

HOW TO ORGANIZE A GOOD ACADEMIC CONFERENCE?

The article discusses the role of academic conferences, things to consider while preparing the conferences, practical tips with samples from the international conference organized by the Republican Research Center for Innovations in teaching foreign languages (UzRIC) under the Uzbekistan State World Languages University.

Participation in academic conference is an invaluable experience both for experienced and young professionals. Let us look first at what is a conference before exploring how to organize a good conference which might play an important role in teachers continuing professional development. This is what we can read in Wikipedia:

A **conference** is a [meeting](#) of people who "confer" about a topic.

- [Academic conference](#), in science and academic, a formal event where researchers present results, workshops, and other activities.

In order to organise the conference which is appealing, interesting and successful huge amount of work must be done before and during the conference. Thorough and well thought through check lists can help a lot.

Conference preparation

Conference preparation should start long before the conference date and comprises lots of tasks which can ensure the conference success. Conference preparation has several stages which cover such important steps like:

- 1) Define the conference topic, date and venue.
- 2) Write and submit grant proposal. Application form for grant proposal depends on possible sponsor requirements which are usually available on official websites.
- 3) Compile a conference call for proposals. For collecting papers for the publication Call for papers should be sent to all interested.
- 4) Identify topic areas, types of proposals (demonstrations, workshops, paper presentation, poster presentation etc)
- 5) Write a conference programme. It is recommended to send programme to presenters as soon as possible, before they arrive at the conference.
- 6) Set up working groups responsible for i) call for proposal and call for papers ii) conference proceeding iii) liaison person to work with authorities, international and regional participants iv) coffee break/lunch v) venue, equipment vi) travel and accommodation vii) room moderators viii) mass media ix) registration x) feedback collecting.

Call for proposals should include all details necessary for participants. Usually this information covers conference title, venue and date, topic areas, types of proposals, submission requirements, information on conference proceeding, fees if any, proposal deadlines and contact person information for possible queries.

Conference proceeding is very important as this makes the conference appealing to conference participants. Conference proceedings can contain several items such as Preface written by a head of the organization organizing the conference, content page, articles and publishing information.

Call for papers should include all details necessary for getting articles published. Call for papers might include the following: conference details, guidelines for papers, formatting guidelines like margins, line spacing, font size, number of pages, referencing regulations etc. Also they can give information on decision/rejection, payment, deadlines and contact person information. Here information on whether the publication is free of charge or not might be given as well.

The role of a **liaison person** is extremely important as it includes working with authorities, international and regional participants. The liaison person should investigate who will be representing authorities, prepare and send official letters of invitation and check the letters are received. Sometimes a list of VIPs is required for security agency submitted several days before the event.

Team of responsible for **coffee break/lunch** should research options for coffee break and lunch as in some places the host organization offers own facilities but require food and services by particular agency they usually work with.

The **venue and equipment** must be checked carefully before the conference start. The venue: main hall and rooms for concurrent sessions should have enough seats for potential number of participants. It is advisable to check the equipment before the sessions start.

If you have international or regional participants a person responsible for **travel and accommodation** must start negotiations with participants as well as with hotels and travel agencies. Information about travel and accommodation must be sent to participants in a good time before the conference day.

Room moderators assist presenters in running a session. They should check facilities mainly equipment beforehand, warn presenter about time regulations, introduce presenter and help solve any problems presenter can face.

For mass media conference press release will be very handy. **Press release** can be sent to agencies and other interested parties before the conference and must be ready for distribution during the conference.

Tables and people to register conference participants must be prepared and well organized as this is a starting point where people can feel how well the conference is organized.

Feedback can be collected through questionnaire which must be distributed to all conference participants. Participants can put their names if they want but preferably questionnaires should be anonymous.

The conference "Reforms in Uzbekistan - Content based Learning: Opportunities and Challenges"

For the Conference organizing committee the first conference day starts much earlier than starting time written in the conference programme. Usually the team arrives about two hours before the starting time to check that all is ready.

The conference organized by the Republican Research Center for innovations in teaching foreign languages (UzRIC) under the Uzbekistan State World Languages University can serve as a good example of team work and shared responsibilities. UzRIC staff was very anxious as it was their first international scientific-practical conference. The conference "Reforms in Uzbekistan - Content based Learning: Opportunities and Challenges" was held on May 2, 2015, at the National library named after Alisher Navoi in Tashkent.

The conference was held within the framework of implementation of reforms in the education system of Uzbekistan, initiated by the Decree of the President # 1875 signed on 10.12.12 "About measures for further enhancement of system of learning of foreign languages" which was the landmark event and the catalyst for improving the quality of teaching foreign languages at all levels of the educational system. One of the most important points of this resolution is ensuring teaching major subjects on a specialty in foreign languages that sets new challenges and requirements for ESP teachers.

The goals of the conference

The conference aimed at discussing the following topics: implementation of the reforms in teaching foreign languages and ensuring continuity of learning at all levels of the educational process; teaching special subjects, especially technical and international specialties at higher educational institutions in foreign languages; identifying effective ways of teaching foreign languages in non-linguistic universities; discussion of current problems and finding solutions to them, and other issues related to improving the quality of teaching foreign languages in the country.

The issues discussed

The conference covered the following topics: (1) modernization of higher education in Uzbekistan and improving the quality of foreign language teaching in non-linguistic universities; (2) teaching special subjects, especially technical and

international specialties at higher educational institutions in foreign languages; (3) conditions needed to stimulate the learning process, increasing student motivation and development of all language skills in a foreign language; (4) development of curricula and materials, the use of interactive techniques and technologies; (5) the ICT (Information Communication Technologies) implementation in the educational process.

The conference participants

International experts and specialists, representatives of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the US Embassy, the British Council, the Goethe Institute, as well as teachers of vocational colleges and institutes from all regions of Uzbekistan participated in the conference. The conference was held with the financial support of the US Embassy. Additional information about the conference is available at: <http://moodle.uzspic.uz/>

Feedback

The feedback collected at the end of the conference was extremely positive and encouraging. All the participants mentioned that the national conference was well organized, interesting and at the highest level. Majority of participants highly appreciated punctuality, 95 % of participants said that the organizers of the conference were welcoming and polite. 70% of participants liked the place where the conference was held, mentioning that the place was modern and comfortable. In addition, 85% enjoyed coffee break and lunch provided to all participants.

Some participants noted that some workshop themes were not suitable for the conference topic.

Conclusion

Although there is still enough room for improvement, the conference organized by the Republican Innovation Center is a good model to follow and learn from. The conference will provide a space for learning new fresh ideas, share experience, discuss challenges and look for possible solutions but all stages especially preparation stage needs a huge amount of work.

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