



Comparing Male and Female Engineering Students' Perceptions, Problems and Task-Based Needs about Academic Listening

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 09 January 2017 Revised: 11 June 2017 Accepted: 22 November 2017 online: 1 June 2018</p>	<p>This study aimed to investigate Engineering students' perceptions, problems, and preferred tasks about academic listening. The participants were 199 Iranian undergraduate students of Engineering at the Iran University of Science and Technology. The instruments were a questionnaire with 40 items and an interview with 3 open-ended items. Considering learners' attitudes, both male and female learners were aware of the importance of academic listening for their success and found listening comprehension exciting. With regard to problems, both male and female learners reported that insufficient vocabulary, speed of speech, poor quality of recordings, long texts, and unfamiliar topics were their major listening problems. The findings also revealed that listening to news reports, listening to academic interview, listening to academic discussion, listening to announcement, and listening to conversation were the male students' preferred tasks, while listening to academic interviews, listening to seminars and presentations, listening to academic discussion were the female students' preferred tasks.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS Academic Listening Engineering Students Perceptions Problems Subjectivity Task-based Needs</p>	

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Introduction

Listening is known as the most used skill in language teaching area (Morley, 2001; Rost, 2001), and there is no doubt that it is a complicated process in which different types of sources such as phonology, lexical, semantic, and discourse are involved. As Batova (2013) noted, in the academic settings, one of the main aspects of communicative competence is academic listening skill, which cannot develop by itself and needs to be promoted by explicit and extensive training (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). For instance, successful academic listeners should activate the related background knowledge, have the ability to differentiate related and un-related points, and should be good at gaining special skills such as note-taking (Flowerdew, 1994).

As Jeon (2007) states, academic listening tasks include listening to teachers describing courses and assignments or listening to questions, reports, and summaries of classmates, which are all dependent upon active listening skills. Language learners are reported to face a number of problems in listening comprehension classes. According to stepanoviene (2012), problems in listening area can be classified into two main groups: person-centered problems including finite academic terms and expressions, various kinds of accents, weak memory, phonological modifications, and fast speech, whereas task-centered problems consist of unknown words, input varieties, speech rate, interest in topic, length of sentences, and background knowledge. Qutub (2012) found that language learners had problems in answering listening questions, cooperating in class activities, taking notes during lecture, and difficulty in understanding various accents.

Most of the materials used inside the classroom for listening include films, movies, songs, animations, news, and audio files; however, most people prefer to watch foreign films and programs with subtitles (e.g., Chang & Chang, 2013; Herron, 1994; Hsu, Hwang, & Potosi, 2009). It is argued that videos can be a learning technique as they provide learners with contextualized and meaningful input (e.g., Chang, & Chang, 2013; Herron, 1994; Hsu, Hwang, & Potosi, 2009). According to Shahani and Tahriri (2015), the visual support including videos, pictures, diagrams, gestures, facial expressions, and body language can develop listener's comprehension; thus, providing learners with audiovisual materials can be an effective way to improve their listening skill.

Sullivan (2011) states that listening is known as a complicated, multidimensional, and important skill in our new world that more attention should be given to it. According to Lynch

(2011), there are only a few studies on academic listening and the low profiles of listening reflected a wider neglect of listening. Complexity of listening skill and researching in this area may be the reasons for denying this skill (Lynch, 2011). A number of studies (e.g. Hamouda, 2013; Qutub, 2012; Ulum, 2015) have been done on the identification of the language learners' problems in academic listening skill. In addition, a number of studies (e.g., Batova, 2013; Graham, 2011; MacDonald, 2000; Salehi, 2010) have analyzed the language needs of Engineering students; however, there is no study investigating Iranian Engineering students' problems, perceptions, and preferred tasks about academic listening. The purposes of this study thus were (a) to determine the perceptions of undergraduate students of Engineering about the academic listening course offered at the Iran University of Science and Technology, (b) to find the problems of students in the academic listening course, and (c) to investigate their viewpoints about their preferred academic listening tasks for the academic listening course. The following research questions were addressed in this research:

1. What are male and female Engineering students' perceptions about academic listening?
2. What are male and female Engineering students' problems in academic listening?
3. What are male and female Engineering students' preferred tasks for academic listening skill?

