

Beyond the Air Ticket: What Young People Actually Gain from Global Conferences

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study contests the utopian portrayal of youth conferences as democratizing venues for global participation by revealing a stark reality: access, enjoyment, and concrete consequences are predominantly influenced by financial status rather than merit or motivation. This research employs a mixed-methods analysis of 75 completed responses from conference attendees in the Asia Pacific region, identifying three distinct participant profiles: the Budget Student, the Aspiring Professional, and the Corporate Elite. Each profile experiences the conference differently, influenced by age, funding source, and professional status.

The results indicate a concerning legitimacy deficit. Professionals funded by employers who attend high-cost events (over \$1,500) consistently report elevated satisfaction and significant networking results, whereas students funded by family who participate in budget conferences (\$0-499) exhibit the lowest satisfaction levels, frequently viewing these events as profit-oriented tourism experiences that yield primarily symbolic outcomes, such as photographs, rather than substantial professional development. Statistical analysis verifies that this disparity is systematic: a robust positive correlation ($r \approx 0.85$) between event cost and satisfaction suggests that premium pricing acts as both a quality signal and a filtering mechanism, establishing a two-tiered system that effectively benefits the already advantaged while systematically underperforming for marginalized youth.

Machine learning analysis revealed that age and event delivery, rather than venue sophistication, are the major drivers of repeat participation, indicating that young individuals may recognize genuine developmental value above superficial engagement. This research provides essential evidence that juvenile development possibilities are nevertheless hindered by overlapping accessibility hurdles, despite theoretical promises to inclusiveness. The study concludes with five evidence-based recommendations: tiered pricing structures, outcome-based transparency standards, and regional accreditation frameworks aimed at transforming conferences from stratified marketplaces into genuinely equitable platforms for youth empowerment across socioeconomic divides.

Keywords: youth development, conference participation, accessibility barriers, socioeconomic stratification, Asia Pacific, legitimacy gap, international education.

Introduction

Understanding Youth in Contemporary Context

The understanding of youth has undergone considerable transformation, shifting from a mere biological indicator of age to a multifaceted social construct shaped by various economic, political, and technological dynamics. Current academic discourse highlights that the phase of youth should not be viewed solely as a straightforward progression from childhood to adulthood. Instead, it is recognized as a unique and frequently extended stage of life, marked by variability and unpredictability. Galstyan [1] observes that traditional definitions of youth have often associated this stage of life with dependency. In contrast, contemporary sociological viewpoints increasingly emphasize independence encompassing financial, mental, and domestic dimensions and the challenges involved in

achieving it. This review integrates contemporary scholarly work to examine the contemporary understanding of youth, emphasizing the transition from linear developmental pathways to generational experiences. It considers the effects of economic instability, the emergence of transnational identities, and the influence of technology in shaping youth culture.

Conventional frameworks for understanding youth have typically characterized this developmental stage as a linear progression from educational pursuits to employment and the establishment of familial structures. In contrast, Arnett [2] presents a compelling argument against this perspective by introducing the concept of 'emerging adulthood,' which is characterized as a unique developmental stage occurring between the ages of 18 and 25, particularly within industrialized societies.

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Arnett [2] posits that changes in demographics, including the postponement of marriage and extended periods of education, have given rise to a developmental stage characterized by exploration of identity, instability, and a focus on the self, wherein individuals experience a sense of being 'in-between' adolescence and adulthood. Wyn and Woodman [3] provide a critical examination of the prevailing transitional model, contending that conceptualizing youth merely as a progression toward adulthood serves to pathologize individuals who do not adhere to conventional linear trajectories. In contrast, they propose a 'generational' framework, utilizing the 'post-1970 generation' in Australia as a pertinent case study. The authors argue that shifts in state policy, educational systems, and the labor market have fundamentally transformed the experience of adulthood, compelling young individuals to manage significant levels of uncertainty and responsibility [3]. This generational viewpoint redirects attention from the successes or failures of individuals in their development to the wider socio-political contexts that influence the shared experiences of a particular cohort.

Neoliberal economic shifts and labor market instability profoundly influence the current perception of youth. In their comparative analysis of Polish and Ukrainian youth, Ogrodzka-Mazur and Saukh (2019) note a transformation in the axiological landscape, characterized by a decline in traditional social values and a corresponding rise in individual-private values that emphasize self-fulfillment. The authors assert that the uncertainties associated with globalization and political transformation have produced a generation that emphasizes individual existence, often disregarding ideological or religious authorities in favor of a more pragmatic approach to life [4]. The Global South expresses precarity in distinct ways. In his 2010 study, Jeffrey [5] examines the phenomenon of 'Timepass' as experienced by educated yet unemployed young men in India. These individuals find themselves marginalized from the stable, salaried positions that the contemporary path ostensibly guarantees, resulting in their experience of a prolonged state of uncertainty or 'waithood.' Jeffrey [5] observes that these young men, instead of merely occupying the role of passive victims, actively engage in the construction of affirmative masculinities and cross-caste solidarities. They achieve this by 'hanging out' in urban spaces, thereby transforming their surplus time into a significant form of cultural and political agency. This aligns with Galstyan's [1] argument that youth independence serves as an essential theoretical framework. However, for numerous individuals, systemic obstacles hinder the attainment of this independence, leading to an extended reliance on familial structures. The boundaries of the nation no longer limit the spatial dynamics of youth in an increasingly interconnected world. In their 2016 study, Reynolds and Zontini [6] expand the discourse surrounding youth identity by exploring the complexities of transnational and diasporic networks. The authors contend that the prevailing narrative, which perceives migrant youth exclusively as subjects of crisis or marginalization, is fundamentally flawed. Rather, it is proposed that youth within diasporic communities participate in the practice of 'doing families' across national boundaries, thereby sustaining robust emotional and practical connections to the homelands of their parents [6]. This phenomenon results in intricate and dynamic identities, as young individuals maneuver through various cultural contexts concurrently. The societies in which they reside frequently enforce strict definitions of citizenship and belonging, which this phenomenon challenges.

A prominent characteristic of today's youth is the pervasive presence of digital technology, which significantly influences their social interactions and sense of independence. In her 2016 work, Vanden Abeele [7] presents 'mobile youth culture' as a concept that transcends the mere utilization of devices and frames it instead as a significant structural distinction that characterizes the adolescent phase of life. Mobile media facilitate continuous connectivity and promote individualism within networks, empowering young individuals to navigate their relationships and express their identities independently of adult oversight [7]. This interaction with technology facilitates the examination of identity as described by Arnett [2] and promotes the transnational connections highlighted by Reynolds and Zontini [], thereby reinforcing the notion that modern youth culture is profoundly intertwined with digital connectivity.

The existing body of literature indicates that comprehending youth in today's context necessitates transcending traditional notions of biological age and linear transition frameworks. When examined through Arnett's [2] psychological perspective of exploration, Wyn and Woodman's [3] sociological framework of generation, or Jeffrey's (2010) anthropological concept of 'timepass,' it becomes clear that contemporary youth is characterized by their ability to navigate uncertainty. The contemporary youth experience is significantly influenced by factors such as economic instability [4], transnational mobility [6], and the role of digital mediation [7]. This demographic represents a multifaceted social context in which individuals engage in the active negotiation of their independence and identity, all while navigating the evolving structural constraints that shape their realities [1].

