**, **SAIDE**, and **African Storybooks** are testaments to what is possible when we work together.

Mauritius is proud to **co-host DETA** once again and contribute to a shared vision for **Transformative, Quality Education** across Africa.

### **Mauritius: A small Island with Continental Vision**

Mauritius may be small in size, but we think and act like a continent.

As the host of DETA 2025, Mauritius is proud to contribute to **this continental dialogue**.

Our small island nation has long understood the **power of Education** to transform society and level the playing field.

In recent years, we have invested in ICT in education, digital campuses, and capacity building in online and hybrid pedagogy. The Mauritius Institute of Education has led pioneering work in **open and distance learning, e-content development, and regional collaboration**.

Through our Digital Transformation Blueprint and our investments in higher education, we aim to:

- Champion **open educational resources (OERs)**.
- Expand access to **lifelong learning**.
- Promote **green digital education** aligned with climate goals.

We believe that **the digital classroom must be a classroom of compassion, connection, and critical thinking.**

As we step fully into a digital future, we are committed to being a bridge between Africa, Asia and the World- a space where innovation meets inclusivity. We see ourselves not as **peripheral to Africa**, but as fully and proudly part of the African story.

### **A Call to Action**

As we embark on these four days of reflection, innovation, and partnership, I urge all of us to carry this simple yet powerful message:

***“Education is not just a pathway out of poverty; it is a pathway to dignity, equity, and agency.”***

Let us work together to ensure that **distance teacher education** becomes a **driver of equity**, a **beacon of resilience**, and a **platform for empowerment** across the Global South.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Mauritius Institute of Education, the University of Pretoria, SAIDE, and all participating institutions.

I would like to share this quote: “Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success”, by Henry Ford.

It highlights the importance of collaboration and teamwork in achieving a common goal.

Let this conference resonate with the spirit of this quotation.

May **DETA 2025** be a **milestone** in our collective journey toward Educational Transformation.

I now have the great pleasure of declaring the **DETA 2025 Conference officially open and wish you productive and successful deliberations.**

**Thank you.**