



THE ROLE OF SUBTITLES IN DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS OF B1 LEARNERS

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Abstract: This article examines the methodological role of subtitles in developing listening skills among B1-level learners of English as a foreign language. Listening comprehension is one of the most demanding language skills because learners must process speech in real time, recognize reduced forms, follow intonation, identify key words, and interpret meaning through context. At the B1 level, learners are usually able to understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar topics, but they often experience difficulty with natural speed, connected speech, unfamiliar accents, background noise, and vocabulary gaps. In this regard, subtitled audiovisual materials can serve as a valuable pedagogical bridge between controlled classroom listening and authentic communication.

Keywords: subtitles, listening comprehension, B1 learners, EFL, audiovisual materials, captions, CEFR, communicative competence, authentic video, English language teaching.

B1 DARAJADAGI TIL O'RGANUVCHILARDA TINGLAB TUSHUNISH KO'NIKMALARINI SHAKLLANTIRISH VA RIVOJLANTIRISHDA SUBTITRLARDAN FOYDALANISHNING AHAMIYATI

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada B1 darajadagi ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'rganuvchi o'quvchilarda tinglab tushunish ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishda subtitrlarning metodik o'rni tahlil qilinadi. Tinglab tushunish murakkab nutqiy ko'nikmalardan biri bo'lib, o'quvchi real vaqt rejimida nutq tezligi, talaffuz, qisqarishlar, intonatsiya, kontekst va lug'aviy birliklarni birgalikda idrok etishi kerak. B1 bosqichida o'quvchilar tanish mavzulardagi aniq nutqning asosiy mazmunini tushuna olsalar-da, tabiiy tezlikdagi nutq, aksentlar, fon shovqini va notanish so'zlarda qiynaladilar.

Kalit so'zlar: subtitr, tinglab tushunish, B1 daraja, EFL, audiovizual materiallar, CEFR, kommunikativ kompetensiya, autentik video, ingliz tilini o'qitish metodikasi.



INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, foreign language education is no longer limited to memorizing vocabulary, translating isolated sentences, or learning grammatical rules for examinations. The development of communicative competence has become a central goal of language teaching because learners need to understand spoken language in authentic situations, respond appropriately, and participate in social, academic, and professional communication. Among the four language skills, listening is often the first channel through which learners encounter real speech, yet it remains one of the most difficult skills to develop systematically. Learners can pause while reading and think before writing, but listening requires immediate processing. Once the speech has passed, the learner must either understand it at that moment or lose part of the message.

The relevance of this topic is also connected with the current educational policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Education” emphasizes the importance of forming knowledge, skills, and competencies that correspond to modern social needs and personal development. This means that foreign language teaching should not be reduced to theoretical knowledge only; it should prepare learners to use language in real communicative conditions. The Presidential Resolution No. PQ-1875 of December 10, 2012, on improving the system of foreign language learning marked an important shift toward the wider use of modern pedagogical and information-communication technologies in language education. Later, Presidential Resolution No. PQ-5117 of May 19, 2021, identified the popularization of foreign language learning as a priority direction of educational policy. The “Uzbekistan–2030” Strategy also stresses the importance of preparing young people for modern professions, digital skills, and foreign language communication. In addition, the 2026 policy documents related to the implementation of this strategy continue to support foreign language learning among young people through broader access, subsidies, and measurable national targets.

These reforms create a strong methodological need to use digital and multimedia resources in English language teaching. In modern classrooms, learners meet English not only through textbooks and teacher explanations, but also through films, short videos, educational platforms, podcasts, social media clips, interviews, online lectures, and video blogs. For B1 learners, however, authentic audiovisual materials may be challenging because the speech is faster, less predictable, and more varied than textbook audio. Subtitles can help reduce this gap. They allow learners to connect spoken input with written language, recognize words that are difficult to catch by ear, and observe how language is used in context.



The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages describes a B1 learner as someone who can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, and similar contexts. The same level also involves understanding the main point of many radio or television programmes when the delivery is relatively slow and clear. This description shows that B1 listening is not expected to be perfect or native-like. Rather, learners at this stage need gradual exposure to clear but authentic speech. Subtitled videos, if selected and used properly, can provide this kind of exposure.

