

# **OPERATION PHAKISA EDUCATION: WHY A SECRET? MASS SURVEILLANCE, INEQUALITY AND RACE IN SOUTH AFRICA'S EMERGING NATIONAL E- EDUCATION SYSTEM**

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## **Abstract**

E-education is a rapidly-expanding technology for primary and secondary education in many parts of the world. In 2015, the South African government began to design and implement a national plan for e-education for grades R-12, Operation Phakisa Education (OPE). This project is in its early phase and has been developed clandestinely via the input of various governmental, corporate, state, and civil society organizations. OPE aims to transform the national education system and cultivate “21st Century learners” in every classroom, including proposals for cloud-based software and Big Data collection.

This paper investigates several possible human rights concerns with respect to OPE proposals under consideration by South African policymakers. One issue is the possibility of a “chilling effect” on free speech and inquiry. Another is parental and student consent. A third issue is the monitoring and evaluation of teachers and the associated limits on teacher autonomy. Last, this paper considers the influence of digital surveillance on OPE by both government and corporate institutions. The former is evaluated in light of increased foreign and domestic government surveillance, while the latter is considered within the context of deepening socioeconomic inequality.

This analysis gives insight into the issue of surveillance through e-education, with special focus on the economically and racially-divided nation of South Africa and its sensitivity to foreign power and influence. It also provides alternative e-education proposals, ones that center upon the privacy, autonomy, and empowerment of 21st Century learners.