

### Academic Conferences:

## What Can They Bring to Academics? Ibri College of Technology and Applied Sciences as a Model

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### Abstract

Conferences are normally formal meetings that take place in different venues around the globe where academics meet, present, and discuss their production, whether it is related to business, climate, geography, education, information technology(IT), etc. They normally occur annually, or as need be. The possible question here is: why conferences? That is a loss of money, effort, fatigue, and more tiredness. However, from another perspective, conferences are a sign of healthy experience that reflects the hard work of faculty members at educational institutions on one hand, and encourages socialization among all presenters and participants on the other hand. In order to get the optimal results about the importance and value of conducting conferences, the researchers have distributed a questionnaire among (28) faculty members in the English Department at Ibri College- the Sultanate of Oman in the Middle East. The results were exciting and showed an extreme interest in attending conferences to promote instructors' academic status. Explanation, discussion, and recommendations will be highlighted in detail throughout this article.

**Keywords:** academics, analysis, article, attend, conference, domains, perspective, research

### Introduction

Conferences play a vital role in spreading knowledge in almost all fields in life: agriculture, industry, geography, and education. Ministries of higher education do care much about conducting academic conferences, as they are essential in the educational field, and represent the

backbone of the whole process, especially in exchanging experience and enhancing practice. They help academics show their effort and devotion in their specializations. Moreover, they are taken into consideration in the annual reports when evaluating teachers' performance. High caliber academics seek for as many conferences, meetings, workshops as possible as a sign of hard work that can give power to their curriculum vitae. During such conferences, brilliant ideas arise, discussing new syllabi suggestions, enhancing, modifying, or replacing current or old programs being taught at schools or universities, unifying theory with practice, etc. This paper highlights the importance and value of conferences for academics and, to some extent, students who volunteer to participate in, or lead conferences, and highlights relevant matters of financial support, administrative policies, etc.

### ***Study Problem***

This study identifies the ultimate benefit of academic conferences conducted locally, nationally, or internationally. What can presenters and participants bring back to their institutions after finishing such formal meetings on one hand, and how can their students make use of what they get from their teachers who participate in such conferences, on the other hand? All of these things will be fathomed in depth in this paper to reveal what faculty members think of the value of attending conferences.

### ***Study Objectives***

This paper aims to:

1. Investigate the significance of academic conferences as a means of professional development for teachers.
2. Shed light on the benefits academic conferences offer to educators in terms of knowledge acquisition, pedagogical innovation, networking, and career advancement.
3. Contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of academic conferences in supporting the growth and development of teachers.
4. Identify the professional and personal value of academic conferences as perceived by Ibri College faculty members.

### ***Research Question***

The fundamental question of this study is: What value do academic conferences have as perceived by faculty members at university level, Ibri CAS as a model?

### **Literature Review**

Academic conferences are important events that bring together scholars and experts from different fields to discuss and exchange ideas on various topics. These conferences create a platform for researchers to present their latest findings, share their experiences, and get feedback from peers. The value of academic conferences cannot be overstated, as they serve several important purposes.

An academic conference (sometimes called a research conference, academic congress, academic meeting or symposium) is a meeting which researchers attend to present their findings and hear about the latest work within their field. These events are usually organized by associations or groups of independent researchers under the watchful eye of a scientific or technical committee who ensure the technical quality of the research that's presented. (McCurry, 2019, Para. 1). "... a conference is a place where academics, researchers, experts, and professionals deliver and present information after doing thorough research (Abbadia, 2022, Para. 3).

As academics move forward in their careers, they find themselves interested in attending educational workshops, symposia, and conferences so as to give and take some knowledge related to their majors. They are mostly driven by a conviction that such conferences can help achieve purposes. Firstly, academic conferences provide an opportunity for researchers to gain visibility and recognition in their fields. Doing so is rewarding in many ways: presenting research at a conference is an excellent way to showcase one's work and attract the attention of potential collaborators, employers, and funders, knowing more possible methods of teaching, giving others some of their personal experience in the teaching domain, gaining a sound reputation in their school where they teach, getting promotion, and may be some financial support. "A conference is an opportunity for academics and researchers to present and discuss their latest work, and discover new and interesting developments in their field. Which means that almost everyone who attends an event like this also presents at it". (McCurry, 2019, Para. 5).