Youth Development Programs & Conference Models

The field of youth development has evolved from sporadic interventions to a more structured approach that emphasizes evidence-based programming, grounded in established theoretical frameworks and logic models. Current academic discourse highlights that successful youth programming transcends the mere prevention of problematic behaviors; it focuses instead on fostering competencies, enhancing agency, and encouraging meaningful contributions among young individuals. This review integrates existing literature on the structural evolution of youth development programs (YDPs), examines the usefulness of logic models and frameworks, and discusses the implementation of various programmatic approaches, including sports, mentoring, international summits, and clinical interventions. This review further explores the role of conferences as vibrant venues for fostering youth development, emphasizing the importance of multidisciplinary learning, collaborative partnerships, cultural exchange, and global engagement.

The youth development sector is evolving towards more advanced methods of evaluation and design. Roth and Brooks-Gunn [8] articulate a conceptual evolution within the field, positing that it is progressing towards what they term "Version 3.0." This advancement requires a more sophisticated comprehension of programs, viewing them as developmental contexts rather than merely isolated interventions. Program assessment should consider the relationship between personal traits and program quality. In support of this assertion, Arnold and Silliman [9] present a comprehensive analysis of the current Positive Youth Development (PYD) frameworks, including the "Five Cs" and the "Developmental Assets Framework."

The authors contend that although numerous models exhibit a high degree of scientific validity, a significant translational gap persists. This gap is characterized by local practitioners frequently lacking the requisite "theory of action" necessary for the faithful implementation of these frameworks [9]. To connect theoretical frameworks with practical application, Martinek [10] emphasizes the importance of employing logic models to evaluate the fidelity of programs. Through the process of mapping activities to immediate, intermediate, and ultimate outcomes, logic models enable practitioners to gain knowledge about the complex structures of programming, thereby elucidating the causal pathways involved. The field of sports programming similarly reflects the emphasis on mechanisms. Holt et al. [11] formulated a grounded theory regarding positive youth development (PYD) through the medium of sport, differentiating between "implicit" processes, which are fostered by a supportive environment and interpersonal relationships, and "explicit" processes, which involve organized activities aimed at developing life skills. The authors suggest that although a favorable climate can produce beneficial outcomes, the most effective approach for youth development arises from the integration of a positive climate with a deliberate emphasis on the transfer of life skills [11].

Intervention models, especially those focused on mentoring and mental health strategies, have been subject to thorough examination. In their 2019 meta-analysis, Raposa and other researchers [12] examined various youth mentoring programs. Their findings indicate that, while mentoring tends to be effective overall, those programs that employ targeted and time-limited strategies frequently produce more favorable outcomes compared to open-ended models. The authors emphasize that the methodological rigor employed in research, along with the distinct attributes of mentors, particularly those with experience in helping professions, plays a crucial role in influencing the effectiveness of programs [12]. Colizzi et al. [13] advocate for a shift in the field of mental health, moving away from conventional, isolated approaches to care and embracing a multidisciplinary, trans-diagnostic clinical staging model. The authors advocate for the establishment of comprehensive youth mental health services that emphasize the importance of prevention and early intervention. This approach seeks to extend beyond the realm of psychotic disorders to encompass a wider array of psychosocial challenges faced by young individuals [13]. This multidisciplinary approach is illustrated through conference models in the medical field, where both national and international gatherings unite specialists from diverse disciplines. Such collaborations encourage comprehensive learning and advance interdisciplinary strategies for addressing complex issues. Medical conferences serve as vital venues for collaborative mentorship and collective learning, ultimately enhancing clinical outcomes and patient care. These gatherings facilitate in-depth discussions of clinical papers and case studies, fostering an environment conducive to knowledge exchange and professional development. Shash et al. [14] emphasize the significance of networking within the realm of cancer education and capacity building, asserting that the formation of professional relationships among individuals in a specific specialty constitutes a crucial element of continuous advancement in cancer development. In 2023, the Global Health Cancer Conference took place in Luxor, Egypt, serving as a significant platform for discussing the present landscape and prospective advancements in cancer diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, and prevention throughout Egypt, Africa, and the Middle East [14].

The COVID-19 pandemic raised awareness about the importance of collaborative initiatives, as international conferences and the exchange of knowledge facilitated scientists in the development of vaccines by synthesizing information from various global sources.

In the realm of international development, the incorporation of Positive Youth Development (PYD) principles necessitates the modification of frameworks to align with various cultural contexts. Lindsay et al. [15] present the International Youth Foundation's approach, emphasizing the importance of incorporating Positive Youth Development (PYD) values into its organizational practices. Significantly, they introduced a "conference model" for engaging youth, exemplified by the Our Future, Our Voices virtual summit. This initiative illustrated that effective engagement of youth necessitates relinquishing control to young individuals during the design phase and allocating resources towards capacity building. This approach effectively shifts youth from being passive to becoming active partners in the process [15]. International conferences and educational partnerships across borders serve a comparable purpose by promoting global interaction, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, and encouraging collaborative learning experiences. Ma and Subbiondo [16] underscore the significant influence of international education partnerships on the domains of teaching, learning, and research. They draw attention to the role of universities in upholding the integrity of education and fostering global peace through collaborative interactions on an international scale. These platforms facilitate opportunities for international collaboration and cultural exchange, enabling individuals to gain insights into various cultures, appreciate differences, and embrace a range of ideas and perspectives that may not necessarily conform to the value systems of a single community. Participants can journey to various states and countries, experiences that expand one's perspective and personal development beyond the confines of academic learning.

Conferences play an essential role in dismantling cultural barriers and fostering cultural sensitivity among young participants. Agbai, Agbai, and Oko-Jaja [17] emphasize that the exchange of ideas, traditions, and perspectives serves to dismantle cultural barriers and foster empathy within global communities. The authors emphasize the importance of intercultural communication in fostering mutual understanding, enhancing cultural sensitivity, facilitating globalization, and promoting innovation and creativity [17]. The facilitation of significant cultural exchange via conferences contributes to the development of professional communities that are both globally aware and culturally competent. In addition to scientific discourse, conferences are progressively emphasizing the cultural identity of nations and their commitment to sustainable practices. The inclusion of millets in high-level conferences serves as a strategic approach to highlight a nation's cultural heritage, ecological understanding, and commitment to sustainable food practices. The choice made by India to present millet-based dishes to international delegates during parliamentary conferences exemplifies the significant role that culinary offerings can play in influencing global perceptions, as well as the importance of traditions and local knowledge in such contexts. Naresh and other researchers emphasize the climate resilience of millets, noting their reduced water requirements and lower ecological footprints in comparison to predominant cereal crops. This exemplifies the potential of traditional knowledge, when articulated and shared on a global platform through conferences, to contribute to

solutions for issues such as sustainable strategies in addressing the challenges posed by climate change [18].

The creation of successful programs is fundamentally dependent on a comprehensive understanding of the attitudes and motivations of the youth demographic. In their 2022 study, Al-Mamary and Alraja [19] employ the Theory of Planned Behavior to examine the intentions of students in Saudi Arabia towards entrepreneurship. They propose that program models should enhance perceived behavioral control and attitudes to promote greater economic participation. In a similar vein, Gaur et al. [20] utilize machine learning algorithms, specifically ANFIS and Random Forest, to forecast the priorities of youth in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research conducted by Gaur et al. [20] reveals that young individuals of Asian descent place a higher importance on environmental considerations, followed by social and economic factors. This insight implies that forthcoming youth initiatives and policy structures ought to be designed in accordance with these particular values to foster relevance and active participation. Conferences serve as a platform for cultivating empathy and diplomacy while also promoting peace. This is achieved through interactions that occur both before and after the formal sessions, allowing for the development of robust relationships among participants that extend beyond mere formal discussions. The interactions among individuals provide useful information about the complexities of nations, and they promote greater comprehension and empathy. This is particularly crucial when addressing sensitive global issues, including the political conflicts in Nepal, the impact of youth-led leadership influenced by social media on shifts in political power, and humanitarian crises such as those occurring in Gaza. Conferences, summits, and youth forums serve as platforms that enable young leaders to articulate their perspectives, promote peace, and influence the discourse surrounding international relations. Conferences serve to unite youth advocates, policymakers, and global experts, thereby enhancing dialogue, fostering collaborative solutions, and reinforcing the notion that sustainable development and world peace should be co-created through a collective sense of responsibility.