MAIN BODY

Listening comprehension at the B1 level has several specific features. B1 learners are no longer complete beginners; they can usually follow simple conversations, understand familiar classroom instructions, and catch the main idea of short recordings. However, their listening ability is still fragile. They may understand a text when it is slow and clearly articulated, but lose confidence when they hear natural speech. This is because natural speech contains reductions, contractions, weak forms, linking, hesitation markers, incomplete sentences, and changes in rhythm. For example, the written phrase “What are you going to do?” may sound closer to “Whatcha gonna do?” in casual speech. A learner may know each word separately but still fail to recognize the phrase when it is spoken quickly.

Another important feature of B1 listening is the learner’s dependence on familiar vocabulary. When learners hear several unknown words in a short time, they often stop following the message. They may focus on the missing words instead of using context to infer meaning. This creates a chain reaction: one unknown word causes anxiety, anxiety reduces attention, and reduced attention causes further misunderstanding. Therefore, effective listening instruction should help learners tolerate partial understanding and focus on main ideas before details.

B1 learners also experience difficulty with accents. In many classrooms, learners are mostly exposed to carefully recorded textbook materials produced by speakers with standard pronunciation. In real life, however, English is used by people with different national, regional, and social accents. Even within standard British or American English, pronunciation varies depending on speed, age, emotion, and context. Subtitled videos can introduce this diversity in a manageable way because learners can listen to different voices while receiving written support.

Finally, listening involves psychological readiness. Many learners believe that they must understand every word in order to understand the message. This belief is harmful, especially at B1 level. It makes learners feel unsuccessful even when they have



understood the main idea. Subtitles can reduce this fear, but they must be used carefully. The aim is not to make learners dependent on reading, but to help them become better listeners.

Subtitles are written representations of spoken language displayed on the screen during audiovisual material. In language teaching, the term is used broadly, but it is useful to distinguish several types. Same-language subtitles, often called captions, present the spoken language in the same language as the audio. For example, an English video with English subtitles allows learners to hear and read English at the same time. Interlingual subtitles present the translation of the spoken language in another language, for example English audio with Uzbek subtitles. Bilingual subtitles show both the original language and translation. Automatic subtitles are generated by digital platforms through speech recognition technologies.

For B1 learners, same-language subtitles are usually the most beneficial for developing listening skills because they connect auditory and visual forms of the target language. Learners see the words they are hearing and begin to notice how written English changes in spoken form. For example, they may see “I have been” and hear “I’ve been”, or see “did you” and hear a connected sound closer to “didja”. This noticing is important because learners often know vocabulary in written form before they can recognize it in speech.

Interlingual subtitles can also be useful, especially when the topic is culturally unfamiliar or when the teacher wants to introduce a complex video without discouraging learners. However, they carry a methodological risk. If learners focus mainly on Uzbek subtitles, they may understand the content but not improve their English listening. Therefore, translation subtitles should be used for limited purposes, such as motivating learners, clarifying cultural context, or comparing meaning, rather than as the main listening tool.

Automatic subtitles require special caution. They are widely available and convenient, especially on platforms such as YouTube, but they are not always accurate. Errors may occur because of fast speech, background noise, unfamiliar names, poor audio quality, or non-standard accents. For a B1 learner, a wrong subtitle can be confusing because the learner may not have enough language knowledge to identify the mistake. Teachers should therefore preview materials before class and avoid using automatic captions without checking them.

Despite their advantages, subtitles can create problems when they are used without a clear pedagogical purpose. The following table summarizes the most common difficulties and possible solutions for B1 classrooms.



Problem	Practical solution
Overdependence on subtitles	Use subtitles as temporary scaffolding. Begin with subtitles, then repeat the same material without subtitles. Gradually reduce written support.
Learners read instead of listening	Give listening-focused tasks, such as identifying stressed words, marking heard phrases, or comparing audio with the subtitle.
Too much cognitive load	Use short videos of 2–4 minutes, pause between segments, and avoid giving too many tasks at once.
Inaccurate automatic captions	Preview the video before class, correct key errors, and use caption errors as a critical noticing activity only when appropriate.
Videos are above the learners' level	Select familiar topics, clear speech, and manageable vocabulary. Introduce key words before listening.
Mother-tongue subtitles reduce English processing	Use Uzbek subtitles only briefly for cultural or motivational support. For listening development, prefer English subtitles.
No clear lesson objective	Connect the video to a specific skill aim: main idea, detail recognition, pronunciation noticing, vocabulary, or summarizing.