Therefore, conferences offer networking opportunities that can lead to new research collaborations, which can be crucial for advancing teachers' career.

Secondly, academic conferences help disseminate knowledge and promote academic discourse. By attending a conference, researchers can learn about the latest research in their fields, as well as share their own research with others. This exchange of ideas can lead to new insights and collaborations, which can help to advance the field as a whole.

Attending conferences offers many chances to teachers of all majors such as approaching the elite in their fields, getting the opportunity to know how to learn more about the courses they teach. Moreover, academic conferences offer teachers an opportunity to receive the proper feedback from their peers and the audience, as well, which can help improve the quality of teaching in classrooms. It also provides an opportunity for researchers to test their ideas and hypotheses. However, for some fresh teachers, attending conferences for the first time may get them worried, embarrassed, excited, or terrified. But in the coming conferences they will be in a good shape. "Academic conferences offer unique opportunities for networking, learning, and developing. However, they can also be a terrifying experience, especially at the beginning of one's academic career". Maurer ((n.d), Para. 2).

Yet many researchers, especially those just starting out in academia, are often wary and hesitate to sign up for scientific conferences. Academic conferences present researchers with an opportunity to keep up with the latest developments in science, learn about career-changing prospects, and forge strong working relationships. (George, 2022, Para. 4).

What should participants do when they decide to present some topics in a certain conference?

According to Maurer ((n.d), para. 6), "Rehearse and practice your presentation, and time it. Being well prepared will make you more confident, will signal to your audience that you take them seriously and behave professionally, and allow you to focus on the reaction of your audience".

Being well-prepared for one's presentation needs full knowledge of the subject matter. Rehearsing gives more confidence and more awareness about the subject and will show the audience that things are completely under control. But when one becomes part of the audience, they have to show strong zeal and interest and participate by asking questions, commenting on some items, and engaging in discussion. Moreover, the participant should network with their peers much more than with the big names, as he/she will be in closer contact with peers and colleagues at work.

When you are part of the audience, show interest and ask questions. We all like engaging audiences, so be one. Also, do not only network with the "big names" in your field (i.e. professors), but also engage with your peers. These are the people with whom you will share the largest part of your career, and it is indispensable to learn, exchange and create supportive networks with one's peers. Maurer ((n.d), Para. 11).

Some fresh and unexperienced teachers don't distinguish between conference and journal papers, which is good to highlight in this paper.

To start with, both are written for specific purposes; conference papers are meant mainly for presentation at conferences, workshops, etc., while journal papers are intended for publication in journals provided that they are well-checked and proofread, and subjected to certain criteria.

The primary distinction between a journal paper and a conference paper is that, while both require writing, journal papers are intended for publication in journals, whereas conference papers are intended for presentation at conferences and may be published in conference proceedings. (Abbadia, 2022, Para. 4).

If someone decides to attend a conference- local or international-, they should consider a few things in advance: the purpose beyond attending—is it related to one's field, and whether he/she can afford all required expenses. Once everything is ready, go ahead and get the benefit of this chance, as it is the first step on the way of gaining progress and good academic reputation.

When making the decision to attend an academic conference, ask yourself what you want to achieve, whether you want to join a global conference or a specialized event focused on your field, and finally evaluate the potential costs involved (for travel,

stay, admission fee, etc.). Once you shortlist the type of academic conference you want to attend, go ahead and sign up; it's the first step to building your research and professional reputation. All the best! (George, 2022, Para. 14).

In fact, mixing with others and exchanging ideas-academics, in particular- does have so many benefits on top of which is beating academic and professional isolation. "Conference participation helped to combat feelings of professional isolation". (Kostoulas. 2015, Para. 3). When professional hints work hand in hand with personal benefits, that is so great a job.

Secondly, academic conferences help to disseminate knowledge and promote academic discourse. By attending a conference, researchers can learn about the latest research in their field, as well as share their own research with others. This exchange of ideas can lead to new insights and collaborations, which can help to advance the field as a whole.

Not only do participants get professional advantages by attending or participating in conferences, but also they can gain some personal skills in the field of technology.

One of our personal favorites of organizing and attending events is the fact that conferences offer you a glimpse into the latest trends and technologies. Knowing them, especially in the programming world, is crucial for staying on top of the game. (Pranjić, 2022, Para 7).