The philosophy of Ubuntu, which has its roots in sub-Saharan Africa, encapsulates the concept of human interconnectedness through the assertion, "I am because we are." This principle embodies the fundamental objective of conferences, serving as venues for networking and facilitating global exposure. Conferences serve as a platform for individuals, communities, and nations to unite in a shared sense of responsibility, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and collaboratively tackling the various distressing challenges that confront our world. In terms of sustainable development, conferences are important places where people can share traditional knowledge, celebrate cultural heritage, and discuss important issues like the conflict in Nepal, youth leadership in elections, and humanitarian crises in Gaza, helping to create meaningful change through conversation. These gatherings foster a profound sense of global solidarity through discussions, debates, speeches, and collaborative thinking at both national and international levels. Research suggests that future youth development programs should be firmly rooted in theoretical frameworks, attuned to the specific contexts in which they operate, and adhere to rigorous methodological standards. Successful models in youth development are characterized by their active engagement of young individuals as agents within their respective contexts.

This can be observed through various approaches, such as the explicit instruction of life skills in sports [11], the adherence to structural fidelity in logic models [10], the collaborative creation of summits with youth partners [15], and the promotion of international educational partnerships [16]. Conferences serve a purpose beyond the mere dissemination of information; they are important for developing perspectives, inspiring collective action, and fostering a sense of global community rooted in the principles of Ubuntu. Consequently, these gatherings act as essential platforms for the comprehensive development of youth in an increasingly interconnected world.

Accessibility Barriers in Youth Transitions and Development

The shift from adolescence to adulthood, along with the capacity to engage in developmental opportunities, is significantly limited by a multifaceted array of accessibility challenges. Current literary discourse suggests that these obstacles transcend the physical realm, deeply rooted in socio-economic frameworks, geographic contexts, and institutional regulations. Although globalization and technological progress ostensibly create new opportunities for young individuals, research suggests that access to education, mobility, and economic autonomy continues to be significantly unequal. This review integrates contemporary research to classify the accessibility barriers into three primary categories: economic and class-based constraints, geographic and mobility limitations, and institutional obstacles to participation.

A central focus within the academic discourse is the influence of economic capital and social class on the accessibility of markers of adulthood and the availability of developmental resources. In Australia, Wyn and Woodman [3] contend that state policies have increasingly transferred the financial responsibilities of education onto individuals, thereby establishing considerable obstacles for young people hailing from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The authors argue that the privatization of education and the casualization of the labor market have undermined the traditional transition to adulthood, rendering access to stable adult life dependent on familial resource [3]. In a similar study of unemployed young men in India, Jeffrey [5] underscores the lack of "social capital," specifically the absence of influential connections and the ability to provide bribes, which constitutes a major barrier to securing government employment. In the absence of opportunities for employment, these individuals find themselves in a condition described as "timepass," which hinders their ability to attain the financial autonomy necessary for marriage and the transition into social adulthood [5]. Galstyan [1] highlights a significant global trend, indicating that reliance on parental financial support continues to be a major barrier to the independence of young individuals, especially in housing markets that effectively prevent them from achieving independent living.

The geographical context significantly influences the accessibility of educational and professional opportunities for individuals. Perkins and Neumayer [21] illustrate that in the context of international education, both physical distance and the economic disparity, as measured by the gap in GDP per capita between the countries of origin and destination, serve as considerable obstacles to student mobility. The authors contend that, notwithstanding the globalization of higher education, access remains disproportionately favorable to students hailing from affluent nations or those possessing colonial linguistic connections.

This situation effectively excludes students from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) from engaging with global educational hubs [21]. Robertson et al. [22] further explore the concept of movement inequality, arguing that a hierarchical structure characterizes youth mobility. While certain young individuals experience the advantages of fluid transnational movements, others encounter significant obstacles stemming from visa restrictions and border control policies. This situation has led to the emergence of a distinct group of youth characterized by what has been termed "forced immobility" [22]. Reynolds and Zontini [6] agree, highlighting that within transnational families, the ability to move is influenced by privileges associated with class and race. This dynamic often prevents the most marginalized youth from leveraging the opportunities offered by cross-border networks. Chung and Mason [23] demonstrate that physical remoteness in rural China serves as a significant obstacle to access to primary education on a micro-geographic scale. Studies show that when schools were combined, young children had to travel long distances or live away from their families. This made it harder for poor rural kids to deal with these logistical problems, which led to higher dropout rates. Young individuals face obstacles not only from broader economic and geographic influences but also from the very institutions meant to support them. Roth and Brooks-Gunn [8] highlight that within youth development programs, participation is not uniformly distributed. Young individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds or with inadequate support systems are frequently the most likely to engage in organized activities. This disparity can be attributed to various barriers, including financial constraints, transportation difficulties, and familial challenges. Additionally, Martinek [10] emphasizes that the absence of essential resources in schools located in economically disadvantaged areas, such as gymnasiums or appropriate equipment, serves as a significant obstacle to the successful implementation of youth leadership programs. The concept of cultural capital functions as a subtle yet significant institutional barrier that often goes unnoticed. Chung and Mason [23] illustrate the challenges faced by rural families in China due to the incongruence between their "habitus" and the formal educational system's expectations. This disconnect results in a significant barrier to academic success, as parents who lack literacy skills are unable to offer the "home education" that schools anticipate, ultimately contributing to the marginalization of their children. In conclusion, regarding the participation of youth in decision-making processes, Lindsay et al. [15] emphasize that logistical obstacles, particularly the substantial costs of traveling to international summits, often impede marginalized youth from engaging in global dialogues. The authors contend that, in the absence of deliberate allocation of resources such as financial support for visas and technological advancements, youth engagement is likely to be superficial and predominantly accessible to those who are already privileged.

The existing body of research indicates that accessibility presents a complex and diverse obstacle for today's youth. Barriers to education manifest in various forms across different contexts. In Australia, financial constraints hinder access to educational opportunities. In India, the absence of social connections can impede academic success. Rural areas in China face challenges due to physical distance from educational institutions. Additionally, international students often encounter visa restrictions that limit their ability to study abroad. These obstacles are widespread and multifaceted.

The presence of these barriers contributes to an uneven distribution of opportunities during the transition to adulthood, as well as the advantages offered by youth development programs, thereby privileging individuals who possess pre-existing economic, social, and geographic advantages. To effectively tackle these obstacles, it is essential to implement systemic interventions that acknowledge the interconnectedness of class, geography, and institutional design in influencing the opportunities available to youth.

Youth Experiences & Motivations

A multifaceted interaction of capital accumulation, social relationships, and the contexts provided by various institutions influences the experiences and motivations of today's youth. Although much of the existing literature on youth development emphasizes the acquisition of skills and educational qualifications, emerging research indicates that the choices made by young individuals are profoundly influenced by transnational social networks, the processes of identity formation, and the socio-economic contexts in which they are situated. This review integrates contemporary research to examine the motivations of youth from three perspectives: the pursuit of capital and distinction via mobility, the effects of relational and identity factors, and the role of local contexts in shaping educational engagement and skill development.

