

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATING IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CONFERENCES

ПЕРЕВАГИ ТА ТРУДНОЩІ УЧАСТІ В МІЖНАРОДНИХ СТУДЕНТСЬКИХ КОНФЕРЕНЦІЯХ

The article examines the students' participation in international students conferences in general and based on the example of the annual conference in particular, which is organized and conducted by the Department of English for Humanities of the Faculty of Linguistics of the National Technical University of Ukraine «Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute». The analysis of the International Student Conference «Ukrainian and Foreign Science: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow» shows that the participation in such conferences has an important developmental, technological and social significance for the training of future specialists of technical and humanitarian profiles. Participating in international students conferences affords students valuable opportunities to learn from other students as well as to share their work with others; to network and establish long-term collaborative relationships with like-minded peers. The present paper is focused on the role of international students conferences in professional development and public speaking. The findings of the study present evidence that participation in international conferences provides students with an opportunity to develop their critical thinking, their writing, reading, speaking and listening skills; help them to be more confident. Our paper describes the stages of organization international students conferences, the specific features of each stage, the possible issues and solutions. It is indicated that students held a highly positive view of participating in international students conferences. Moreover, students with unsuccessful experience in writing thesis and preparing presentation were and still are motivated.

Different formats of conferences are analyzed, examples from the students' experience of participation in different formats are given as well as their impressions are summarized. It is emphasized the importance of the teacher's role in preparing students for the conference.

Key words: personal development, Intercultural Communication, Global Exposure, Hybrid model.

У статті розглядається участь студентів у міжнародних студентських конференціях загалом та на прикладі щорічної

конференції зокрема, яку організовує та проводить кафедра англійської мови гуманітарного спрямування факультету лінгвістики Національного технічного університету України «Київський політехнічний інститут імені Ігоря Сікорського». Аналіз Міжнародної студентської конференції «Наука в Україні та за кордоном: вчора, сьогодні, завтра» дав підставу стверджувати, що участь студентів мала важливе розвиваюче, технологічне та соціальне значення для підготовки майбутніх фахівців технічного та гуманітарного профілів. Участь у міжнародних студентських конференціях відкриває студентам перспективні можливості вчитися та в інших поділитися власним досвідом; налагодити подальшу довготривалу співпрацю з однодумцями. Представлене дослідження сфокусоване на важливості міжнародних студентських конференцій у становленні професійного розвитку та вдосконаленні вміння публічних виступів. Аналіз результатів дослідження продемонстрував тенденцію до розвитку критичного мислення, самовпевненості та чотирьох видів мовленнєвих навчочок, а саме: письмо, говоріння, читання, аудіювання – завдяки активній участі у міжнародних студентських конференціях. У статті подано детальний опис етапів організації міжнародних студентських конференцій, розглянуто проблемні питання та запропоновано шляхи їх вирішення. Окреслено загальну позитивну оцінку досвіду участі у міжнародних студентських конференціях. До того ж, студенти, які з певних причин не брали участі в конференціях, залишаються вмотивованими до такого виду навчальної діяльності. Проаналізовано різні формати проведення конференцій, наведено приклади з досвіду участі студентів у різних форматах та узагальнено їхні враження. Наголошується на важливості ролі викладача під час підготовки студентів до конференції.

Ключові слова: особистісний розвиток, міжкультурна комунікація, глобальний вплив, гібридна модель.

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Introduction. The foundation of progressive development in today's interconnected globe is the convergence of cultures, ideas, and knowledge. Of all the channels that facilitate this worldwide dialogue, international student conferences are essential venues that cause participants' personal and professional. For any student, scholar, or researcher, conferences play a major role in their academics. Especially when it comes to an international conference. The benefits that come along with attending an international conference are long-lasting. Being part of an international conference is one of those things lying on top of almost every student's checklist for their academics.

International conference presentations meanwhile represent one of the biggest challenges for students using English as a Lingua Franca. Nowadays communication technologies are more multimodal than ever. The task for teachers is to teach students to use these technologies for making their reports and presentations.

Analysis of recent research and publications

According to Schreiner, L.J., Badawi, R. & Baldock, C. (2022) students have the chance to attend academic conferences via digital platforms. This new way of attending international conferences takes a new look at online communication and led to higher

attendance rates as well as gives the opportunity to exchange knowledge and interact with others across the world [6]. At Global Academic Institute (GAI) outlines the chance to publish any findings students present at the event as part of conference proceedings with an International Standard Book Number [1].

Grove, J. (2022) focuses on hybrid model, which offered a blend of online formats and in-person gatherings. With this in mind, we tried to consider the concept of hybrid model as a phenomenon in our paper [3]. Waechter, F. (2023) developed six best practices for long-term sustainability in event planning according to our commitment to organising sustainable conferences[7].