Moreover, attending conferences gives participants the chance to see their heroes and public figures in person. They can meet them, shake hands, chat, have coffee together at break times. It is really an unforgettable and unique chance.

Another amazing benefit of attending a dev conference is that you get to see many of your heroes at once. The best thing is that not only can you listen to them talk and present their stories, you can also meet them, have a chat, and get to know them as people. Shaking hands and talking to your actual childhood heroes, imagine that! (Pranjić, 2022, Para 9).

Normally, conferences have well-experienced and most reputable figures to deliver important things, either at the beginning or end of the conference sessions known as "Keynote" speakers. This is also a chance for all fresh and beginners to watch and listen to such old-handed experts.

excellent and high caliber conferences are weighed by such keynote speakers who are respectful, and complex educators. “Keynote speakers are often chosen for their innovative thinking, their contemporary art practices, and connections with the global community.” (Taylor, 2020, Para. 3).

Attending conferences are never considered a waste of time; on the contrary, teachers can get new skills and methods of teaching from each other. Every participant introduces some of their personal ways of teaching a certain skill, or subject. When teachers return to their schools, they can utilize what they had learned and introduce that to their students and, possibly, colleagues. It is a wonderful move towards gaining new experience, personal and professional.

Reflecting your own practice and discussing with peers is one of the most valuable experiences you can gain each year from attending conferences. The more you can clarify why you teach a certain way, what’s working and what’s not, with others, the more you can refine your own core values as a teacher and bring that right back to the classroom when you return. (Taylor, 2020, Para. 6).

As the days go by, some teachers might get –to some extent- bored of teaching, especially the old. Attending conferences, workshops, meetings, etc., may refresh and give them the courage to continue in high spirit. So, this is one of the many advantages of attending and participating in academic and professional conferences. “Taking time for yourself to recharge is an essential part of the conference experience”. (Taylor, 2020, Para. 10).

As teachers get well-experienced, skillful, and more professional, they believe it is a courtesy to give a hand to new teachers to apply to their students, or pass that to other colleagues. Man is always learning in this life; there are no boundaries that limit learning or spreading knowledge. “As I became more proficient, I reached out to other teachers to assist in their development as new teachers. As I have aged, I find it necessary to continue changing what I do”. (Durken, 2015, Para.6). What about students? Do they get any benefit from what their teachers get from conferences? let us see.

In fact, students get advantages of their teachers’ attending conferences. Skillful teachers are those who get new experience and convey that to others. Take, for example, the following quotation by a teacher who feels proud of getting new experience by attending a certain conference. He will teach his students to be more open and evaluate things critically, not

following the herd blindly. “I will now be able to increase my students’ critical consciousness while using material that I currently teach. This is just one of the benefits of attending a conference”. (Durken, 2015, Para.5). Moreover, he advises colleagues to join prestigious conferences and attend, or run workshops and meet colleagues and exchange ideas so that the educational movement proceeds forward.

My advice to all teachers is to join a professional organization, find a relevant conference to attend, meet colleagues from around the state and get involved in the future of best practices. Run a workshop, take a workshop, read a professional journal. There is much to be gained. (Durken, 2015, Para.6).

Students are the elite and leaders of tomorrow. Teachers should pay more attention to them by asking them to participate, or lead some tasks class, or in a local place. These students need to be creative and get trained earlier to do things that they will use in the future, especially if they plan to be teachers. “Allowing students to lead the conference process gives them autonomy, helps build trust with their adviser or teacher, and deepens the capacity for students to advocate for themselves, a necessary skill that they will carry with them into the future”. (Watts, 2022, Par. 5). “When students lead conferences, they are in the driver’s seat. They are in a position to problem-solve by identifying strategies of support critical to their success”. (Watts, 2022, Par. 13). As a result, students who take part in conferences or discussion become positive speakers and smart participants in class discussions. This gives them more self-trust to talk and defend ideas they believe in.

When students know that they have an active voice in the conversation, they will choose to engage more in a classroom setting, as they will be able to speak directly to their improvement in key skill areas. Another benefit is increasing students’ confidence in their ability to speak in front of adults, learning how to advocate for what they need to be successful. (Watts, 2022, Par. 9).