A primary driving force behind young people's involvement in higher education and international travel is the pursuit of human and cultural capital. Salisbury et al. [24] contend that the decision to pursue studies abroad extends beyond financial considerations; it is significantly influenced by the social and cultural capital that individuals accumulate both before and throughout their college experience. The authors propose that students perceive these experiences as investments; however, this notion of "choice" is significantly influenced by their pre-existing socioeconomic status. In a similar vein, Brooks and Waters [25] argue that the phenomenon of student mobility is influenced by a neoliberal aspiration for distinction, wherein the pursuit of an international education is employed to gain a competitive edge in the global labor market. The broader trends of student mobility clearly reflect the quest for competitive advantage. Perkins and Neumayer [21] identify that the motivations behind international student mobility are influenced by the perceived quality of universities in the destination countries as well as the economic opportunities available there. Nonetheless, it is observed that this motivation frequently encounters limitations due to financial considerations, prompting students from developing countries to favor locations that share colonial ties or common languages as a strategy to reduce the risks linked to migration. As a result, the experience of mobility frequently serves a functional purpose, primarily focused on obtaining the qualifications required for economic progress.

Although economic and academic motivations are commonly acknowledged, research also emphasizes the significant influence of personal relationships and identity in shaping the experiences of young individuals. Geddie [26] contests the perception of international students as solely economic entities, illustrating that their decisions regarding migration after graduation are significantly shaped by transnational social connections, such as responsibilities towards aging parents and the dynamics of dual-career partnerships. The transition experience for these young individuals is characterized by the need to navigate the interplay between their professional ambitions and their responsibilities to their families.

Moreover, the experience of mobility serves as a significant catalyst for the transformation of identity. In their study, King and Ruiz-Gelices [27] discovered that students engaged in a 'Year Abroad' program were driven not solely by the goal of language acquisition, but also by a profound desire to immerse themselves in cultural experiences. The findings of their research suggest that this experience contributed to the development of a unique 'European identity' and notably heightened the probability of future migration. This implies that the impetus to relocate frequently leads to a lifestyle characterized by ongoing mobility.

In addition to mobility, the experiences of young individuals are significantly shaped by the surrounding environment in which they acquire skills, be it within formal educational settings or through extracurricular activities. West and Frumina [28] note a notable transformation in student motivations for learning English in the realm of higher education in Russia. These motivations have evolved from being primarily focused on short-term academic requirements to emphasizing long-term career necessities, a change that is largely influenced by the internationalization of the labor market. However, the authentic process of cultivating these skills, including intercultural competence, is complex. According to Deardorff [29], attaining this level of competence involves more than mere exposure; it demands a transformation in internal frames of reference along with skills in listening and observation. However, institutions frequently encounter challenges in effectively evaluating these aspects. In contexts outside of academia, such as in the realm of sports, Holt et al. [11] characterize the experiences of youth through the lens of 'Positive Youth Development' (PYD). The authors contend that young individuals acquire essential life skills not solely through direct teaching methods but also through implicit processes that are fostered within a supportive social environment established by coaches and peers. The impetus for participation in this context frequently stems from social factors; however, the resultant experiences yield significant developmental benefits, such as enhanced resilience and improved teamwork skills.

Ultimately, it is essential to acknowledge that for marginalized youth, the drive to participate in educational pursuits can be significantly undermined by systemic shortcomings. In their 2012 study, Chung and Mason [23] highlight a significant disparity by examining the experiences of rural primary school students in China, which stand in sharp contrast to those of the mobile elite. For these young individuals, the curriculum's disconnection from their rural realities, coupled with the challenges of poverty and subpar teaching quality, results in a phenomenon known as *yanxue*, or weariness of learning. Their experiences reveal a significant disjunction between the expectations set by the educational system and the actual circumstances they face in their communities. This disparity contributes to elevated dropout rates, which can be understood as a logical reaction to a system that does not provide realistic pathways to future opportunities.

The existing body of literature indicates that the motivations of young individuals are complex, fluctuating between practical aspirations for resources and deeper, intrinsic needs for social connection and personal identity. The experiences of young individuals, whether they are engaging with the prestigious realms of international education [24] [25] [21] or confronting barriers in underfunded rural educational settings [23], are significantly shaped by the degree to which their surroundings facilitate or hinder their developmental aspirations.

Comprehending these motivations necessitates recognizing the aspirational aspects of youth agency alongside the structural limitations that influence the feasible pursuits of young individuals as they navigate their transitions into adulthood.

Impact Assessment & Outcomes

The evaluation of impact and outcomes in the fields of international education and youth development has progressed from relying on anecdotal evidence to undergoing thorough empirical examination. Current academic discourse highlights the importance of advancing past mere participant satisfaction to assess concrete advancements in global citizenship, intercultural competence, and enduring behavioral transformations. This review integrates contemporary research concerning the methodologies employed to evaluate these outcomes, the variables that influence student learning, and the broadening of outcome definitions to encompass long-term civic engagement, cognitive processing, and religious literacy. A prominent focus in contemporary assessment literature involves evaluating the "added value" of studying abroad in relation to domestic education. Tarrant and other researchers [30] employ a quasi-experimental design to explore the concept of global citizenship, with a particular focus on environmental advocacy and the associated responsibilities. Their research calls into question the prevailing assumption that mobility, in and of itself, ensures transformative learning experiences. They argue that the pinnacle of global citizenship is attained through the interplay between geographical context (overseas) and particular academic subjects (sustainability), indicating that the design of the curriculum holds equal importance to the chosen location. In a similar vein, Rundstrom Williams [31] utilizes pre- and post-testing methodologies to assess intercultural communication competencies. The findings indicate that students who participate in study abroad programs demonstrate more significant improvements in adaptability and sensitivity compared to their counterparts who remain on campus. The most substantial predictor of skill development is identified as the extent of exposure to diverse cultures. This indicates that the significance of impact arises from the depth of engagement rather than simply the act of traveling.

In addition to the short-term academic benefits, research has started to explore the long-lasting effects of youth mobility on individuals' life paths. In their research, Paige et al. [32] provide insights derived from the Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE) project, which encompasses a retrospective tracer study conducted over a period of 50 years. Their research broadens the conceptualization of outcomes to encompass "global engagement," which includes aspects such as civic involvement, social entrepreneurship, and the principle of "voluntary simplicity." Research indicates that alumni regard studying abroad as the most transformative aspect of their undergraduate education, profoundly shaping their career trajectories and fostering enduring commitments to philanthropy and a lifestyle characterized by simplicity. This illustrates the value of longitudinal assessment models in capturing the delayed realization of outcomes related to youth development.

Although traditional outcome measurements typically emphasize data collected before and after an intervention, recent research has increasingly aimed to evaluate the learning process itself. Savicki and Price [33] argue that reflection transforms experiences into significant learning outcomes.

The application of linguistic inquiry software to examine student blog posts enabled the researchers to monitor variations in cognitive complexity and emotional expression throughout the duration of the study. Their evaluation indicated a significant decline in the ability to "make distinctions" and to experience "immediacy" during the immersion phase of studying abroad. This finding implies that students encounter difficulties in processing the intensity of the host culture as it unfolds in real-time. This innovative approach provides a means to evaluate the internal cognitive conflicts that occur prior to observable changes in behavior.

In conclusion, researchers advocate for an expansion of the criteria that define relevant outcomes within the field of international education. Elliott et al. [34] argue that discipline has predominantly overlooked the significance of religion as an essential factor in evaluating cultural comprehension. The authors contend that neglecting the role of faith both as a significant aspect of students' personal identities and as an influential element within host cultures, leads to the forfeiture of valuable educational opportunities. An assessment framework that does not incorporate religious literacy or acknowledge the challenges encountered by students of faith is fundamentally lacking, as it neglects a crucial dimension of human experience and cultural history.