The aim of the article is to outline the benefits of participating in International Students Conferences as a key element of professional development

A mixed **method** was used for the purpose of the current study. The qualitative approach included observation and interview.

Results and Discussion. Universities in Ukraine organize and conduct international students conferences in various fields of knowledge. The department of English language for Humanities of the faculty of Linguistics of Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute organizes for the first and second year students the International Conference: Ukrainian and Foreign Science: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. Despite the war in Ukraine and a number of problems caused by the war, this year 384 participants took part in the Conference. Figer 1 helps us to demonstrate the interest among students.

Having said that from 2013 to 2017 the format of conference was offline. Students were gathering together and discussing their findings. Covid 2019 changed the format of the conference. Instead of physically attending the conference, students do their reports and presentations electronically, either synchronously or asynchronously. As a result, attendees can exchange and communicate virtually without physically attending the conference location. This format is

accessible for students with disabilities, which is great. Virtual presenters can appear live, i.e., synchronously, via an expanding range of technology options [2]. Virtual presentations can be used for many different types of conference sessions, including plenaries and panel discussion. Furthermore, sessions can have a workshop element by such means as pausing the presentations for interaction among participants. The main benefit of virtual presentations is that they are easily shared. Also, the presentations are placed on the site of the Department of English for Humanities (Faculty of Linguistics, National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute”) – <https://kamgs3.kpi.ua/en/> and students, who were unable to attend a particular conference, can view the presentations. In addition, a number of foreign students can easily join the conference via Internet.

Unfortunately, there are some problems with virtual presentations, which organizers might predict. For instance, presenters may have the tools, but lack the knowledge of how to use them. We ask them to record their presentations and send us via email. All mentioned elements of virtual attendance led to an increase the number of participants from 50 to 350 as we can see at **Figure 1** above.

Conferences come in many forms, but they all need to be organized. There are organizational guidelines that work for the most part. Organizing a successful international conference is mostly about getting the following things right: document preparation, organization, conducting and reporting. We have to say here that a conference, even a small one, requires a lot of work. The planning, organization and holding of such conferences is obviously a phased work. Organizers have to remember that the more work they can delegate to others to handle, the better. Additionally, it is critical to avoid wearing anyone out; if the organizers enjoy most of the work, the conference will be far more successful. A working group or organizational committee is created, each member coordinates a

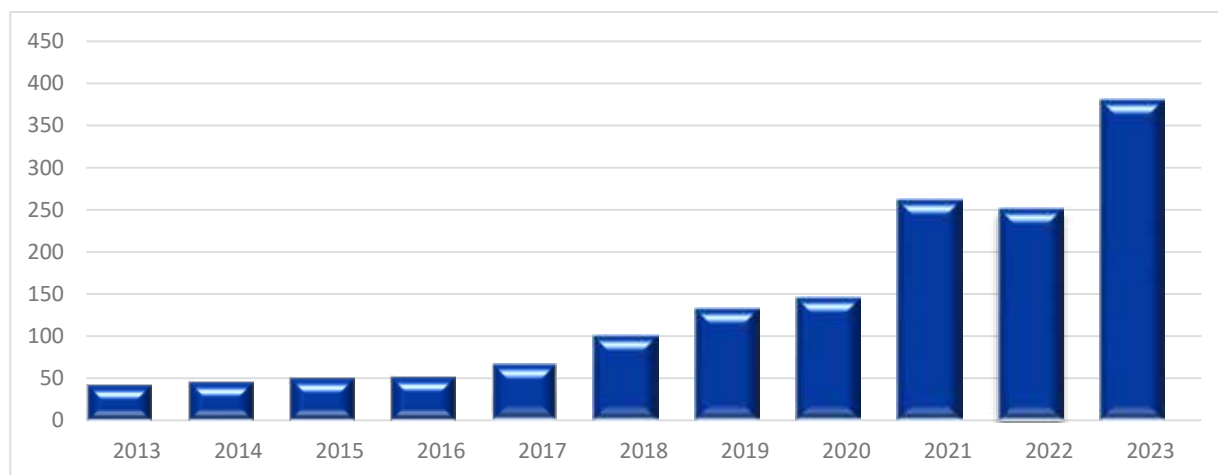


Fig. 1. The participation in International Conference

certain stage of the conference and ensures its effectiveness. These stages are shown in **Figure 2**.



Fig. 2. The stages of The International Conference

Stage 1 consists of not only document preparation, but also making prediction about possible deadlines for each document. This stage is also about goals. The first item in any conference planning checklist is determining the event goals, such as exploring new ideas, increasing motivation, attendee satisfaction etc. The conference goals will often be a mix of internal and external objectives. In addition, this stage is limited in time. The next Stage 2 is not less important than the previous one. Kim, H. J., Kong, Y., Hernandez, C., & Soban, M. (2023) emphasize student engagement directly indexes student achievement, and career development [4]. We try to free up some time during English classes for explaining the importance of participation in international conferences. This activity develop students writing and speaking skills, help them to be more confident.