2. Review of the Related Literature

Academic Listening

According to Lee (2003), we must avoid the usual narrow interpretation of academic listening as listening to lectures and taking notes. Although in university setting the largely monologue lecture may remain the principal genre of instruction, students in English-medium universities are likely to participate in a variety of other communicative events requiring the effective use of reciprocal listening skills—in small group discussions and team projects, tutorials, seminars, meetings with their supervisor/advisor, and so on – each of which makes specific demands on their ability to process and respond to spoken language.

Mohamad, Singh, and Ganapathy (2016) stated that for developing listening ability, the listeners should choose the relative and main points in lectures and listening parts. As Flowerdew (1994) stated, listeners need to obtain some special demands such as identifying relevant background knowledge, differing important and non-important information, and taking notes. Richards (1983) listed some micro-skills of academic listening: (a) the purpose

and the scope of lectures should be noted; (b) the relationships among units within discourse should be identified (e.g., main and supporting ideas, generalizations, and examples); and (c) the relationships such as cause, effect, and conclusion should be understood.

As Richards (2005) stated, the goal of listening is eliciting the meaning from the messages, so learners need to learn both bottom-up and top-down processes to arrive and understand the message. Rubin (1994) categorized the elements which influence listening into five groups: text type, task, speaker, listener, and listening process. Yagang (1994) argued that the difficulty in listening is related to four sources which are the message of listening piece, speaker, listener, and physical setting.

Academic Listening Perceptions

According to Solak and Altay (2014), perception is a way that learners make use of different kinds of signals to interpret what they hear; for instance, they plan, monitor, evaluate, infer, predict, summarize, and listen for the main ideas. Investigating students' preconceptions about the importance of the English listening skill, Hamuda (2013) found that most of the students were aware of the importance of listening comprehension. However, there were still a number of students who did not highly evaluate the role of listening skill. When asked about the difficulty of the listening comprehension, most of the learners remarked that listening comprehension is difficult. In addition, a small number of learners found listening comprehension boring, and only a few learners found that listening comprehension was exciting. Mason (1995) found that the graduate students at a private university felt that academic listening task is growing more complicated, and it requires something more than note-taking and formal speaking skills.

Academic Listening Problems

A number of studies (e.g., Arnold, 2000; Goh, 2000; Hasan, 2000) have indicated that across instructional settings, listening is a source of frustration to learners and an area in which it seems to be difficult to make progress. According to Ulum (2015), hasty speaking, unknown words, and weird pronunciation can lead to some listening problems. Pronunciation and voice quality, effect of mother tongue, culture shock, and accent can also cause some problems in learners' performance (Pourfarhad, Azmey, & Hassani, 2012). Nguyen (2002) suggested some problems affecting listening. First, it is so difficult for listeners to understand the proper names they have never heard it before. The second problem is related to unfamiliar,

uninteresting, and too long listening. The last problem is the connection between the sounds and intonation of the native speakers with different accents.

According to Hamouda (2013), bad quality of recording is the major listening comprehension problem for learners. Buck (2001) identified numerous difficulties which can be confronted in listening tasks such as unknown words, unfamiliar topics, fast speech rate, and unfamiliar accents. According to Graham (2011), another problem is anxiety and self-efficacy. Hasan (2000) stated that the three main listening problems are the words which are not familiar, the grammatical structures that are so difficult, and the length of the spoken text.

Teng (2002) argues that students' difficulties may directly result from their deficient linguistic knowledge. However, Goh (2000) indicated that the most common problem was that the learners forget what they have heard so fast. Rost (2011) listed four factors as a summary which influence listening: medium of the input, nature of the input, nature of the assessment task, and individual listener factors.

Academic Listening Tasks

According to Cowling (2007), one of the most important purposes of the needs analysis is to identify the necessary changes, which should be considered to improve the curriculum of content specification in English language learning. The main purpose of needs analysis, as Chan and Ham (2007) argued, is to determine what language skills a learner needs in order to perform tasks that they encounter.

Nunan (2004) defined task as "a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning" (p. 4). Willis (1996) notes that learners use language to achieve a real outcome with the help of the goal-oriented task activities.

As Richards (2005) states, "tasks which are employed in classroom materials seek to enable listeners to recognize and act on the general, specific or implied meaning of utterances, and these include sequencing tasks, true-false comprehension tasks, picture identification tasks, summary tasks as well as developing effective listening strategies" (p. 2). Silberstein (1994) suggests that activities that help students in using background knowledge facilitate their comprehension. Ellis (2003) argues that academic listening tasks offer a promising tool for investigating the processes involved in language comprehension and acquisition. In academic

listening, mainly characterized by listening to lectures (Ellis, 2003), EFL students are expected to process the information they receive orally. Long (2005) argues that task-based needs analysis have some advantages: it provides more valid information, it identifies the real-world uses of the target language, and its findings can be used as input for course design.