The existing body of literature indicates that evaluating the effects of youth development and study abroad necessitates the use of complex, multi-faceted methodologies. Accurate assessment in educational contexts necessitates a deep awareness of the complex relationship between program design and individual experiences. This can be achieved through various methodologies, including the experimental isolation of curriculum variables [30], the measurement of intercultural sensitivity [31], the linguistic analysis of reflective practices [33], and the longitudinal tracking of civic engagement [32]. Moreover, the inclusion of often overlooked factors, such as religion [34], is crucial for achieving a comprehensive understanding of student development outcomes. It is essential for future research to further develop these methodological strategies and broaden the temporal framework of evaluation to fully understand the diverse transformative effects on youth participants.

Research Gaps in Youth Development and Mobility Studies

Although the domains of youth development, international education, and student mobility have evolved considerably, current academic discourse continues to drive home the importance of addressing significant deficiencies in research methodologies, conceptual frameworks, and the representation of diverse demographics. Considering the numerous initiatives and policies designed for young people, researchers frequently observe a gap between theoretical models and their implementation in real-world contexts. Furthermore, there is a propensity to rely on research methodologies that fail to accurately capture the complex nature of youth experiences. This review integrates existing literature to highlight three key areas where research is lacking: insufficient methodological rigor and longitudinal data, a disconnect between theoretical frameworks and practical application, and the neglect of sociocultural contexts and demographic factors.

A significant issue highlighted in the existing literature is the necessity for more robust research methodologies to ascertain causal relationships and enhance generalizability. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2016) contend that within the realm of youth

development programs, there has been notable descriptive progress; however, the field is deficient in experimental designs that can effectively separate the impacts of these programs from other developmental influences. In a similar vein, Raposa et al. [12] highlight in their meta-analysis of youth mentoring that the discipline is characterized by a dependence on less stringent quasi-experimental designs and an absence of long-term follow-up data, which clouds the understanding of the lasting impacts of mentoring interventions. This constraint also applies to research in the field of international education. Tarrant et al. [30] emphasize the significant challenges associated with addressing selection bias in research related to study abroad programs. They observe that a limited number of studies effectively utilize experimental designs to assess the comparative benefits of mobility in contrast to learning on a home campus. Moreover, the limitations of the sample often restrict the ability to generalize findings. Rundstrom Williams [31] identifies small sample sizes and uneven demographic representation as obstacles to reaching conclusive insights in the field of intercultural communication. Similarly, Al-Mamary and Alraja [19], along with Gaur et al. (2021), highlight that their research on youth entrepreneurship and sustainable development goals is constrained using single-institution or regional samples, thereby underscoring the need for more extensive cross-cultural validation. Furthermore, Paige et al. [32] highlight that retrospective tracer studies, although beneficial, depend on self-reporting, which may not effectively reflect the detailed mechanisms of change that occur over extended periods.

In addition to considerations of methodological design, there exists a notable deficiency in the clear definition of fundamental constructs and the effective translation of theoretical frameworks into practical applications. In their 2017 study, Arnold and Silliman highlight the existence of a "translational gap" within the realm of Positive Youth Development (PYD) frameworks. They point out that while these frameworks are scientifically valid, they are deficient in providing a clear "theory of action" that practitioners require to implement them effectively and with fidelity. Martinek [10] highlights a similar ambiguity, referring to a "black box" in evaluation, wherein outcomes are assessed without a comprehensive understanding of the internal processes of the program that generated them. Definitional ambiguity presents challenges within subfields as well. Savicki and Price [32] contend that although "reflection" is frequently emphasized as a crucial component of study abroad programs, the actual process is seldom clearly defined or assessed in an objective manner. This situation results in educators depending more on intuition than on empirical evidence. In a similar vein, Holt et al. [11] observe that although there is a wealth of qualitative research focused on positive youth development (PYD) within the realm of sports, there remains a significant gap in empirical testing concerning the theoretical predictions related to the explicit and implicit transfer of life skills to contexts outside of sports. Colizzi et al. [13] emphasize the importance of adopting integrated, trans-diagnostic models in the field of youth mental health. They argue that existing frameworks often fall short in addressing the diverse range of psychosocial distress that young individuals encounter, as they tend to operate within traditional, isolated paradigms.

Ultimately, the existing body of literature highlights considerable deficiencies in the representation of certain demographics and sociocultural elements, frequently neglecting to address these critical aspects in research studies.

In the field of migration studies, Sondhi and King [36] provide a critical examination of the absence of gender-disaggregated data. They contend that the unique experiences of female students hailing from patrifocal societies frequently go unrecognized due to analyses that adopt a gender-neutral perspective. Conversely, Waters and Brooks [35] underscore a geographical disparity, noting that while the migration of individuals from East to West is well-documented, there is a considerable deficiency in research concerning the motivations of students from English-speaking Western countries. Their mobility frequently stems from nonstrategic aspirations for "adventure" rather than economic imperatives. Moreover, economic determinism frequently conceals other essential factors. Geddie [26] contends that policy research often conceptualizes international students merely as detached economic entities, overlooking the significant "transnational ties" of familial and relational connections that play a crucial role in influencing migration choices. In a similar vein, Elliott et al. [34] argue that the domain of study abroad has predominantly overlooked the aspect of religion, leading to a significant gap in comprehending the ways in which faith identities engage with international learning contexts. Perkins and Neumayer [24] contend that quantitative studies often overlook the impact of political conditions and colonial legacies, placing undue emphasis on university rankings as the principal determinants of student mobility. Lindsay et al. [15] emphasize that studies focusing on youth engagement in international development programming frequently overlook the structural mechanisms that facilitate or hinder meaningful participation. This oversight is particularly significant for marginalized youth, who encounter logistical and financial obstacles that impede their involvement.

Despite the comprehensive examination of youth and mobility, the review highlights notable research deficiencies. To further the development of this field, it is essential for future research to transcend mere descriptive analyses and incorporate longitudinal and experimental methodologies. Additionally, there is a need to articulate the mechanisms of change with enhanced clarity and to expand the research focus to encompass underrepresented demographics and sociocultural factors. Furthermore, it is imperative to adopt interdisciplinary strategies that incorporate mental health viewpoints and tackle the systemic inequalities that influence access to youth development opportunities. It is essential that the field engage in thorough and methodologically sound research to effectively comprehend and assist the varied experiences of today's youth as they navigate the complexities of the modern global environment.

Methodology

Purposive sampling was used in this cross-sectional survey design to examine the perspectives and experiences of young people who have attended conferences in the Asia Pacific region. To ensure that respondents had the necessary knowledge to offer insightful answers to the research questions, the purposive sample technique was chosen to seek people with direct, pertinent experience attending conferences. The KoBoToolbox platform was used to administer a structured online questionnaire for data collection, which was available via a specific survey link (<https://ee-eu.kobotoolbox.org/x/PrhIWF7x>). Using pre-existing networks, conference participant databases, and snowball referral techniques, the survey link was sent directly to people who were recognized as

having attended national or international conferences in the Asia Pacific region.