All is well that ends well. Participants or attendees of any conference can feel the difference before and after this event. They feel more excited about their profession-- teaching. They are well refreshed as they get new ideas and meet new wonderful people who belong to the same



career. “When I return from an education conference I always have a renewed sense of excitement about teaching, new ideas to try, and some wonderful new friends”. (Evans, 2023, Para. 2).

Teachers are educators and life makers; they strive to convey knowledge to their students. By doing so, they make sure that students are indulged with new topics that will be beneficial not only to them, but also to the whole community or future generations. “Even the most seasoned educators can always find some new way of approaching a topic or sharing an idea with students. As educators we are committed to lifelong learning, and conferences help me fill that cup and then some”. (Evans, 2023, Para. 5). Successful teachers are those who dedicate their time doing good things for promoting their career in the proper way. “Our time is precious, so don’t waste it on sessions that aren’t valuable.” (Turner, 2018, Para. 6).

Conducting conferences should be studied and planned well some time ahead. There should be a message beyond that, not just a sort of prestige, a waste of time, or imitating other institutions. Focus should be made on quality rather than quantity. Nowadays, it seems that there are a number of conferences conducted just as a show off. “We all go to conferences for different reasons, because we feel we should go to them, because we’re following the crowd (which might explain the recent growth in education conferences”. (Turner, 2018, Para. 4). Conferences keep offering opportunities to all academics. It is a chance to get to know academic figures not only from your area, but also from other districts or states. “Education conferences are great professional development opportunities. Not only will you learn about the latest innovations in your field, but you’ll also have the chance to connect with other professionals from outside your school district or even your state”. (Tingley, (n.d), Para. 1).

### ***In-house Conferences***

The Professional Development section at Ibri College-where the researchers teach- is doing its best to promote faculty members’ academic level. Almost every Tuesday there is a local conference, workshop, or seminar. Presenters are free to choose the topic they see suitable and important for example, possible ways of teaching vocabulary, grammar, listening, different genres in literature, etc.

Moreover, the Professional Development section conducts workshops and conferences to the local community—school teachers, students, business people, officials, etc. During the academic year a good number of graduates join the English Department at Ibri College for a month, or maximum two, to get training in the field of translation, as well. Our translators are highly qualified in this field.

### **Methodology**

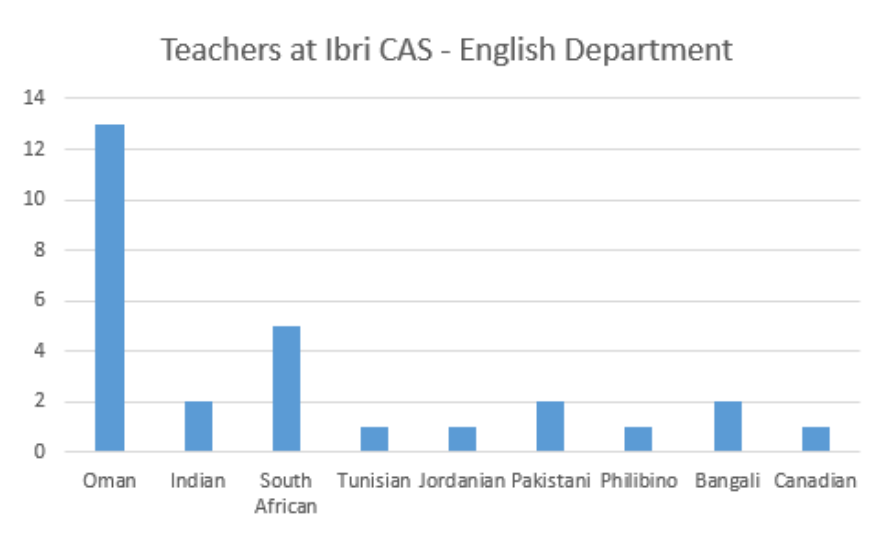
In order to get complete and accurate results on academic conferences, the researchers distributed a survey among (28) male and female full and part-time faculty members at Ibri College of Technology and Applied Sciences, which is one of eleven colleges under the umbrella of University of Technology and Applied Sciences. All students at this college are Local - Omani-, with a small number of expats in the light of cultural cooperation with some countries. Students' first language is Arabic, but the language of instruction is English.

Upon joining college, students take a placement test and those who meet the criteria directly join their majors, but those who don't, they should take a remedial program to study the four skills for one semester: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Those who fail, can have another chance only, if they fail again, they should leave college.