Richards (2008) suggests some examples of tasks that can develop listening skill in classroom: (a) recognizing the references of pronouns in an utterance, (b) identifying the reference of time in an utterance, (c) distinguishing between the positive and negative statements, (d) trying to identify the order in which words occur in an utterance, (e) recognizing sequence makers, (f) identifying key words of a spoken text, and (g) recognizing which modal words occurred in a spoken text" (p. 6).

Empirical Review of the Literature

In a study which is done by Graham (2006), he found that listening is an area in which his students felt the less success in. He noted that his students faced problems in the area of perception, especially regarding the speed of delivery due to mishearing or missing vital words problems.

Yang (2011) conducted a study on exploring the listening difficulties encountered by 32 students at an institute of technology in order to better understand the listening process from the perspective of EFL learners. The participants were asked to keep a listening diary about their listening problems. The results of the data analysis revealed that listening comprehension problems were divided into five categories: text, listener, listening process, speaker, and the task. The top five listening problems encountered by the learners were unknown words in the text, the speedy delivery of listening text, limited vocabulary knowledge, insufficient practice, and inability to pay attention to the next part of the text when thinking about the meaning of the previous text.

Rahimirad and Moini (2015) examined EFL learners' perceptions about academic listening. The result of the interview conducted in the research showed that learners found academic listening comprehension a demanding task mainly due to lack of general listening proficiency. Lack of concentration, over-emphasis on using bottom-up processes, and integrating listening with note taking were found as the major sources of difficulty in comprehending academic listening.

Al-Hamlan and Baniabdelrahman (2015) studied on a group of 400 second grade learners of

Saudi Arabia. The participants were both male and female language learners. The study focused on their professional needs and their language skills and tasks. The researchers used two data collection tools: a questionnaire and interview. The results showed that learners' listening and speaking levels were low, and they preferred pair grouped tasks and asked for having the chance to choose their tasks. They also reported lack of technology in their curriculum.

3. Method

Participants

This research was conducted with 199 Iranian undergraduate students of Engineering (Male= 147; Female = 52) at the Iran University of Science and Technology. The participants' majors were Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Computer Engineering, Metallurgy, Architecture, Electrical Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Industrial Design, Railway Engineering, and Automotive Engineering. The participants were all adult language learners ranging in age from 18 to 24.

Instruments

Data were collected through a questionnaire with three sections (i.e., attitudes, problems, and tasks) and a semi-structured interview with three open-ended items. The first section of the questionnaire explored undergraduate students' attitudes towards academic listening. This section consisted of eight items with five options (i.e., always, often, sometimes, seldom, and never), which were developed by reviewing surveys suggested by Pourfarhad, Azmey, and Hassani (2012), Salehi (2010), and MacDonald, Badger, and White (2000).

The second section of the questionnaire explored undergraduate students' problems about academic listening. This section consisted of 20 items with five options (i.e., strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree, & strongly disagree). For the development of this section, items (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, & 14) were taken from Hamouda (2013); item (1) was from SEMA (2003); items (15, 16, & 17) were taken from Ulum (2015), and items (18, 19, & 20) were used from Alisa (2011). The last section of the questionnaire developed by the researchers explored Engineering students' preferences for the academic listening tasks. This section consisted of 12 items with five options (very important, important, somewhat important, not important, not important at all). An interview with three open-ended questions was also conducted in order to explore learners' perceptions, problems, and their task-based

needs about the academic listening course.

Procedure

The questionnaire included three sections in which some items were taken from other studies and some were developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was translated into Persian and three PhD holders in TEFL assessed its content and were asked to check the questionnaire for possible problems and ambiguities. It was then piloted to identify the learners' possible problems with its items. Based on the feedback received, some necessary changes were made. Before administering the questionnaire to the main participants of the study, the researchers informed them of the purposes of the research, and they were asked to answer the items in 20 minutes. An interview with some of the participants was also conducted in order to explore their perceptions, problems, and their preferred tasks for the academic listening course.

Design

This study was a comparative research to explore male and female language learners' viewpoints about academic listening. For this research, nonprobability convenient or availability sampling was chosen. In other words, the researchers did not choose the participants randomly and had to administer the questionnaire to all undergraduate students of Engineering attending the academic listening course.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and chi-square analysis were conducted to determine learners' attitudes, problems, and their preferred tasks in the academic listening class. Theme based analysis was also done to determine the learners' most frequent responses to the open-ended questions about attitudes, problems, and their preferred tasks.