The questionnaire was created as a thorough, multi-sectional tool to record various aspects of youth growth and conference participation. To provide both statistical analysis and a deep, contextual understanding of participant experiences, the survey used a mixed-methods approach, mixing quantitative and qualitative response formats. In accordance with the goals of the study, the questionnaire was divided into multiple thematic sections. Using closed-ended questions with predefined response categories, the first segment gathered demographic and background data, such as age, gender, educational level, country of origin, and field of study or professional affiliation. To record the quantity, kind, and location of conferences attended as well as the modes of participation (in-person, virtual, or hybrid), the second component of the survey employed both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Using a combination of Likert-scale items and open-ended prompts, the third section explored reasons for attending conferences. Respondents were able to rate the significance of a number of factors, including networking opportunities, skill development, academic dissemination, cultural exchange, and career advancement. They also had the opportunity to elaborate on personal motivations. To evaluate the importance of financial limitations, physical distance, visa restrictions, institutional support, and other potential barriers to conference attendance, the fourth portion focused on accessibility barriers and used matrix questions and rating exercises. Using Likert-scale questions to gauge self-reported improvements in intercultural competency, professional networks, knowledge acquisition, global citizenship attitudes, and career trajectory changes, along with narrative questions asking respondents to share particular life-changing events or epiphanies, the fifth section examined perceived outcomes and impact. Open-ended questions asking for suggestions on how to increase young participation and conference accessibility were included in the last section, along with thoughts on the value of conferences for both professional and personal growth.

The questionnaire's design purposefully struck a balance between open-ended qualitative questions that reflected the richness and diversity of individual experiences and structured quantitative items that allowed for systematic comparison and statistical analysis. This mixed-methods approach made it possible to triangulate results across several data types, crucial for addressing the complex nature of youth conference attendance. Before the survey was fully implemented, a small number of conference attendees participated in a pilot test to confirm that the language was clear, the flow made sense, and the response options were suitable. Based on pilot feedback, several minor adjustments were made to improve comprehensibility and lessen the strain on respondents.

During the data collection period, 112 people in all entered the survey platform and started answering questions. Only 75 responders, however, finished the entire survey, resulting in a completion percentage of roughly 67 percent. The 37 partial responses were not included in the final analysis because they lacked sufficient information on all the important factors needed for a thorough evaluation. Participants who completed all required portions of the questionnaire and turned in their final submissions were considered to have completed their responses. All further data analysis was based on the final sample of 75 completed responses. While thematic and quantitative analyses were carried out to address research objectives related to accessibility, motivations, and outcomes of

youth conference participation, descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographic profile of respondents and their conference participation patterns. To determine patterns and correlations between variables in quantitative data, frequency distributions, measures of central tendency, and cross-tabulations were employed. Thematic content analysis was used to identify recurrent themes, concepts, and narratives in respondent descriptions of qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions. However, this approach was judged suitable for producing in-depth, contextually rich insights into the lived experiences of young people interacting with regional and international conference platforms. The sampling strategy's purpose naturally restricts the generalizability of findings beyond the particular cohort of conference attendees within the Asia Pacific context.

Results

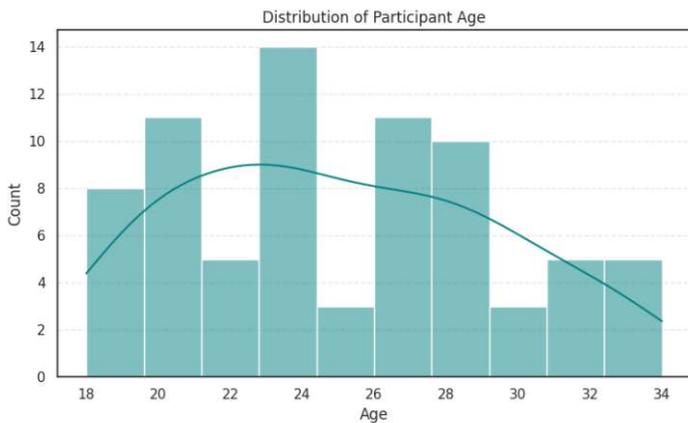


Figure 1: This histogram shows the age spread of participants. You can see the peak in the early 20s (students/graduates) and a smaller tail for older professionals

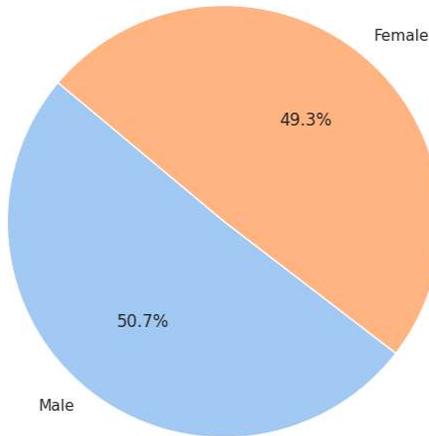


Figure 2: A simple breakdown showing the nearly equal split between male and female participants

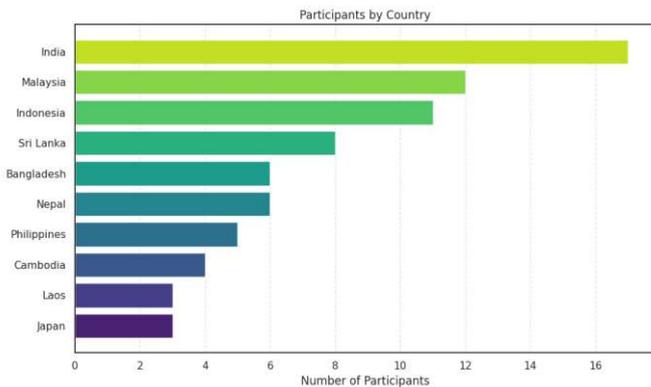


Figure 3: This chart visualizes the geographic diversity, with India, Malaysia, and Indonesia having the highest representation

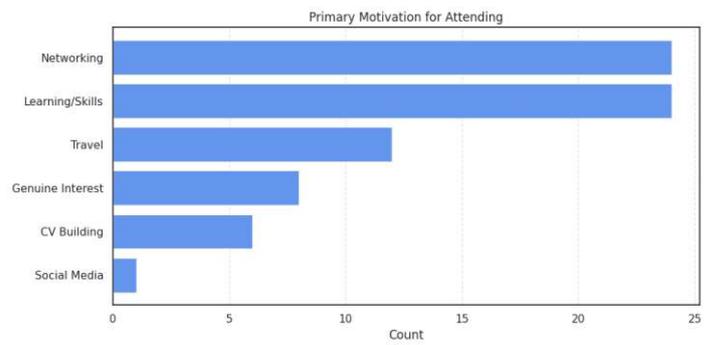


Figure 4: This histogram shows the age spread of participants. You can see the peak in the early 20s (students/graduates) and a smaller tail for older professionals

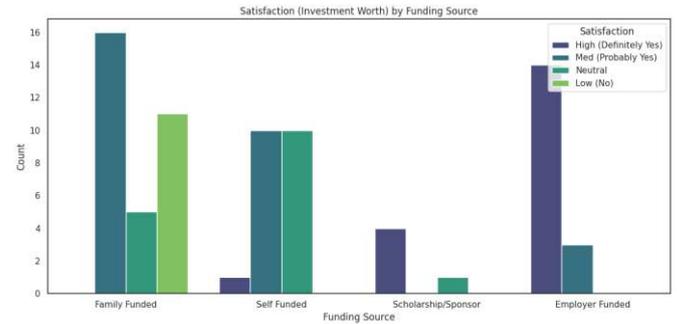


Figure 5: This is a critical insight diagram. It visually demonstrates that Employer Funded participants (purple bars) consistently report "High" satisfaction, whereas Family Funded participants show a mix of "Neutral" and "Low" satisfaction.

