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Introducing student peer mentoring in universities in Pakistan: Hierarchy and a different culture in learning?

The paper will present a social action research project which explores the impact of students' peer mentoring on the culture of learning within higher education in Pakistan. The main objective is to examine the value of peer mentoring as a mechanism for promoting educational attainment and improved student retention. It will also discuss the way in which such processes may contribute to developing learning communities in Universities in a developing country, particularly amongst "non-traditional" entrants to Higher Education.

Peer Mentoring has been shown to be effective in parts of the developed world in helping students, especially those under-represented in HE. The project introduced a peer mentoring scheme for students at Pakistani universities, where there is little counselling or other student support. While they struggle to meet the basic university teaching within limited budgets, no funds are available for co-curricular schemes for student support. By identifying the specific issues and difficulties faced by students through fieldwork in specific Pakistani universities and an assessment of the current practices of the limited student support available, it was possible to design and implement a pilot project within the selected universities which provide the much needed support for minimal cost.

The presentation will cover: a) Higher education in Pakistan, b) student support services c) the development of the peer mentoring project and d) monitoring and evaluation results and themes emerging from this research.

Pakistan is a country with strong historic and cultural ties to Europe, but increasingly isolated academically and culturally because of the current political situation in the region. It is important to keep open the doors of academic and cultural exchange between European and Pakistani Universities at this time.