

## From Ringside to Fluency: The Impact of WWE Commentary on Pronunciation Development

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### Abstract

This study explores how shadowing emotionally expressive media, specifically WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment) commentary, can support English pronunciation development among EFL learners. Drawing on Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Imitation Theory, the research employs a narrative-based, self-exploratory design conducted over 16 weeks. Through systematic shadowing of WWE broadcasts, weekly audio recordings, and reflective journaling, the study documents gradual improvements in consonant articulation, word stress, and prosodic features such as rhythm, pitch variation, and expressive fluency. High-energy segments of commentary were particularly effective in enhancing speech confidence and reducing hesitation, suggesting that emotionally engaging input may facilitate natural and fluent speech production. While results were promising, the single-participant design limits generalizability. Future research with more participants, objective assessment tools, and varied media formats is recommended to build on and validate these findings.

**Keywords:** Pronunciation Development, Shadowing, Media-based Language Learning

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## INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation plays a pivotal role in second language acquisition, particularly for non-native speakers of English. The ability to pronounce words clearly and accurately is essential not only for effective communication but also for the development of fluency and speaker confidence (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, traditional approaches to teaching pronunciation such as phonetic drills, repetition, and controlled practice are commonly employed. While these techniques may be effective, they often lack the authenticity and contextual richness needed for real-world communication (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Morley, 1991).

To address these gaps, researchers now explore media's role in language learning. Media content such as movies, TV series, podcasts, and live sports commentary can expose learners to natural speech patterns, including features like stress, intonation, and rhythm. These features are often absent from controlled classroom materials (Levis, 2018; Vanderplank, 2016). However, while the pedagogical value of scripted media such as films and dramas is well established, less attention has been devoted to the educational potential of live, unscripted media especially sports commentary as a resource for developing pronunciation (Gilmore, 2007).

One compelling example of this underutilized media form is World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) commentary, which combines the immediacy of live sports narration with the emotive expression of performance-based storytelling (Verma, 2020). WWE broadcasts feature high-energy commentators such as Jim Ross and Michael Cole, whose speech is rich in linguistic features ranging from varied pitch and tone to emphatic stress and dynamic pacing that may benefit pronunciation learners. Their delivery, designed to evoke emotion and maintain viewer engagement, creates a vivid and accessible model for speech imitation (Billings et al., 2017; Vanderplank, 2016).

These characteristics make WWE commentary particularly relevant for EFL learners seeking to improve core aspects of pronunciation. The rapid yet deliberate articulation, frequent repetition of catchphrases, and use of specialized vocabulary expose learners to a diverse range of phonological patterns. Furthermore, the emotionally expressive delivery introduces learners to authentic prosodic features such as intonation and emphasis that are often underrepresented in textbook-driven instruction (Billings et al., 2017; Vanderplank, 2016).

Despite anecdotal reports and informal observations suggesting that mimicking WWE commentary can support oral fluency and pronunciation clarity, there is a notable lack of

empirical research exploring this form of media in applied linguistic contexts. This underrepresentation highlights a gap in the current literature and presents an opportunity to examine how nontraditional, entertainment-driven content might contribute to second language pronunciation development (Levis, 2018; Yoshida, 2016).

To address this gap, the present study investigates the potential of WWE commentary as a pronunciation training tool using a narrative-based, self-exploratory approach. Specifically, it explores how engaging with this emotionally charged and rhythmically varied speech input may facilitate improvement in key areas of English pronunciation. Grounded in Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) and Imitation Theory (Skinner, 1957), the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does shadowing WWE commentary improve English pronunciation?
2. What is the effect of emotionally expressive media on pronunciation fluency?