### ***Participants***

All (28) male and female English teachers in the Department of English at Ibri College were selected to participate in the research. They come from diverse countries with many years of experience in teaching English as an ESL/EFL. They were all briefed about the survey and told that it is voluntary, and there is no need for mentioning their names. Out of the (28), (22) showed interest in participating in this research.

The following bar- chart shows the number and nationalities of the participants.



### Nature of Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of (15) questions: (5) Yes/No, (5) Agree/ Disagree, and (5) open ended. This is shown in the appendix page.

### Findings and Discussion

What is evident from the results is that English teachers at Ibri College have attended, and are willing to attend, various kinds of academic conferences, each with its own focus and goals. For instance, all of them have attended at least one per year, interdisciplinary academic conferences, which were broad in scope and covered a wide range of topics, aiming at gaining a broader understanding of the key issues in teaching and learning. All of them have also attended discipline-specific conferences where they have had the chance to connect with others, share experience and interests.

However, the most common mentioned type of academic conferences was the professional development (PD) events, which are designed specifically to help teachers develop their own skills and knowledge in a particular teaching-related skill or method, such as innovative ways to develop students' writing, effective students' feedback, conducting group work, using technology in education, etc. These (PD) events were seen as the most influential and directly linked to improving teachers' practice. One teacher declares that "Attending (PD) sessions in the college has helped me apply and come up with more interesting ideas in teaching vocabulary".

Moreover, there are also the student conferences which are designed specifically to give students the chance to interact with each other and with teachers in a practical way to help them

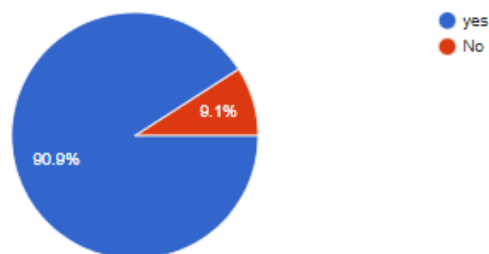
gain a greater insight of the main issue in their disciplines and skills of conducting conference- a skill they will need after graduation. “When students have the chance to attend conferences, they develop many skills, especially presentation and argumentative skills”, one female teacher claimed.

In addition, the overall findings reveal a high value that English teachers at Ibri College allocate to attending academic conferences, emphasizing the positive significance and the various benefits and outcomes associated with attending and participating in academic conferences. They are seen as events for coming together to share research, discuss new ideas and findings, and network with each other in their field. In specific, key areas of benefits were highlighted by the participants:

1. Professional Development (PD): Academic conferences serve as important avenues for teachers' professional development. Participants indicate that attending conferences allows them to access innovative teaching strategies, pedagogical approaches, and research-based practices. This exposure enhances their teaching skills and knowledge, enabling them to deliver high-quality instruction and meet the evolving needs of their students. However, expenses related to attending academic conferences are often seen as a challenge by many teachers. This might explain why some teachers rely on their institutions' financial support to attending such events.

5. From an academic point of view, attending conferences is an invaluable chance, but I have to consider my budget—can I afford all expenses: travel, registration fees, stay and pocket money?

22 responses



Therefore, some participants thought that providing more financial support in this regard would be helpful in attracting more teachers to attend conferences;

15. Mention some suggestions that may help promote academic conferences so that they can be unique?

7 responses

Welcoming public figures as presenters, academic institutions should provide presenters with all expenses: tickets, pocket money, residence, etc.

2. Networking and Collaboration: Conferences provide valuable networking opportunities for teachers to connect with peers, experts, and educational leaders. Participants suggest that these interactions foster collaboration and the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices among educators. Collaborative relationships established at conferences often lead to ongoing professional support networks and the development of partnerships for research or curriculum development projects. Few teachers only were reluctant to network with others, may be because they are worried to go outside their comfort zone by exchanging ideas with others and that they might have to reveal some of their teaching weaknesses, which is a completely false perception.