4. Results

Female Students' Perceptions about Academic Listening Skill

The percentage and chi-square test for each item of the attitude questionnaire for the female learners are presented in Table 1. It is important to note that in this section the combined results for the 'never' and 'seldom' categories and 'often' and 'always' categories are reported.

Items	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always	Chi-Square	p
1. As I listen I occasionally ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension.	-	5	42	32	19	15	.001
2. I feel that listening in English is a challenge for me.	5	11	44	25	13	24	.000
3. I am more aware of the perceived importance of academic listening.	-	-	13	46	40	9	.009
4. I found that academic listening is boring and not interesting.	11	26	40	19	1	22	.000
5. I found that academic listening comprehension is exciting.	-	13	32	34	19	6	.085
6. I feel nervous and worried when I don't understand the spoken text.	-	15	46	23.1	15	13	.004
7. I find it difficult to understand the spoken text which is not interesting to me.	-	7	28	51	11	25	.000
8. After listening I find it difficult to evaluate the overall accuracy of my comprehension	5.0	23.1	42	26	1	28	.000

Table 1: Percentage and Chi-Squire Value for Female students' Replies to Attitude Survey

Table 1 shows that the highest percentage for often and always categories were obtained by the following items: 'I am more aware of the perceived importance of the academic listening skill' (86%), 'I find it difficult to understand the spoken text, which is not interesting to me' (62%), 'academic listening comprehension is exciting' (53%), and 'as I listen I occasionally ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension' (51%). The highest percentage for never and seldom categories were reported for the following items: 'academic listening is boring and not interesting' (37%), and 'evaluating the overall accuracy of comprehension is difficult' (28.1%). The frequency occurrences of the participants' responses were significantly significant ($p < .05$) in most of the items with the exception of item 5, 'finding that academic listening comprehension is exciting' ($p = .085$).

The female students were also interviewed about their attitudes towards academic listening. Their responses could be hierarchically ranked as: academic listening is interesting as it is useful for improving English language and preparing learners for future ($f = 17$), playing listening files more than once is better ($f = 3$), academic listening course is difficult for learners who have low English proficiency ($f = 3$), there is no interest in academic listening course among students ($f = 2$), academic listening course is a good class, and it would be better to use PowerPoint presentations, movie, and picture in it ($f = 1$), teachers should not consider a mark for this course because it creates stress for learners ($f = 1$), and a placement test should be administered to determine each students' listening level ($f = 1$). The results of male students' attitudes about academic listening are presented in Table 2.

Male Students' Perceptions about Academic Listening Skill

As shown in Table 2, the highest percentage for 'often' and 'always' categories reported by male students were related to the following items: 'I am more aware of the perceived importance of the academic listening skill' (77%); and 'As I listen I occasionally ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension' (50%). Whereas the highest percentage for 'never' and 'seldom' categories was reported for 'listening comprehension is boring and not interesting' (34%); 'listening in English is a challenge' (34%); 'after listening evaluating the overall accuracy of comprehension is difficult' (33%); 'I feel nervous and worried when I do not understand the spoken text' (27.1%); and about 40% of the respondents chose 'sometimes' category for the items 4 and 8: 'academic listening is boring and not interesting' (43.0%), and 'after listening I found it difficult to evaluate the overall accuracy of my

comprehension' (41.0%). The frequency occurrences of their responses were statistically significant in all of the items.

Items	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always	Chi-Square	<i>p</i>
1. As I listen I occasionally ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension.	2	12	34	36.1	14	62.000	.000
2. I feel that academic listening in English is a challenge for me.	10	24	35	20	9	33.000	.000
3. I am more aware of the perceived importance of academic listening skill.	-	4	17	34	43	100.000	.000
4. I found that academic listening is boring and not interesting.	7	27	43	15	6	71.000	.000
5. I found that listening comprehension is exciting.	4	15	34	31	13	46.000	.000
6. I feel nervous and worried when I don't understand the spoken text.	6	21.1	32	28	10	36.000	.000
7. I find it difficult to understand the spoken text which is not interesting to me.	1	11	37	34	14	70.000	.000
8. After listening I find it difficult to evaluate the overall accuracy of my comprehension.	3	30	41	20	4.1	81.000	.000