These questions are situated within a theoretical context that emphasizes the role of meaningful input and mimetic practice in second language acquisition. To better understand the mechanisms through which emotionally rich, unscripted media may influence pronunciation development, the study draws on established theories that connect language exposure and imitation to skill acquisition.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in two complementary theories from second language acquisition: Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) and Imitation Theory (Skinner, 1957). Together, these frameworks provide a theoretical basis for understanding how exposure to emotionally rich, media-based input can support the development of pronunciation skills in EFL learners. By integrating the concepts of comprehensible input and guided imitation, the study positions pronunciation as both a perceptual and performative skill shaped through meaningful interaction with language.

Building on this foundation, Krashen's Input Hypothesis posits that language acquisition is most effective when learners engage with input that is just beyond their current proficiency level yet remains accessible through contextual cues. This type of input supports the natural assimilation of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and phonological patterns. Furthermore, Krashen emphasizes the importance of lowering the affective filter, which refers

to emotional factors that may impede language learning, by providing content that is both stimulating and encouraging (Krashen, 1985).

In this regard, WWE commentary offers a particularly rich form of comprehensible input. Characterized by its repetitive phrases, visual-verbal synchrony, and emotionally charged delivery, it creates a vivid context in which language is tightly linked to action. This enhances attentional focus and reinforces lexical patterns through repeated exposure. The commentary's immediacy and alignment with visual cues provide real-time comprehension support, while its entertaining and immersive nature may lower learner anxiety and increase willingness to engage, factors that align closely with Krashen's emphasis on affective variables in language learning (Billings et al., 2017; Desbordes & Richelieu, 2012; Vanderplank, 2016).

While Krashen's theory addresses the input side of language acquisition, Imitation Theory complements it by focusing on output, specifically, the development of pronunciation through speech reproduction. This theory maintains that learners improve phonological accuracy by mimicking the speech of proficient users, particularly in terms of rhythm, stress, and intonation. According to Skinner (1957), the ability to closely replicate native-like speech patterns is essential for developing intelligibility and natural fluency. Through imitation, learners internalize not just sounds, but the prosodic features that make spoken language expressive and communicative.

Within this perspective, shadowing, the real-time repetition of speech, serves as an effective method for bridging perception and production (Murphey, 2001). WWE commentators, with their clear articulation, controlled pacing, and emotionally expressive delivery, offer robust models for imitation. Their spontaneous yet deliberate use of pitch variation, emphatic stress, and rhythmic pacing introduces learners to suprasegmental features that are often overlooked in conventional classroom materials (Vanderplank, 2016).

Viewed holistically, these two theoretical perspectives illuminate how media-based, emotionally engaging speech can facilitate pronunciation development. The interaction between comprehensible input and active imitation underscores the dual importance of receptive exposure and productive practice in mastering spoken language. By grounding the study in these established frameworks, WWE commentary is framed not merely as an entertaining form of media, but as a pedagogically sound and linguistically meaningful tool for enhancing English pronunciation.

Drawing from this theoretical foundation, the following literature review examines prior research on media-based pronunciation learning, shadowing techniques, and the pedagogical value of emotionally expressive commentary such as that found in WWE broadcasts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) note that traditional methods like drills and transcription often overlook prosodic features such as rhythm and intonation. Pronunciation, however, remains a key aspect of second language acquisition (SLA), shaping learners' intelligibility, fluency, and confidence. Derwing and Munro (2015) highlight how this creates a gap between classroom practice and real-world communication. As a result, there is growing interest in more authentic, context-rich approaches, particularly media-based learning, as a way to enhance pronunciation instruction.

Media-based language learning builds on Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input just beyond a learner's current level. Authentic media like films, TV shows, and podcasts provide this input while exposing learners to natural language use and essential prosodic features often missing from scripted materials (Levis, 2018). Emotionally engaging content also helps reduce affective filters, boosting motivation and retention (Krashen, 1985; Vanderplank, 2016). More recent research highlights the value of unscripted formats such as reality TV and YouTube vlogs for their informal and emotionally rich language (Jones & Hafner, 2021; Purnamasari, 2018; Verbeke & Simon, 2023; Weninger & Kiss, 2013).