Organization also includes writing reports and making presentations. Students are proposed to choose one field from an offered list such as economics, health/medicine, engineering, physical sciences, social sciences etc. This list caters to diverse interests, allowing students to choose field that align with their future professional goals and areas of expertise.

Having said that teachers should pay attention on cultural aspects. International conference means international collaboration and interaction between different cultures. It is important to know that there are different level of cultures. For instance, National culture – the set of norms, behaviours and customs of a nation; Occupation culture – values and characteristics of members of a particular occupation [8]. According to Mushaathoni, M. (2023) the university should consider expanding its current cultural diversity training programmes to include training on intercultural communication dimensions [5]. We ask our students to avoid questions about religion and gender inequality. As an attendee, they have the opportunity to present their research by submitting reports to other students from different countries and universities. They can gain valuable feedback from knowledgeable professionals in their field.

Considering the data provided in **Figure 3**, we can see that almost all students possess a positive attitude to the participation in international students conferences. Nevertheless, almost all students demonstrate a willingness to write thesis in co-authorship.

At the same time, some students demonstrate a negative attitude to the participation in international students conferences (21%). One of the students said the following: *“Writing thesis is too difficult for me. I feel uncomfortable because my level of English is low”*.

Seventy-two percent of respondents consider that participating in international students conferences is one of the important stage in personal and professional development.

The questionnaire was distributed online using Google Forms, and a link was sent to participants via a Telegram group exclusively for students, who took part in International Students Conference: *Ukrainian and Foreign Science: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*. The introduction to the questionnaire reassured participants that their responses would be used for

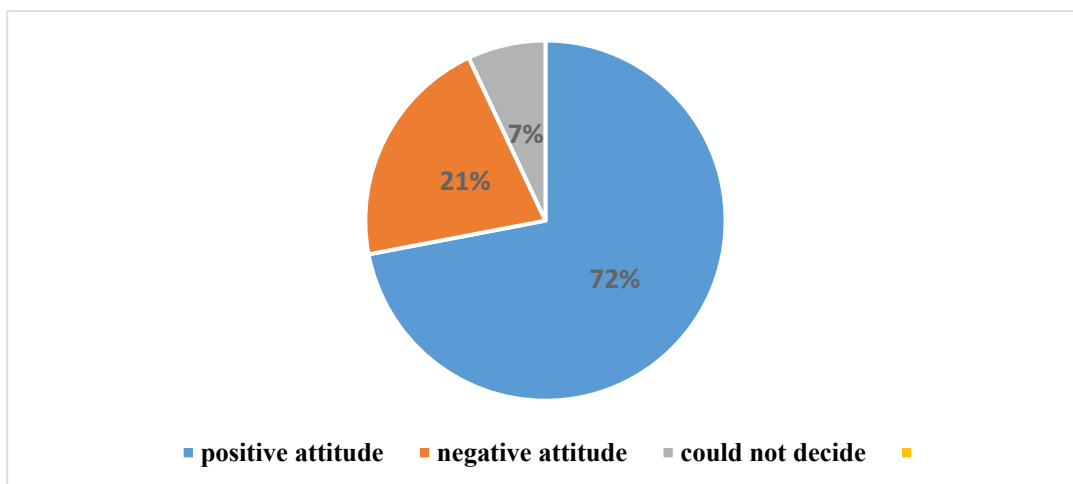


Fig. 3. Evaluation of participating in International Students Conference

research purposes. One hundred and eighty students took part in survey. Students who participated in the survey mentioned about hybrid model. It is a synchronous event that has a combination of online and offline meeting. This type of meeting format was rare before the COVID-19 pandemic, but started to become more common nowadays. We believe that hybrid model will be favored in the future because it offers the most flexibility to participants.

Conclusion. Successful conferences are carefully planned journeys that educate and inspire. Attending an international conference is a significant opportunity for growth and networking.

Professional conference organizers can create and provide engaging and immersive attendee experiences with the aid of 21st-century technologies. By implementing the strategies discussed in this article, conference organisers can create partnerships that enhance attendee experiences. Teach students to review the conference agenda beforehand and identify key sessions and speakers of interest. This way of planning helps them allocate their time effectively and not miss important presentations. Also remind them about building connections, which can lead to future collaborations and opportunities. In addition, students can share their conference experiences on social media platforms to connect with a broader audience. This practice increases their professional visibility.

Consider what you learnt and how it relates to your work after the conference. Integrating new concepts and knowledge into your professional practice is facilitated by reflection. Moreover, having like-minded people around can be great for the mind, renew enthusiasm, make you happier and more productive, which is important nowadays.

Remember that the true value of an international students conference lies in what you take away from it and how you apply it in your future career.

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