Table 2: Male Student's Attitudes towards Academic Listening

The results of the male language learners' responses to the interview about attitudes towards academic listening could be hierarchically ranked as: academic listening course is effective for improving English language, so there should be a specific plan for it (f = 27), academic listening course is not interesting for students, and teachers should let students speak in the class, have group discussion, and show movie with subtitle (f =8), the level of the class is low for a person who has studied English before and the level of students are not equal, so the class is not useful for all (f = 7), there should be no mark for this course as in this way we can

concentrate better (f= 2), British accent is unclear for some of the learners (f = 1), there should be some extra marks for this lesson (f= 1), academic listening course was interesting lesson but it would be better to have this lesson during high school and elementary school for getting more understanding of this skill (f = 1), it would be better if the teacher considers more time for watching movies in the class (f =1), and it was better to use more standard tests like IELTS in this course (f = 1).

Problems of Female Students of Engineering in Academic Listening

In this section, the percentage and chi-square test for each item of the questionnaire on problems for the female learners are presented. It is important to note that the combined results for the 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' categories and 'agree' and 'strongly agree' categories are reported in this section. Female undergraduate students reported that they had more problems with following areas: 'understanding listening texts in which there are too many unfamiliar words including jargons and idioms' (69%), 'concentrating with noises around' (63.1%), 'understanding well when speakers speak too fast' (63%), 'losing concentration if the recording is in a poor quality' (59%), 'losing concentration when the text is too long' (57%), 'interference of long spoken text with their listening comprehension' (53%), and 'understanding listening text when the topic is unfamiliar' (53%). Whereas they reported they had less problems in the following areas: 'being dependent on ready-made materials' (34%), 'before doing listening comprehension tasks they feared that they could not understand what they would hear' (30%), and 'interfering complex grammatical structures with listening comprehension' (26%). The frequency occurrences of their responses were statistically significant in all of the items.

The female students' responses to the interview about their problems were: after listening to a long text for the first time, I feel stressed and prefer to listen to the text more than once (f = 4), I cannot concentrate on the academic listening tasks and sometimes lose my attention (f =3), unknown accent and unfamiliar words are our problems in the academic listening course (f =2), when speakers speak fast, I cannot understand (f = 2), it is difficult to understand the technical texts (f = 1), it is impossible to listen and understand simultaneously (f = 1), having class after lunch time was boring for us (f = 1), and low level of English proficiency is our problems (f = 1).

Problems of Male Undergraduate Students of Engineering in Academic Listening

Male students reported that they had more problems with the following areas: 'understanding listening texts in which there were too many unfamiliar words including jargons and idioms' (50%) and 'losing concentration with recording in a poor quality' (50%), whereas they reported they had less problems in the following aspects: 'before doing listening comprehension tasks they feared that they could understand what they would hear' (34%), 'quickly remembering words or phrases had just heard' (34%), 'being dependent on ready-made materials' (33%) and 'getting general understanding of the spoken text from the first listening' (31.1%). The frequency occurrences of the participants' responses were significantly different in all of the items.

The male students' responses to the interview about their problems in academic listening were: academic listening class is boring and there is no interaction in it ($f = 4$), speaker's accent, voice quality, and speaker's fast speed are our problems ($f = 3$), we should spend more time on academic listening course during each semester ($f = 3$), I cannot recognize when sentences finish and start for each task ($f = 1$), there is no group discussion in the class ($f = 1$), the main problems are unfamiliar words and pronunciation ($f = 1$), and unfamiliarity with note taking technique is my major problem ($f = 1$).

Task-based Needs of Female Undergraduate Students for Academic Listening

The analysis of the questionnaire data indicated that there were 10 tasks that the majority of female students preferred to have in the academic listening course: 'listening to information about courses at university (e.g., study plans, course requirements, and class schedules)' (74%), 'listening to news reports' (73%), 'listening to academic interview' (70%), 'listening to academic discussions' (68%), 'listening to academic conversation' (66%), 'listening to announcements (e.g., homework & exam dates)' (66%), 'listening to telephone messages' (63%), 'listening to academic opinions' (60%), 'listening to numerical information (e.g., numbers, dates, percentages and fractions)' (59%), and 'listening to seminars and presentations' (58%). On the other hand, they regarded the following tasks 'not important/not important at all', respectively: 'listening to information about university library (e.g., its services, sections, and materials)' (16%), 'listening to telephone messages' (13%), and 'listening to news reports' (8%). The frequency occurrences of the learners' responses were significantly different in most of the items with the exception of item 5, 'listening to seminars and presentations' ($p = .074$).