Unscripted, emotionally expressive media like live sports commentary, political debates, and reaction videos expose learners to natural shifts in pitch, stress, and pacing that reflect real-life conversation. These spontaneous formats offer affective richness typically lacking in scripted materials. Both Borrego et al. (2007) and Mishan (2004) highlighted that unscripted radio improved learners' prosodic awareness, while Rohmiyati et al. (2025) showed that emotionally charged video blogs boosted engagement and imitation of features like intonation and emphasis. Extending this insight, such media not only enhance exposure to authentic speech but also create emotionally engaging contexts that promote deeper processing and more effective pronunciation practice.

Live sports commentary, in particular, offers a compelling blend of spontaneous language use, emotional intensity, and rapid delivery, making it an authentic and stimulating model for pronunciation training. Unlike scripted dialogue, which tends to be polished and predictable, sports commentary reflects real-time reactions and varied linguistic expressions. Ferguson (1983) asserts that this type of dynamic input not only holds learners' attention but also exposes them to authentic patterns of speech, including shifting intonation and emphatic stress. Jenkins (2000) further notes that exposure to these features can significantly enhance learners' ability to interpret and reproduce natural speech. Extending this perspective, Wood (2006) emphasizes that emotionally heightened input may improve learners' ability to process prosodic cues, reinforcing the pedagogical value of high-arousal speech.

To fully benefit from such input, learners must go beyond passive listening and engage actively with the speech. One highly effective technique for this purpose is shadowing, which involves repeating speech in real time to mimic native pronunciation. Rooted in Imitation Theory (Skinner, 1957), shadowing enables learners to internalize suprasegmental features such as rhythm, stress, and pitch variation. Vandergrift and Goh (2011) demonstrate that learners who engage in shadowing show notable improvements in both fluency and prosodic accuracy. When paired with emotionally charged and rhythmically complex input like live commentary, shadowing may amplify its pedagogical impact. This interaction between input quality and imitation strategy positions shadowing as a powerful bridge between perception and production in SLA.

Within this context, WWE commentary presents a particularly rich source of pronunciation input. Commentators like Jim Ross and Michael Cole combine clear articulation with dramatic expression, employing pitch variation, emphatic stress, repetition, and controlled pacing (Billings et al., 2017; Vanderplank, 2016). These features provide learners with phonetic clarity and prosodic patterns that closely resemble spontaneous conversation. The frequent use of catchphrases and specialized vocabulary also offers consistent and memorable targets for pronunciation practice (Warden, 2016). WWE's emotionally charged delivery aligns with Krashen's idea that engaging input enhances acquisition, reinforcing its relevance to both the Input Hypothesis and Imitation Theory.

Despite these pedagogical advantages, WWE commentary remains under-researched in SLA literature. Most existing studies have focused on scripted media or general entertainment content, often overlooking the learning potential of performance-based sports

entertainment. Gilmore (2007) and King (2002) have emphasized the value of authenticity in media use, yet they have not considered the unique combination of clarity, intensity, and spontaneity found in WWE broadcasts. Furthermore, while Derwing and Munro (2015) stress the importance of active engagement with media for pronunciation gains, few empirical studies have examined how learners interact with unscripted, expressive input in performative contexts. As a result, WWE commentary represents an untapped pedagogical resource, warranting further investigation within the context of pronunciation development.

In summary, the literature emphasizes the value of moving beyond traditional pronunciation instruction toward immersive, emotionally rich approaches. While media-based learning has gained traction, especially with scripted content, there remains a notable lack of research on how unscripted, emotionally expressive media like live sports or entertainment commentary affects pronunciation development. This study addresses that gap by exploring the pedagogical potential of WWE commentary, a form of dynamic and affective media rarely examined in SLA. Informed by Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Imitation Theory, this study adopts a narrative-based, self-exploratory methodology to investigate how shadowing such commentary influences both segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation features in an EFL context.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

To investigate the role of WWE commentary in English pronunciation development, this study adopted a qualitative, narrative-based design grounded in self-exploration. This approach was chosen to closely examine the lived experience of engaging with emotionally expressive media through shadowing, a technique aligned with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which emphasizes exposure to comprehensible input, and Skinner's Imitation Theory (1957), which highlights learning through guided imitation. The longitudinal and reflective nature of the methodology enabled both experiential tracking and in-depth phonological analysis, offering insight into how immersive, emotionally rich input may influence pronunciation development and fluency over time.

