

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background, research question, operational definitions, aims, and significance of the study. It highlights the role of academic speaking in higher education and examines how participation in the Siliwangi International English Conference (SIEC) 2025, as a project in the Academic Listening and Speaking (ALS) course, may bring benefits and challenges to students in developing their academic communication skills.

A. Background of the Study

In higher education, academic speaking plays a crucial role in enabling students to participate effectively in formal academic discourse. Academic speaking involves the use of spoken language in institutional contexts such as lectures, seminars, and academic presentations, where communication is shaped by academic norms and conventions (Jordan, 1997). Jordan (1997) further explains that academic speaking is not limited to producing grammatically correct sentences, but also involves organizing ideas, interacting with others, and adapting language to the academic audience. As Brown (2004) asserts, speaking proficiency in academic contexts involves both linguistic accuracy, which supports the clear and precise expression of academic ideas, and pragmatic competence, which enables speakers to manage interaction and use language in ways that suit formal academic settings. Novita et al. (2022) further report that integrating academic speaking practice into higher education encourages students to express their ideas. When students have opportunities to speak in academic settings, such as presentations and discussions, they take greater responsibility for preparing content and delivering it clearly, which increases both their confidence and their engagement in the learning process. Given these findings, the development of academic speaking skills should not be limited to classroom activities. However, it should be supported through experiential learning opportunities, such as academic conference presentations, where students can apply their skills in real academic contexts.

Jordan (1997) states that one of the key forms of academic speaking is oral presentation, in which speakers are required to organize ideas, explain academic content, and interact with an academic audience through questions and discussion. Based on Jordan's (1997) view of academic oral presentations, international conferences can be considered a real-world context for them, as participants are required to present ideas, respond to questions, and engage with a wider academic community. In line with this, Ming (2005) defines oral presentations as a form of communication that combines spoken language with visual support, is delivered within a limited time, and takes place in formal academic settings, reflecting how presentations are typically conducted at academic conferences. These characteristics show that conference presentations closely match the features of academic oral presentations described in academic speaking theory.

Rudneva and Ulanova (2022) report that participation in international student conferences, when integrated into academic programs, offers students structured opportunities to develop academic communication skills through sustained preparation and formal research presentations. Their study shows that such engagement helps students improve the clarity of their academic messages, deepen their understanding of academic discourse, and interact more effectively with academic audiences. These international conference experiences are therefore not only venues for presenting work but also important learning spaces for developing academic speaking competence. Similarly, Greenwood (2025) explains that international academic engagement fosters students' intercultural competence and develops their ability to communicate research effectively to diverse audiences. Participation in conferences also enhances students' confidence and helps them build networks that contribute to their academic and professional identity (Maysuroh et al., 2023; Sulistyowati & Suryani, 2023). These experiences are also significant because they promote not only linguistic and cognitive development but also students' reflective practice and self-efficacy (Kurniawati et al., 2023). Thus, international academic forums, such as conferences, provide meaningful learning environments in which students actively practice organizing ideas, delivering

formal presentations, and responding to academic audiences, thereby directly supporting the development of academic speaking competence in higher education.

In line with this, the Academic Listening and Speaking (ALS) course at a university in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia, requires students to present at the Siliwangi International English Conference (SIEC) as one of its projects. This course requires students to work collaboratively to present their research findings at an international conference as a project at the end of the semester. Throughout the course, students engage in various activities that build their academic communication skills, including extensive listening practice, note-taking, reflective video recording, and participation in webinars and workshops. They are also guided to design, write, and present academic papers based on scientific references, culminating in presentations at both classroom sessions and international conferences. Conducted on-site presentation for students, the course provides opportunities for interaction among students, lecturers, and external audiences. The course design emphasizes real-world performance and the contextual use of academic communication skills.

Given the growing emphasis on experiential learning in higher education, it is important to examine how students experience participation in real academic events such as international conferences. Rudneva and Ulanova (2022) found that engaging in academic oral presentations at international conferences enhances students' academic communication skills and learning engagement. However, limited research has examined how students experience participating in international conferences as part of their learning in the Academic Listening and Speaking course. In the ALS course, participation in the Siliwangi International English Conference (SIEC) 2025 gives students opportunities to listen to and engage with academic presentations in a real academic setting. Nevertheless, little is known about how students perceive this experience. Therefore, this study investigates students' perceived benefits and challenges of participating in an international conference during SIEC 2025. The findings are expected to provide

insights into how conference participation can support the development of students' academic speaking skills and professional communication in higher education.

B. Formulation of the Problems

The research question of this study is: What are students' experiences while participating in the Siliwangi International English Conference (SIEC) 2025 as a project in the Academic Listening and Speaking (ALS) course?

C. Operational Definitions

1. International Conference

In this study, the term "international conference" refers to the Siliwangi International English Conference (SIEC) held in 2025 and organized by the English Education Department. As part of the Academic Listening and Speaking course, students were guided throughout the semester to conduct a small-scale research project to be presented at a conference. The SIEC 2025 featured several events, including keynote speakers, plenary sessions, and parallel sessions. The student participants delivered their presentations during the parallel sessions, which were held offline for students.

2. Students' Experience

Students' experiences are defined as the ways they perceive, feel, and reflect on their participation as presenters in SIEC 2025, a project conducted in the Academic Listening and Speaking (ALS) course. Students' experiences include presentations, feelings, challenges encountered during the conference, audience interactions, and perceived benefits of the activity. These experiences are examined through students' responses to semi-structured interviews that focus on the benefits and challenges of participating in an international conference.

3. Academic Listening and Speaking Course

This course is designed to equip students with essential academic communication skills, focusing on listening comprehension and oral presentation. This course emphasizes language as a tool for effective

communication rather than focusing solely on form. Students are guided through the process of preparing, organizing, and delivering academic presentations that are later delivered in a real academic forum. As part of the course, students participate in webinars and workshops to equip them to deliver presentations at international conferences.

D. Aim of the Study

This study aims to investigate students' experiences while participating in an international conference as a project in the Academic Listening and Speaking course.

E. Significances of the Study

1. Practical Use

In practice, the findings of this study can inform lecturers, course designers, and institutions about how to use international conferences to support the development of academic speaking in courses such as Academic Listening and Speaking, particularly for undergraduate students preparing for academic and professional communication.

2. Empirical Use

Empirically, this study provides qualitative data on students' experiences of participating in international conferences, an area that has received limited attention in previous research. The findings may serve as a reference for future studies exploring students' engagement, confidence, and speaking development in real academic communication settings.