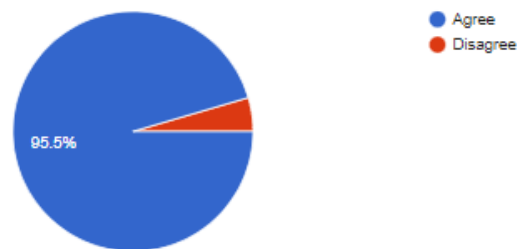


3. Knowledge Dissemination and Acquisition: As perceived by the participants, academic conferences serve as crucial platforms for the dissemination and acquisition of knowledge. Attending conferences allows researchers to access the latest research findings, emerging theories, and innovative practices in their respective fields. It provides an opportunity to broaden one's knowledge base and stay abreast of advancements within their discipline. Many teachers admitted that they have learned about new educational technologies that have facilitated their teaching by attending academic conferences. Using the interactive whiteboard and 'liveworksheets' website were the most mentioned examples by the participants.
4. Renewed Motivation and Inspiration: for many teachers, attending academic conferences can reignite their motivation and passion for their profession. Exposure to innovative teaching methods, success stories, and inspirational keynote speakers reinvigorates their enthusiasm, creativity, and commitment to their role. This renewed motivation, as acknowledged by most of the participants, positively impacts their teaching practices and student engagement in the classroom.

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7. Attending and presenting papers in conferences can be rewarding to my colleagues and my students who will become more critical and positive speakers in class while dealing with the current material.

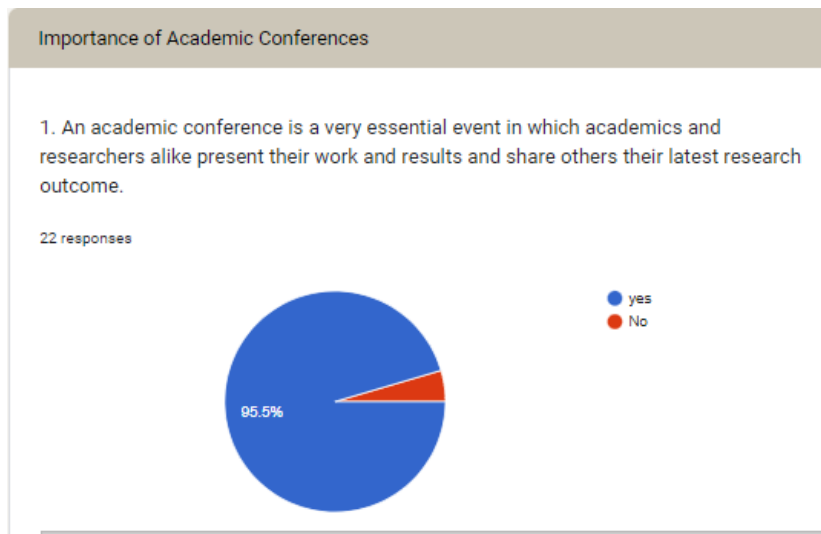
22 responses



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Nearly all the participants clearly linked attending academic conferences to improved teaching strategies and better students' performance and engagement in class.

5. **Enhanced Content Knowledge:** Academic conferences offer teachers opportunities to deepen their content knowledge in specific subject areas. The participants admitted that attending subject-specific conferences enables them to stay updated with the latest research, instructional materials, and curriculum trends. It is with no doubt that this expanded content knowledge enhances their ability to deliver accurate and up-to-date information to students, leading to more effective teaching and learning experiences.



It might be that one of the key positive hints of attending academic conferences is the dissemination of research findings, which teachers rarely have the chance to due to their busy schedules during the academic teaching year.

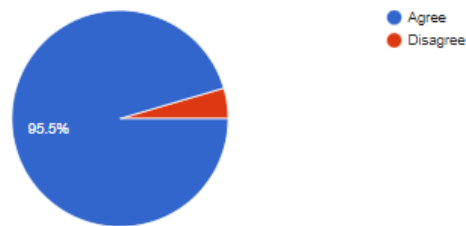
6. **Instructional Strategies and Classroom Innovations:** It was also highlighted by all the participants that academic conferences expose them to a wide range of instructional strategies, educational technologies, and classroom innovations. By attending workshops, presentations, and demonstrations, teachers gain practical insights and ideas that they can implement in their classrooms. What is certain is that these conferences provide a platform for educators to learn about successful teaching practices to adopt in their own

teaching contexts. “I always find myself using new strategies for group-work and teaching vocabulary after attending conferences”, one male teacher believes.