One of the most serious problems is overdependence. If learners always watch videos with subtitles, they may not develop the ability to process speech independently. The teacher should therefore organize repeated listening in stages. A useful sequence is: first watch without subtitles for the general idea, then watch with English subtitles for confirmation, and finally watch again without subtitles to check improvement. This sequence helps learners use subtitles as a bridge rather than a permanent support.

Another problem is cognitive overload. A B1 learner cannot successfully process a long video, read subtitles, remember new vocabulary, answer questions, and take notes at the same time. The teacher should keep tasks simple and focused. For example, during the first viewing, learners may only answer one question: “What is the main topic?” During the second viewing, they may complete a short table. During the third viewing, they may focus on pronunciation or useful expressions.

A further problem is the quality of automatic subtitles. Teachers should not assume that all online captions are reliable. If a video contains many subtitle errors, it may



create confusion. However, carefully selected errors can also become a learning activity. For example, the teacher may show one sentence from an automatic subtitle and ask learners to listen again and correct it. This activity develops careful listening and critical awareness of digital tools.

The choice of video is equally important. A B1 learner benefits more from a short, clear, relevant video than from a famous but linguistically difficult film scene. The video should be connected with familiar topics such as daily routine, travel, study, shopping, health, hobbies, interviews, social media habits, or simple news. The teacher should also consider speech speed, accent, background noise, visual clarity, and vocabulary load.

An effective subtitled-video lesson should follow a clear structure. The first stage is pre-listening preparation. At this stage, the teacher introduces the topic, activates learners' background knowledge, and pre-teaches only the most necessary vocabulary. It is not useful to explain every unknown word because learners must also learn to infer meaning from context. A short prediction task can be effective: learners look at the title or screenshot and guess what the video will be about.

The second stage is first viewing without subtitles. The purpose is to train learners to catch the global meaning. The teacher should not ask difficult detail questions at this stage. Suitable questions include: Who is speaking? Where are they? What is the general topic? What problem is mentioned? This stage helps learners understand that successful listening does not require perfect word-by-word comprehension.

The third stage is viewing with English subtitles. Here, learners confirm their predictions and identify specific information. They may complete a table, underline key phrases on a transcript, choose the correct summary, or write down useful expressions. The subtitle acts as a support system that helps learners connect sound and text.

The fourth stage is language noticing. The teacher selects several short phrases from the video and draws attention to pronunciation, connected speech, stress, or useful vocabulary. For example, learners can compare the written phrase "What do you want to do?" with its fast spoken form. They can repeat the phrase, mark stressed words, and practice saying it naturally.

The fifth stage is final viewing without subtitles. This is essential because it checks whether subtitles have improved listening rather than replaced it. Learners listen again and note what they understand better than before. Even small improvement is valuable because it develops confidence and awareness.

The sixth stage is post-listening production. Learners use the video content in speaking or writing. They may retell the video, role-play the dialogue, express their



opinion, compare the situation with their own life, or create a short similar dialogue. This final stage connects listening with communicative use.

SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To make the theoretical discussion more evidence-based, a small-scale questionnaire was analysed. The survey received 12 completed responses, and the completion rate was 100 percent. The age item was answered by 11 respondents, while one respondent skipped this question. The largest group of participants was 19-22 years old, which means that the results mainly reflect the opinions of young adult B1 learners who regularly meet English through digital media and classroom tasks.

The questionnaire data confirm that subtitles are not only a visual aid, but also a learning support that can influence word recognition, pronunciation awareness, and learners’ confidence in listening. At the same time, the results show one important limitation: subtitles may distract students if the teacher does not give clear listening tasks. Therefore, the survey supports a balanced methodological position: subtitles should be used as temporary scaffolding, not as a permanent replacement for independent listening.

Table 1.

Summary of survey results related to the use of subtitles

No.	Survey item	Main numerical result	Methodological interpretation
1	After watching videos with subtitles, I can recognize more English words in listening tasks.	Strongly agree - 58.33% (7); agree - 41.67% (5); total positive response - 100%.	The result shows that subtitles help learners connect the spoken form of words with their written form. This supports vocabulary recognition during listening tasks.
2	Watching videos with English subtitles improves my pronunciation.	Strongly agree - 41.67% (5); agree - 41.67% (5); disagree - 16.67% (2); total positive response - 83.34%.	Most respondents associate English subtitles with better pronunciation because they can compare written forms with natural spoken forms.
3	Subtitles distract me from listening carefully.	Strongly agree - 33.33% (4); agree - 58.33% (7);	This finding shows that subtitles must be accompanied by guided tasks. Otherwise,



No.	Survey item	Main numerical result	Methodological interpretation
		disagree - 8.33% (1); total agreement - 91.66%.	learners may read the text instead of listening to the sound.