### Data Collection

Data collection spanned four consecutive months and focused on the systematic shadowing of WWE commentary, primarily drawn from episodes of Monday Night Raw and

SmackDown (WWE, n.d.). WWE was chosen for its emotionally heightened, rhythmically varied speech, offering ideal conditions to examine both shadowing practices and the effects of expressive media on spoken fluency.

Each week, a 30-minute segment of live commentary was selected as the core material for daily practice. The researcher listened to the segment repeatedly, transcribed key excerpts, and engaged in real-time shadowing to replicate the commentators' delivery. Particular emphasis was placed on suprasegmental features such as pitch, stress, emotional tone, and rhythm. This practice enabled in-depth analysis of how emotionally dynamic input influenced both segmental (consonants and vowels) and suprasegmental (intonation and rhythm) pronunciation features.

In parallel, the study explored how the emotional intensity of the commentary, characterized by excitement, urgency, and dramatic pacing, affected fluency, pacing, and expressive speech. Highly charged moments in each broadcast provided rich prosodic variation for imitation. Weekly progress was tracked through recordings made after several days of shadowing, capturing changes in speech flow, vocal energy, and emotional tone. These recordings revealed how expressive input supported more natural and confident delivery. A reflective journal was also maintained to document engagement, pronunciation challenges, and observable gains in intonation and emphasis.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis focused on two primary dimensions: phonological development, specifically articulation, stress, and intonation, and the emotional impact of expressive media on fluency, including rhythm, pacing, and speech confidence.

To examine phonological changes, all self-recorded shadowing sessions were reviewed every two weeks and evaluated using a customized rubric adapted from Celce-Murcia et al. (2010). The rubric employed a 1–5 rating scale, where 1 represented minimal control or frequent errors, 3 indicated moderate accuracy with occasional lapses, and 5 denoted consistent, fluent, and clear production of the target feature. Separate descriptors were applied to four core areas: clarity of articulation, accuracy of syllable stress, control of intonation contours, and overall fluency. These were calibrated for self-assessment and longitudinal tracking. Special attention was given to comparing recordings from the early and final stages of the study to identify developmental patterns over time. This comparison helped chart gradual improvements in pronunciation control, particularly in reproducing the exaggerated prosodic features modeled by WWE commentators. Additionally, wrestling-



specific terminology (e.g., *suplex*, *submission*, *finisher*) was analyzed for segmental precision, as these words posed unique articulation challenges and served as phonological benchmarks.

A thematic analysis was also conducted on entries from the reflective journal to explore how emotional engagement influenced speech performance. Open coding was used to identify recurring themes, which included “expressive fluency,” “emotional imitation,” “speech confidence,” and “intonation adaptation.” These codes were refined iteratively and cross-referenced with the corresponding weekly recordings to triangulate insights. Particular focus was placed on emotionally charged moments in the broadcasts such as dramatic reversals or climactic commentary, which frequently coincided with shifts in vocal energy, pacing, and prosodic fluidity. These qualitative findings provided a deeper understanding of how affectively rich input contributed to more natural and confident speech delivery.

Taken together, these analytical procedures offered a comprehensive view of how emotionally expressive, media-based input influenced both the technical precision and emotional dynamism of spoken English.

### **Trustworthiness and Reflexivity**

Trustworthiness was established through methodological transparency, triangulation, and critical self-reflection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All procedures related to data collection and analysis were thoroughly documented to ensure traceability. Triangulation across audio recordings, transcriptions, and reflective journal entries provided a multi-layered perspective, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings.