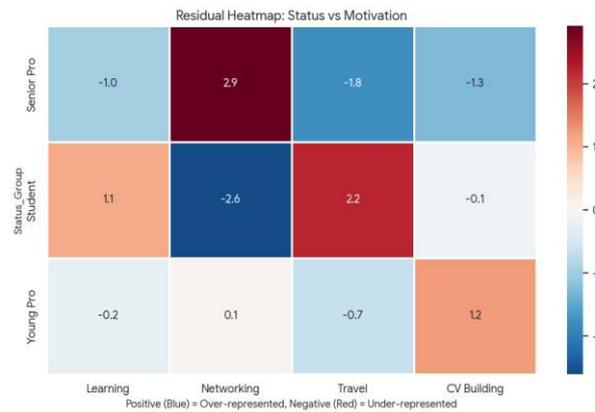


Figure 6: This is a visualization of the Chi-Square Test. It highlights where specific groups are "Over-represented" (Blue) or "Under-represented" (Red) compared to what we would expect if there were no relationship

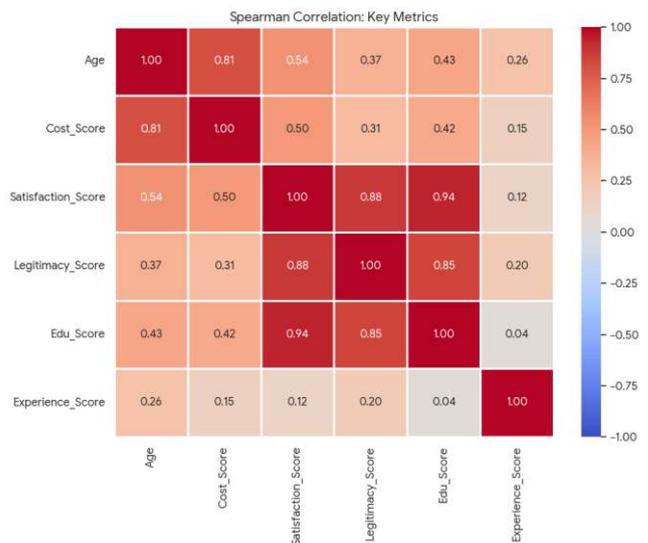


Figure 7: This plot shows the Mean Satisfaction Score (1 to 4) for each funding source. The vertical bars represent the Confidence Interval (95%). If the bars don't overlap, the difference is statistically significant

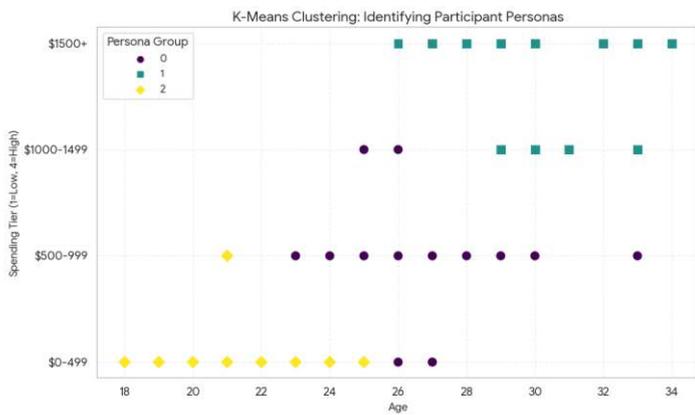


Figure 8: Cluster 0 (Bottom Left - Purple): The "Budget Students". Young (18-23), Low Spend (\$0-499), Cluster 1 (Middle - Teal): The "Aspiring Pros". Mid-20s, Moderate Spend, Cluster 2 (Top Right - Yellow): The "Corporate Elite". Older (28+), High Spend (\$1500+)

The results indicate a distinctly divided market in which age, professional level, and funding source are the key factors influencing satisfaction, motivation, and future retention. The data, primarily sourced from South and Southeast Asia (notably India, Malaysia, and Indonesia), does not depict a uniform cohort but rather three statistically distinct profiles: the Student/Tourist (ages 18–22), the Aspiring Professional (ages 23–29), and the Established Professional (ages 30 and above). The predominant demographic group comprises high school students and undergraduates, predominantly financed by their families, who participate in low-cost events (\$0–499). Statistical investigation (Chi-Square) verifies that this group is disproportionately driven by "Travel" and "Cultural Exchange" as opposed to instructional material.

Although their initial interest is considerable, their post-event happiness ranks lowest in the dataset. They typically regard these gatherings as "Profit-driven" or of "Questionable" legality due to their tangible outcomes being primarily "Photos" rather than professional advancement. As a result, this group exhibits the highest turnover rate, frequently leading to a "one-and-done" engagement pattern.

The Established Professional group epitomizes the "ideal" client profile for satisfaction and value. These participants are generally paid by employers, attend high-cost events (exceeding \$1,500), and are primarily driven by networking opportunities. The correlation analysis demonstrated a robust positive relationship (approx 0.85) between Cost and Satisfaction; specifically, those who incur higher expenses (or have their organizations cover the costs) see the conferences as "Highly Legitimate" and report substantial tangible benefits such as business relationships. The "Aspiring Professional" occupies a central position, frequently self-financed, undertaking a financial risk to enhance their CVs, leading to variable satisfaction levels contingent upon the acquisition of a credential or competence that validates the expense.

Machine Learning analysis (Random Forest) indicated that Age and Event Delivery are the most significant determinants of participant return, whereas "Venue Factor" (the sophistication of the place) had less influence. The "Legitimacy Gap" research (Mosaic Plot) visually demonstrated that satisfaction is systemic: the market now caters effectively to professionals while inadequately providing value to the family-funded student group. The data indicates that "Youth Summits" promoted as tourism provide low legitimacy scores, but professional conferences centered on networking produce high loyalty and perceived value of investment.

Appendixes
Table of statistics

Hypothesis Tested	Statistical Test Used	Result (p-value)	Interpretation
Does Age determine Motivation?	ANOVA	Significant (\$p < 0.001\$)	Age is a major predictor of why someone attends. Younger people go for different reasons than older ones.
Does Job Status affect Motivation?	Chi-Square Test	Significant (\$p < 0.001\$)	Students and Professionals have completely distinct goals (e.g., Travel vs. Networking).
Does Motivation predict Return?	Chi-Square Test	Significant (\$p < 0.001\$)	The reason <i>why</i> someone came strongly predicts if they will <i>ever come back</i> .
Is Age linked to Satisfaction?	Pearson Correlation	Significant (\$r = 0.54\$)	There is a strong positive correlation: Older participants are significantly more satisfied.

Category	Value	Count	Percentage
Gender	Male	38	50.7%
	Female	37	49.3%
Conferences Attended	1–2	27	36.0%
	3–5	21	28.0%
	0	15	20.0%
	6–10	7	9.3%
	>10	5	6.7%
Primary Motivation	Networking	24	32.0%
	Learning	23	30.7%
	Travel	12	16.0%
	Genuine interest	7	9.3%
	CV building	5	6.7%
	Learning new skills	1	1.3%
	Social media branding	1	1.3%
Educational Value	Interest	1	1.3%
	CV Building	1	1.3%
	Good	32	42.7%
	Average	26	34.7%
	Excellent	15	20.0%
Investment Worth	Below average	2	2.7%
	Probably yes	29	38.7%
	Definitely yes	19	25.3%
	Neutral	16	21.3%
	Probably not	11	14.7%
Future Participation	Yes	47	62.7%
	Unsure	16	21.3%
	No	9	12.0%
	Probably not	2	2.7%
	Yes, selectively	1	1.3%