7. Professional Recognition and Leadership Opportunities: Active participation in academic conferences is also seen by the participants to contribute to their professional recognition and leadership opportunities. Those who had the chance to present at conferences or serve on conference committees felt that they have enhanced their visibility within the educational community. Such recognition may lead to more chances, like invitations to contribute to curriculum development projects, serve as mentors to other teachers, or even pursue leadership roles within their schools or districts.

9. Attending conferences does refine one's academic writing and research skills, and benefit from other scholars' work, comments, and notes that come from them, which are deeply appreciated and considered in expanding the researcher's status to publish his/her research.

22 responses

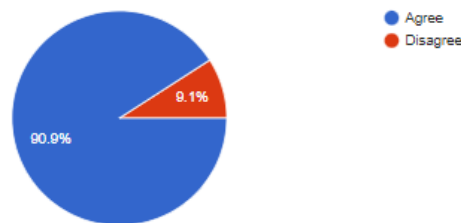


8. Lifelong Learning and Continuous Improvement: It was also agreed among all the participants that academic conferences promote a culture of lifelong learning and continuous professional improvement among teachers. Teachers who attend conferences are more likely to engage in ongoing professional development activities beyond the conference itself. They demonstrate a commitment to staying informed about the latest research and best practices, resulting in improved teaching effectiveness and student outcomes, especially with regard to using educational technology.



10. One of the personal things that presenters and researchers of managing and organizing conferences and related academic events is that conferences provide one with an experience and a glimpse in the modern world of technology which has become so crucial nowadays.

22 responses



## Recommendations

- Academic conferences are the backbone of the educational process when it comes to enhancing practice; it should constitute an essential part of teachers' annual professional development plan.
- Quality should outweigh quantity; more focus should be given to outstanding topics highlighted in conferences. These should reflect the professional needs of the teachers and be linked directly to their daily tasks.
- Academic institutions should encourage their faculty members to attend professional conferences and support them morally and financially; there should be considerable budgets for them to ensure progress, care, and perfect support.
- For ensuring success for the conferences, the agenda and related instructions and duties should be distributed a considerable time ahead so that participants can get a full idea about it and the purpose beyond conducting that event.
- Upon returning to their institutions, it is important that participants convey the impact by conducting meetings with their peers to brief them about the outcome of the conferences they had attended. In addition, since conferences lead to generating great knowledge and useful findings, the outcomes of these conferences should be well documented and disseminated to all stakeholders.

- Academic conferences provide an opportunity to stay updated on the latest research trends, developments, and innovations in various disciplines. By attending conferences, teachers can gain valuable insights into cutting-edge research, emerging theories, teaching methodologies and strategies, and the latest educational technological advancements. This exposure to new knowledge can inspire fresh ideas and stimulate intellectual curiosity.
- Conferences bring together researchers, academics, professionals, and experts from diverse backgrounds and institutions. These events provide an ideal platform for networking and fostering collaborations with like-minded individuals. Interacting with peers and experts can lead to fruitful discussions, exchange of ideas, and potential partnerships for future research projects, publications, and collaborations.
- Many conferences offer teachers researchers the chance to present their work in the form of oral presentations, poster sessions, or panel discussions. Presenting research at a conference allows teachers to receive feedback, suggestions, and constructive criticism from experts in their field. It also provides an opportunity to showcase their work to a wider audience, gain recognition, and receive valuable insights that can help improve their teaching.
- Conferences bring together individuals from various disciplines. This interdisciplinary environment fosters cross-pollination of ideas and promotes innovative thinking. By attending conferences outside their specific teaching subject, teachers can gain fresh perspectives, draw inspiration from different and innovative teaching techniques.
- Academic conferences offer a break from the routine of daily work and provide a stimulating environment where teachers can immerse themselves in intellectual discussions and academic camaraderie. These events often reignite passion for teaching, inspire new ideas, and renew motivation. The energy and enthusiasm experienced at conferences can have a profound impact on your overall productivity and personal growth.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the results from this research highlight the significant and multifaceted value of academic conferences for teachers. These conferences offer opportunities for professional growth, networking, collaboration, and inspiration. They enhance teachers' content knowledge, instructional strategies, and motivation, ultimately leading to improved teaching practices and student success. The research findings underscore the importance of teachers' active participation in academic conferences as a means to continually enhance their professional skills and contribute to the advancement of education. They also stress the need for more financial support for such valuable professional development opportunities.

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## About the Researchers

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