While the single-participant design limits the generalizability of results, it allowed for a rich, in-depth exploration of pronunciation development through immersive media engagement. The researcher adopted a reflexive stance throughout the study, drawing on personal experience as an EFL learner and educator while actively monitoring potential biases through ongoing journaling and analytic introspection. This reflexivity contributed to the integrity and transparency of the study’s self-exploratory design.

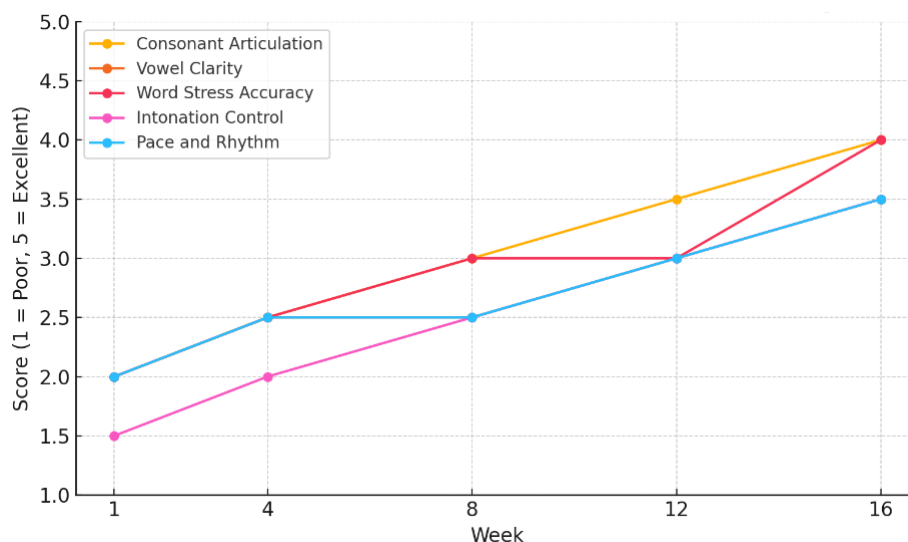
## **RESULTS**

Data were drawn from weekly pronunciation recordings, a reflective journal, and self-assessment over 16 weeks. The results are presented in three categories: phonological development, prosodic and expressive fluency, and speech rate and confidence.

## 1. Improvements in segmental pronunciation features

The most evident improvement occurred in consonant articulation and word stress accuracy, which progressed from initial ratings of 2 to 4 by Week 16. Features such as vowel clarity, intonation control, and speech rhythm showed more modest gains, reflecting the complexity of these areas and the challenge of mastering them through self-guided shadowing alone.

Figure 1 illustrates the gradual, nonlinear progression of pronunciation features. Improvements were incremental, with plateaus in the early and middle weeks reflecting typical pronunciation learning curves.



**Figure 1.** Weekly progress in five pronunciation features

*Note: Scores reflect a 1–5 rubric: 1 = minimal control, 5 = fluent and accurate.*

## 2. Suprasegmental development and expressive fluency

Progress was also noted in suprasegmental features, including pitch range and rhythmic control, especially during emotionally intense moments in the commentary. WWE's expressive language, marked by high energy, pitch modulation, and strategic emphasis, proved effective for practicing intonation and emotional speech delivery.

These findings are supported by journal reflections, summarized in Table 1, which show recurring themes of increased speech confidence, emotional imitation, and fluency breakthroughs during specific weeks. These themes, identified through open coding of journal

entries, corresponded with notable changes in pronunciation observed in the weekly recordings, thus reinforcing the triangulated nature of the analysis.