The first important finding is related to word recognition. All respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that videos with subtitles helped them recognize more English words in listening tasks. This is pedagogically significant because B1 learners often know many words in written form but fail to identify them in connected speech. Subtitles make word boundaries visible and help learners notice how familiar vocabulary sounds in natural speech.

The second finding concerns pronunciation. In total, 83.34 percent of respondents reported that English subtitles helped improve their pronunciation. This does not mean that subtitles alone can teach pronunciation; rather, they create a useful condition for noticing. When learners see a phrase and hear it at the same time, they become more aware of stress, linking, reductions, and intonation. For this reason, subtitled videos should be followed by repetition, shadowing, and short speaking activities.

The third finding is more cautious. A high proportion of respondents, 91.66 percent, agreed that subtitles may distract them from careful listening. This result is important because it prevents an overly one-sided interpretation of subtitles. The presence of written text can support comprehension, but it can also shift attention from sound to reading. Teachers should therefore prepare tasks that force learners to listen actively, such as identifying stressed words, checking missing words, comparing what they hear with what they read, or watching the same segment again without subtitles.

Figure 1. Age distribution of respondents (n=11; one response skipped)



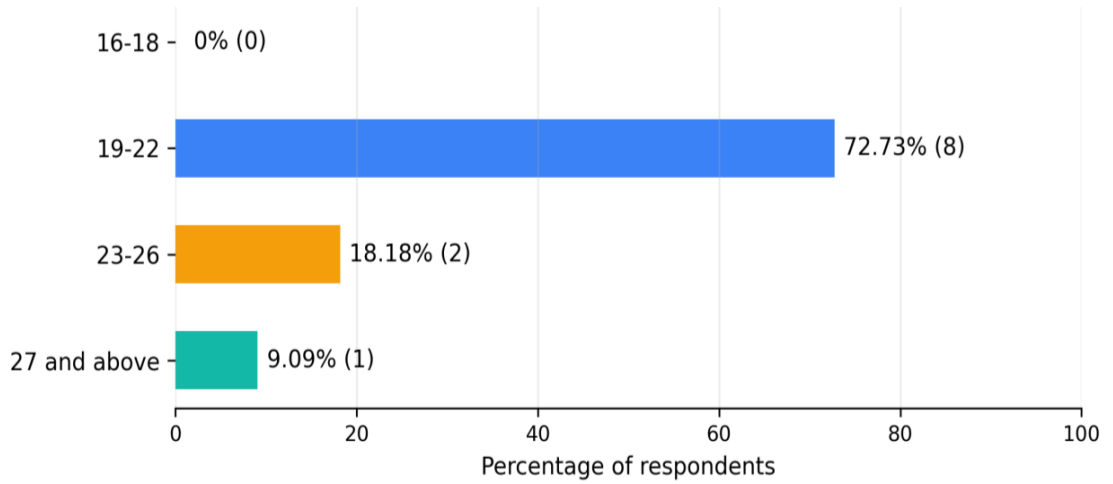


Figure 2. Perceived benefits of subtitles for word recognition and pronunciation

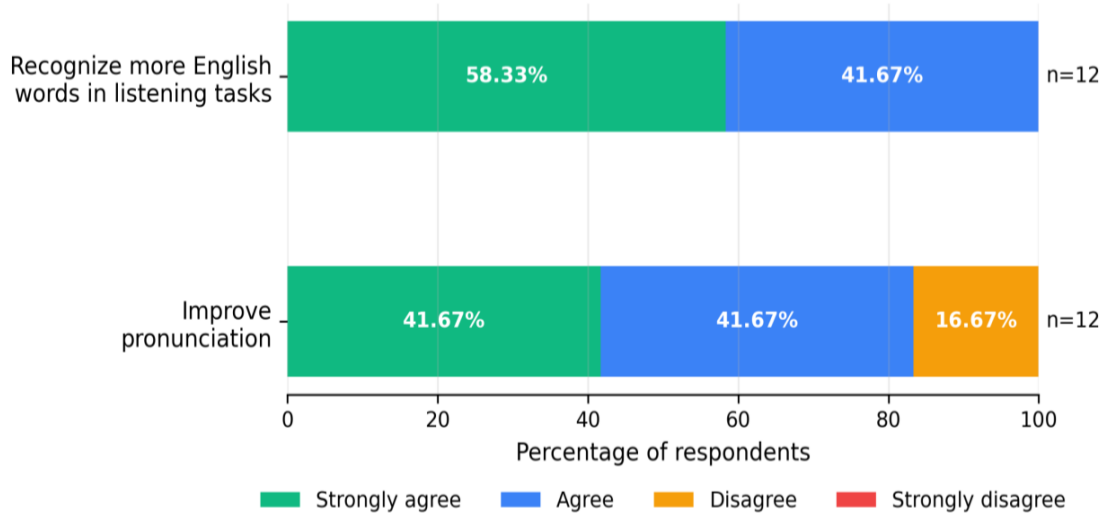


Figure 3. Respondents' views on subtitles as a possible distraction

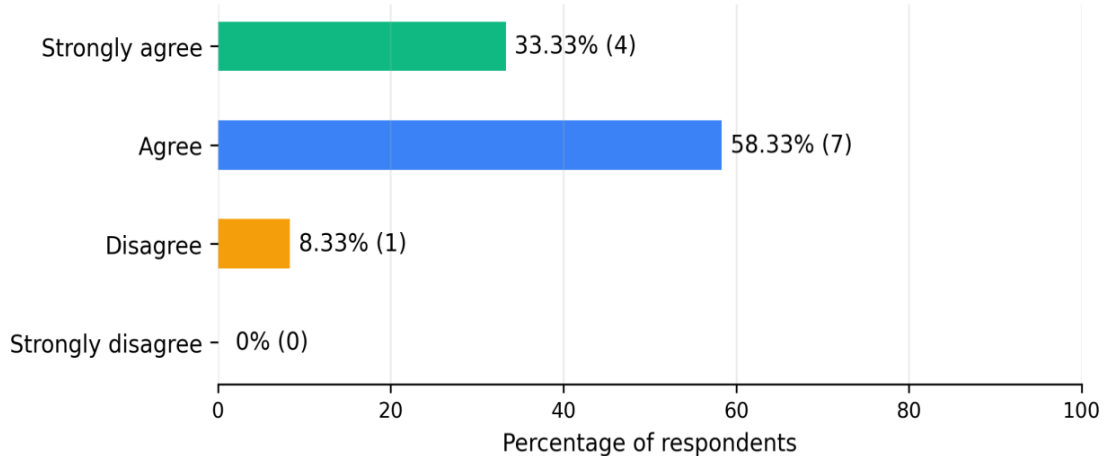
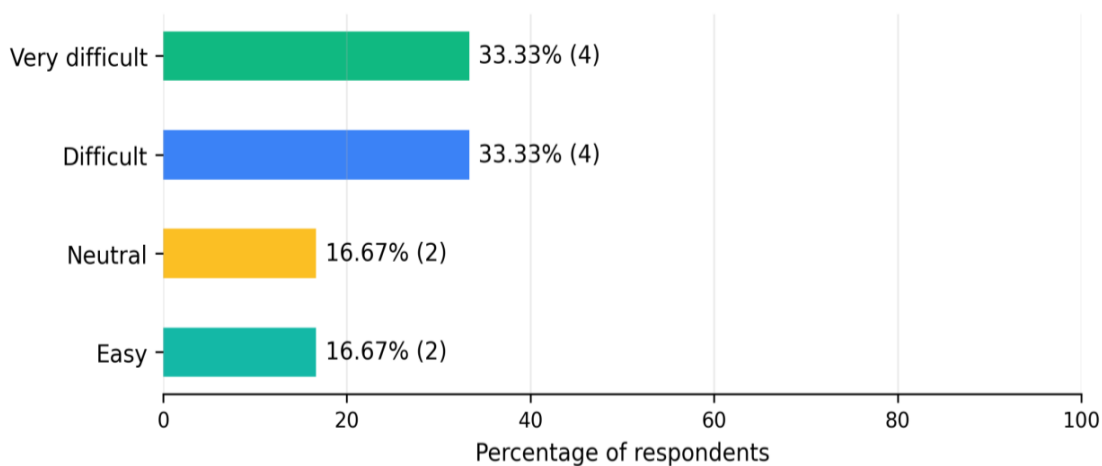




Figure 4. Learners' difficulty in listening without subtitles



The age-distribution diagram shows that the questionnaire mainly reflects the learning experience of young adult learners. Most respondents belong to the 19-22 age group, while only a small number represent the 23-26 and 27-and-above groups. This means that the results should be interpreted primarily as evidence from a student-centred higher education context rather than as a broad generalization about all B1 learners. At the same time, the age profile is suitable for the purpose of the article because university students often use digital video content and are familiar with subtitles in everyday learning.