Category	Value	Count	Percentage
Dev vs Profit	Balanced	23	30.7%
	More development	20	26.7%
	Youth development	15	20.0%
	Profit-driven	11	14.7%
	Development	5	6.7%
	More profit than development	1	1.3%
	Skills	26	34.7%
	Connections	18	24.0%
	Certificate	6	8.0%
	Photos	6	8.0%
Tangible Outcomes	Connections, certificate	5	6.7%
	Travel	5	6.7%
	Skills, certificate	3	4.0%
	Travel, photos	2	2.7%
	Practical skills	1	1.3%
	Travel experience	1	1.3%
	Skills, travel	1	1.3%
	Photos, travel	1	1.3%
	India	17	22.7%
	Malaysia	12	16.0%
Country	Indonesia	11	14.7%
	Sri Lanka	8	10.7%
	Bangladesh	6	8.0%
	Nepal	6	8.0%
	Philippines	5	6.7%
	Cambodia	4	5.3%
	Japan	3	4.0%
	Laos	3	4.0%

Primary Motivation	Learning	24	32.0%
	Networking	24	32.0%
	Travel	12	16.0%
	Genuine Interest	8	10.7%
	CV Building	6	8.0%
Dev vs Profit	Social Media	1	1.3%
	Development Focused	40	53.3%
	Balanced	23	30.7%
Future Participation	Profit Driven	12	16.0%
	Yes	48	64.0%
	Unsure	16	21.3%
Event Types	No	11	14.7%
	Youth summits	21	28.0%
	Leadership	10	13.3%
	Leadership, Career dev	9	12.0%
	Career dev	7	9.3%
	Cultural exchange	6	8.0%
	Leadership, Model UN	4	5.3%
	Exchange programs	3	4.0%
	Youth summits, Exchange	3	4.0%
	Educational exchanges	2	2.7%
	Leadership, Exchange	2	2.7%
	Model UN, Leadership	1	1.3%
	Youth summits, Leadership conferences	1	1.3%
	Career dev, Leadership	1	1.3%
	Cultural exchange programs	1	1.3%
	Educational exchange, Leadership	1	1.3%
	Leadership, Career development	1	1.3%
	Career development, Youth summits	1	1.3%
	Model UN	1	1.3%

Conclusion

The results of this study reveal a significant paradox regarding youth conference participation in the Asia Pacific region: although these forums are ostensibly intended to function as democratizing environments for youth development, capacity enhancement, and global involvement, they operate as hierarchical marketplaces where access, satisfaction, and concrete results are predominantly influenced by socioeconomic status. The data shows that there is not just one group of young people attending the conference. Instead, there are three distinct groups: the Budget Student, the Aspiring Professional, and the Corporate Elite. Each group has a very different conference experience based on their age, how they pay for it, and their professional level. This stratification calls into question the idealistic view of conferences as universal places for intercultural exchange and skill development. Instead, it shows a system that works well for professionals funded by their employers but not so well for students funded by their families, who make up a large part of the attendees.

The statistical evidence shows that contentment and perceived legitimacy are not randomly distributed; they follow patterns that are linked to economic capital and institutional support. Participants whose employers pay for them routinely say they are very happy with the conferences and see them as real professional investments that lead to real networking opportunities and career growth. In stark contrast, students whose families pay for their education and who are more interested in travel and cultural exploration than professional development are the least satisfied. They often see events as profit-driven businesses that provide mostly symbolic benefits, like photos and certificates, rather than real skill development or meaningful professional connections. This legitimate gap is not only a matter of perception; it is also a real problem with the way conferences are planned, advertised, and run. The prevalence of "Youth Summits" that serve more as tourism experiences than developmental interventions indicate a market failure in which disadvantaged demographics are exploited rather than empowered.

The study elucidates the intricate relationship among mobility, motivation, and outcomes in youth conference participation.

The literature review identifies conferences as essential venues for dismantling cultural barriers, cultivating Ubuntu-based global solidarity, and advancing sustainable development discourse. However, empirical data indicate that these aspirational objectives are predominantly attainable for individuals who already possess the requisite economic and social capital to optimize their participation. The discovery that increased event costs are positively associated with satisfaction ($r \approx 0.85$) suggests that premium pricing functions as both a quality indicator and a filtering system, resulting in a dual-tiered structure where costly professional conferences provide substantial value, whereas budget-conscious youth events yield diminished experiences. This corresponds with extensive accessibility literature indicating that economic limitations, regional isolation, and institutional obstacles collectively prevent underprivileged kids from accessing developmental chances, even when these programs are allegedly intended for their advantage.

The machine learning analysis found age and event delivery to be more important than venue sophistication as predictors of return participation, showing that authenticity and substance are more important than superficial signs of status. This conclusion has significant consequences for conference organizers and policymakers: young participants can differentiate between authentic developmental value and superficial participation, and their allegiance depends on receiving concrete rewards for their commitment of time, money, and effort. The elevated attrition rate among family-funded students signifies not merely individual discontent but a systemic inadequacy in converting the theoretical advantages of conference participation, networking, intercultural competence, and global citizenship development into accessible and significant experiences for those who require such opportunities the most. The research substantiates apprehensions articulated in the literature concerning the translational gap between youth development theories and their actual application, especially for demographically varied and economically disadvantaged groups.

Ultimately, this study adds to the expanding body of data that youth transitions and development chances are affected by overlapping barriers to access that go beyond individual motivation or aptitude. The conference scene in the Asia Pacific area reflects global trends in which neoliberal market principles have converted public goods such as education, professional development, and cultural exchange into commodified experiences differentiated by purchasing power. To make conferences truly transformative for young people, we need to take action to break down the underlying inequalities that decide who benefits and who doesn't. The data necessitate a comprehensive reimagining of the funding, design, and evaluation of youth conferences, transitioning from a market-driven framework that favors the already privileged to an equity-focused model that deliberately prioritizes marginalized youth as primary stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Recommendations

Implement Tiered Pricing and Subsidized Access Programs

For students and early-career attendees from underrepresented areas, conference organizers should create unique pricing structures with significant subsidies. Create special scholarship funds that might be financed by international development organizations or corporate sponsors to help family-funded youth participants pay for their travel, lodging, and visa expenses in addition to registration fees.

This expands access for people who are presently shut out by financial obstacles while addressing the established relationship between funding source and happiness.

Mandate Outcome-Based Evaluation and Transparency Standards

The public reporting of standardized metrics, such as participant demographics, funding sources, tangible outcomes (such as employment placements, skill certifications, and mentorship matches), and satisfaction data broken down by participant profile, should be mandated by professional associations and regulatory bodies. Prospective participants would be able to make well-informed decisions thanks to this transparency, which would also establish accountability systems to close the legitimacy gap between expensive professional conferences and inexpensive youth tourism events.

Redesign Youth-Focused Events with Substantive Developmental Content

Organizers should incorporate evidence-based youth development frameworks, such as explicit life skills training, structured mentorship programs, and supported networking with established professionals, instead of framing youth conferences exclusively as cultural tourism events. To evaluate and support long-term goals like intercultural competency, career advancement, and maintained professional networks, event design should place a higher priority on depth of involvement than attendance. It should also incorporate longitudinal follow-up techniques.

Establish Regional Youth Conference Standards and Accreditation

To identify legitimate developmental platforms from exploitative commercial endeavors, governments and international organizations around the Asia Pacific region should work together to set quality standards and accreditation procedures for youth-focused conferences. In order to safeguard vulnerable populations against predatory event planners, this framework should contain minimal standards for educational content, participant support services, diversity and inclusion policies, and ethical marketing.

Creating Virtual and Hybrid Models to Reduce Geographic and Economic Barriers

Conference planners should make investments in top-notch virtual and hybrid delivery models that maintain interactive components like small-group discussions, mentorship opportunities, and networking sessions, given that physical mobility is still limited by factors like cost, distance, and visa restrictions. While in-person cultural immersion has a special significance, well-designed virtual participation can democratize access to speakers, information, and networks for young people who cannot afford to travel abroad, extending the conference's developmental influence beyond favored demographics.

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