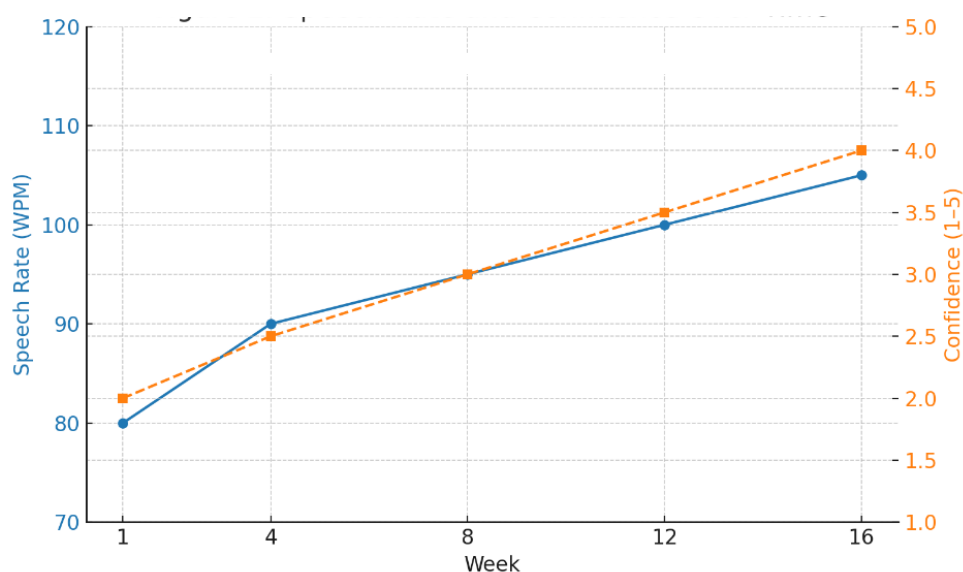
**Table 1.** Summary of journal themes related to pronunciation

Theme	Example Entry (Excerpt)	Frequency (Noted Weeks)
Increased Speech Confidence	"Felt more natural today, especially during intense moments."	Weeks 8, 11, 15
Emotional Imitation	"Copied Cole's tone when he yelled about the reversal. I think I nailed it!"	Weeks 6, 12
Fluency Breakthroughs	"Almost no pauses today. The rhythm came easily."	Weeks 10, 13, 16

These reflections aligned with observed gains in expressiveness and prosody, particularly when the input was emotionally engaging and rhythmically varied.

### 3. Fluency gains and increased speaking confidence

In addition to segmental and suprasegmental gains, there was noticeable improvement in fluency and self-confidence, as shown in Figure 2. Speech rate increased steadily from 80 to 105 words per minute over the course of the study, while self-rated confidence rose from 2.0 to 4.0 on a 5-point scale.



**Figure 2.** Increases in speech rate (words per minute) and self-rated confidence

*Note: Confidence was rated on a 1–5 scale, from very low to very high.*

The findings suggest that emotionally charged, fast-paced input like WWE commentary not only challenges learners to keep up with speech rhythm but also encourages more confident and fluent delivery. Though the gains were moderate, they reflect the steady and realistic progress expected from self-guided pronunciation practice. This observed trajectory lays the groundwork for the following discussion, which interprets the outcomes through the lens of the study's theoretical frameworks and affective dimensions.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer insight into the ways in which shadowing WWE commentary can support pronunciation development in EFL learners, particularly in relation to both segmental accuracy and suprasegmental fluency, in line with the two research questions.

The first research question focused on how shadowing WWE commentary improves English pronunciation. Results demonstrated steady gains in consonant articulation, word stress accuracy, and pacing over the 16-week period, although more modest improvement was noted in vowel clarity and intonation control. These outcomes suggest that regular exposure to the speech patterns of sports entertainment commentary can support phonological development even without formal instruction or external feedback. This supports Wood's (2006) finding that repetition of formulaic, prosodically rich sequences can help learners build fluency and internalize phonological patterns. Similarly, Vandergrift and Goh (2011) reported that active shadowing promotes both perception and production of rhythm and stress, especially when combined with emotionally charged material.

The consistency of practice and the clear articulation by WWE commentators provided a suitable model for pronunciation training, reinforcing the pedagogical potential of nontraditional input sources. Murphey (2001) also emphasized the role of mimicry in pronunciation learning, particularly when learners are exposed to engaging spoken input such as songs or chants, which parallel the rhythmic and dramatic delivery of WWE speech.