The diagram on word recognition presents one of the strongest positive findings of the survey. All respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that watching videos with subtitles helped them recognize more English words in listening tasks. This result supports the idea that subtitles build a connection between the written form of a word and its spoken form. For B1 learners, this connection is especially useful because many of them know vocabulary in written form but may fail to identify the same words in fast or connected speech.

The pronunciation-related diagram also gives meaningful pedagogical evidence. A total of 83.34 percent of respondents reported that English subtitles helped them improve their pronunciation. This finding suggests that subtitles do not only support comprehension; they also help learners notice how words are actually pronounced in context. When learners see a word on the screen and hear it at the same time, they can observe stress, rhythm, intonation, weak forms, contractions, and connected-speech features more clearly than through explanation alone.

The diagram about distraction gives a more cautious and balanced view. A very high proportion of respondents, 91.66 percent, agreed that subtitles may distract them from listening carefully. This does not contradict the usefulness of subtitles. Rather, it shows that subtitles require methodological control. If learners focus only on reading



the text on the screen, the activity may develop reading more than listening. Therefore, the teacher should design tasks that direct students' attention to sound, pronunciation, key phrases, and meaning, not only to the written subtitle line.

The diagram on listening without subtitles shows that unsupported listening remains challenging for the majority of respondents. In total, 66.66 percent described listening without subtitles as difficult or very difficult. This result is natural for B1-level learners because authentic speech often includes speed, accent variation, background noise, reductions, and unfamiliar vocabulary. The finding confirms that subtitles should be treated as temporary scaffolding: they help learners at the beginning, but the support should gradually be reduced so that learners can become more independent listeners.

Taken together, the diagrams provide a balanced picture of subtitle use in B1 listening classes. On the one hand, subtitles improve word recognition, support pronunciation awareness, and make authentic materials more accessible. On the other hand, they may cause learners to rely too much on reading if the teacher does not manage the process carefully. For this reason, the best classroom model is not to use subtitles all the time, but to apply them in stages: first to support comprehension, then to notice language features, and finally to return to listening without subtitles.

CONCLUSION

The survey results also support this conclusion. All respondents reported improvement in word recognition after using subtitles, and 83.34 percent connected English subtitles with pronunciation development. However, the fact that 91.66 percent of respondents also noticed possible distraction proves that subtitles should be used through guided, repeated, and gradually reduced listening activities. In this sense, the empirical findings strengthen the main methodological argument of the article: subtitles are effective when they function as scaffolding and not as a permanent substitute for listening.

Subtitles play an important role in developing listening skills among B1 learners when they are used purposefully and systematically. They help learners connect spoken and written forms, recognize vocabulary in natural speech, notice pronunciation features, reduce anxiety, and access authentic audiovisual materials. At the B1 level, learners need exactly this kind of support because they are ready to move beyond controlled textbook audio but are not yet fully prepared for unsupported authentic speech.

The analysis shows that subtitles are not merely a technical feature of video materials. In language education, they can function as methodological scaffolding.



They support comprehension at the beginning, help learners notice linguistic features during repeated listening, and prepare them for subtitled listening at the final stage. However, their effectiveness depends on the teacher's decisions. If subtitles are used without a clear objective, learners may become dependent on reading, experience cognitive overload, or fail to develop real listening strategies.

For this reason, teachers should select appropriate videos, use English subtitles mainly for listening development, prepare learners before viewing, design focused while-listening tasks, and finish with subtitled listening or communicative production. Problems such as overdependence, automatic caption errors, inappropriate materials, and unclear assessment can be solved through careful planning and gradual reduction of support.

In the context of Uzbekistan's educational reforms and the growing importance of foreign language competence, subtitled audiovisual materials offer a practical and modern way to improve English language teaching. They correspond to the policy direction that encourages the use of innovative technologies, communicative methods, and internationally recognized language standards. Therefore, the systematic use of subtitles in B1 English lessons can contribute to more confident, motivated, and competent listeners who are better prepared for real communication in English.

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