The female students' responses in the interview about their preferences for academic listening were showing movies (f = 3), using routine and daily conversations (f = 3), listening to the job interviews and news reports (f = 2), having academic listening files related to their major (f = 1), having new CDs, files or new books (f = 1), having discussion before lesson (f = 1), more emphasis on pronunciation and accents (f = 1), teaching slang (f = 1), and learning unknown words and practicing them (f = 1).

Task-based Needs of Male Undergraduate Students for Academic Listening

Male undergraduate students considered the following tasks 'important/very important': 'listening to academic interview' (66%), 'listening to seminars and presentations' (62.1%), 'listening to academic discussions' (62%), 'listening to news reports' (61.1%), 'listening to announcements (e.g., homework & exam dates)' (61%), 'listening to academic opinions' (59%), 'listening to academic conversation' (57%) and 'listening to telephone messages' (57%). Whereas they regarded the following tasks 'not important/not important at all', respectively: 'listening to information about university library (e.g., its services, sections, and materials)' (16%), 'listening to telephone messages' (14%), 'listening to announcements' (13%), and 'listening to numerical information e.g., numbers, dates, percentages, and fractions' (13%). The frequency occurrences of the learners' responses were significantly different in all of the items.

The male students' responses in the interview about their preferences for academic listening tasks were showing movies (f = 9), having face to face conversation or group discussion (f = 5), sport topics (f = 5), listening files about learners' interesting topics (f = 2), having listening file about street talks (f = 2), showing movies with subtitles (f = 1), listening to English stories (f = 1), having discussion about daily news (f = 1), presenting listening files for each major (f = 1), doing more homework for improving listening skills (f = 1), having group activity (f = 1), listening to different accents from various countries (f = 1), listening to job interview and news reports (f = 1), having international standard tests (f = 1), and having more scientific seminars (f = 1)

5. Discussion

Despite some years of obligatory English courses during primary and secondary education, the learners in this study had some problems in academic listening course. Though they were aware of the importance of the academic listening skill, they found listening comprehension difficult, which may be due to the insufficient training in high school about listening skills. This may also be related to their lack of concentration in listening classes, the lack of group discussion, their difficulty in recognizing words, or the difficulty to understand the files with various accents.

It is also believed that their problems in academic listening are probably due to a few reasons. First, before entering university, no systematic instruction is offered for listening skill. Moreover, the lack of standards for the academic listening skill and the lack of concrete listening outcomes, time constraints, and the traditional teacher-centered teaching methods can account for the Engineering students' problems in the academic listening classes. Moreover, the lack of knowledge about methods and strategies to learn new lexical items is another major factor regarding their problems in listening comprehension. Lack of using technological tools in teaching and learning listening can also reduce learners' motivation and interest in this regard.

6. Conclusions

This study investigated undergraduate Engineering students' academic listening problems, perceptions and preferred tasks after passing a course on academic listening at the Iran University of Science and Technology. There were interest and positive views about this course among students. With regard to problems in academic listening, both male and female learners reported that insufficient vocabulary, speed of speech, poor quality of recordings, long texts, and unfamiliar topics were their major listening problems. Listening to academic interview, listening to seminars and presentations, and listening to daily conversations were the most preferred tasks by female students about academic listening, while listening to news reports, listening to academic interview, and listening to academic discussion were the most preferred tasks by male students. The results of the interview also revealed that female students preferred to have listening tasks about watching movies, daily conversations, and job interviews, whereas male students preferred to have tasks about movies, sports topics, and

group discussion.

Academic listening course is difficult for learners who have not improved their general English; thus, English instructors are suggested to provide learners with seminars or presentations in English in order to promote their awareness of the requirements of the academic context. They are also suggested to consider students' preferences for the academic listening tasks in the academic listening course and to use various listening strategies to help learners comprehend the tasks; for instance, they can have pre-teaching of unknown words before playing each listening file. Teachers are also suggested to consider learners' interest and use authentic materials with interesting topics. It is also necessary to let students deal with various accents, particularly in the extensive listening.

Future researchers can explore academic listening instructors' views about learners' problems and the useful tasks for them through using questionnaire and interview. Another study can be conducted investigating undergraduate students' use of listening strategies in academic listening course. Further research can be performed in which a comparison is made between learners' listening level and their problems, perceptions, and preferences for the academic listening tasks. Another research can be conducted to explore undergraduate students' problems, perceptions, and preferred tasks about other language skills (i.e., speaking, reading, and writing).

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