Closely related to this, the second research question explored the effect of emotionally expressive media on pronunciation fluency. Results indicated that emotionally intense segments, such as high-stakes match moments, contributed to increased speech fluidity, prosodic variation, and expressive delivery. Journal reflections further revealed that

these moments helped reduce hesitation and boost confidence. These findings reflect Krashen's (1985) affective filter hypothesis, which posits that learners acquire language more effectively when they are emotionally engaged and unburdened by anxiety. In support, Hirano (2009) found that emotionally resonant content improved EFL learners' willingness to speak and promoted spontaneous oral expression. Ferguson (1983) similarly argued that emotionally heightened input sustains attention and enhances exposure to authentic speech features such as emphatic stress and shifting intonation.

The use of performative commentary, rich in pitch variation and dramatic stress, thus appears to foster improvement not only in the mechanical aspects of pronunciation but also in overall speech confidence and fluency. Jenkins (2000) emphasized that learners need exposure to expressive input in order to develop prosodic sensitivity, while Levis (2018) noted that such features are underemphasized in traditional pronunciation curricula.

Furthermore, the steady increase in speech rate and confidence ratings suggests that the combination of emotional involvement and rhythmic repetition plays a pivotal role in fluency development. Unlike scripted materials, WWE commentary reflected spontaneous and emotionally reactive language, offering a dynamic model for internalizing prosodic norms. Huang (2024) found that shadowing emotionally expressive video blogs helped learners develop more natural rhythm and intonation patterns, a finding that aligns with the fluency breakthroughs noted in this study. Imitating dramatic intonation, as recorded in journal entries, likely indicates growing prosodic awareness, an area often neglected in classroom instruction. These aspects reinforce the value of integrating emotionally rich, rhythmically engaging media into EFL learning environments.

Notwithstanding these positive findings, the study's limitations must be acknowledged. As a self-exploratory, single-participant design, the findings are not generalizable. The observed progress was shaped by the researcher's motivation, consistency, and prior experience, and the lack of expert feedback may have allowed some errors to persist. However, the depth of engagement made possible by this design provides meaningful insight into how immersive and affective input can support pronunciation improvement over time. This highlights the underexplored pedagogical value of using WWE commentary as a pronunciation learning tool, and invites further research involving more participants, control groups, and cross-media comparisons.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how shadowing WWE commentary can enhance English pronunciation and fluency development in an EFL context. The findings demonstrated that regular imitation of emotionally expressive commentary led to gradual improvement in key segmental features, such as consonant articulation and word stress, as well as suprasegmental elements like rhythm and pitch variation. These gains were particularly noticeable during high-intensity segments, where emotional engagement appeared to boost speech confidence and expressiveness. Based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Imitation Theory, the results support the use of authentic, affectively rich media to foster natural speech production. This suggests that shadowing dynamic and emotionally engaging input, such as sports entertainment commentary, can serve as a valuable supplement to traditional pronunciation instruction, especially for learners seeking to improve not only clarity but also prosodic fluency.

Given the observable improvements, several limitations must be considered. As a single-participant, self-exploratory study, the results are not generalizable and may reflect individual factors such as motivation or prior familiarity with the content. The lack of expert feedback or formal assessment means some errors may have gone undetected, and the subjective nature of journal reflections limits objectivity. Future research should involve more participants, use control groups, and apply pre- and post-assessments to evaluate outcomes more systematically. Exploring other emotionally rich media could also help determine how such input supports pronunciation across diverse learner profiles.

For EFL educators, integrating shadowing with emotionally dynamic media like WWE commentary offers a low-pressure, engaging way to build both accuracy and fluency. This approach is especially useful for learners who struggle with traditional drills or lack confidence. It also supports autonomous learning, giving students more control over their pronunciation practice. Overall, the study underscores the value of expressive media in helping learners speak more clearly and confidently.

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