

Teaching for Communicative Risk: An Educational Framework for English as a Lingua Franca in High-Stakes International Contexts

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to develop an integrated educational framework for teaching communicative risk in English as a Lingua Franca in high-stakes international contexts.

Methods and Materials: This study was conducted as a systematic review using qualitative thematic synthesis. Relevant literature was identified from major academic databases in applied linguistics, education, communication studies, and social sciences. The review focused on studies addressing English as a Lingua Franca, communicative risk, multilingual interaction, intercultural communication, pragmatic negotiation, intelligibility, professional discourse, and high-stakes international communication. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, eligible sources were analyzed through structured data extraction and thematic coding. The synthesis process emphasized conceptual integration rather than statistical aggregation, with the purpose of identifying recurring risk domains, pedagogical strategies, and framework dimensions.

Findings: The thematic synthesis indicated that communicative risk in English as a Lingua Franca contexts is not primarily caused by linguistic error alone, but by the interaction of intelligibility problems, pragmatic ambiguity, intercultural misinterpretation, unequal institutional power, domain-specific terminology, emotional pressure, digital mediation, and assessment norms. The inferential pattern of the findings showed that successful communication in high-stakes international settings depends on learners' ability to anticipate misunderstanding, manage clarity, negotiate meaning, repair breakdowns, interpret cultural variation, adapt terminology to audience needs, and maintain participation under pressure. The final synthesis generated a nine-dimensional educational framework consisting of risk awareness, intelligibility management, interactional repair, intercultural interpretation, domain and terminology control, ethical and power-sensitive communication, emotional resilience, digital communicative competence, and assessment for communicative effectiveness.

Conclusion: The study concludes that English language education for high-stakes international contexts should move beyond native-speaker-centered models and toward risk-sensitive ELF pedagogy. Teaching communicative risk can help learners use English more responsibly, strategically, and equitably in multilingual settings where misunderstanding may affect academic, professional, institutional, or safety-related outcomes.

Keywords: *English as a Lingua Franca; Communicative Risk; High-Stakes Communication; Intercultural Communication; Intelligibility; Language Education; Systematic Review*

1. Introduction

English has increasingly become the principal medium through which individuals, institutions, and professional communities communicate across national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. In many international settings, English is no longer used primarily as a language of interaction between native and non-native speakers, but as a shared communicative resource among multilingual speakers who bring different linguistic repertoires, cultural expectations, institutional positions, and pragmatic norms into interaction. This condition has been conceptualized through the framework of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which shifts attention away from native-speaker imitation and toward the ways in which speakers use English flexibly, strategically, and collaboratively to achieve mutual understanding. ELF research has therefore challenged traditional assumptions in English language teaching by showing that communicative effectiveness in global settings cannot be measured only by grammatical conformity, accent proximity, or adherence to standardized native-speaker models. Instead, successful communication depends on intelligibility, accommodation, negotiation of meaning, contextual awareness, and the ability to manage difference in real time (Jenkins, 2015, 2022; Seidlhofer, 2011).

The development of ELF scholarship has transformed the theoretical understanding of English in international communication. Rather than treating English as a fixed linguistic system owned by native speakers, ELF studies conceptualize English as a dynamic, adaptive, and multilingual communicative practice shaped by the needs of its users. Mauranen's work on academic ELF demonstrates that multilingual speakers actively shape academic English through interaction, meaning-making, and discourse practices that emerge in international scholarly communities (Mauranen, 2012). This perspective is further supported by later discussions of ELF in relation to second language acquisition and World Englishes, where ELF is positioned as a field that requires attention to multilingual competence, linguistic variability, and the realities of transnational

interaction (Mauranen, 2018). Similarly, Cogo and Dewey's corpus-driven investigation shows that ELF communication involves systematic patterns of accommodation, pragmatic adjustment, and cooperative negotiation rather than random linguistic deficiency (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). From this viewpoint, English language education must move beyond the narrow correction of learner deviations and instead prepare learners to participate effectively in multilingual communicative ecologies.

The relationship between ELF and multilingualism is central to this educational shift. ELF interaction usually occurs among speakers whose linguistic identities are not limited to English and whose communicative resources include multiple languages, cultural frames, disciplinary backgrounds, and interactional strategies. Cogo emphasizes that ELF is deeply connected to multilingual practices because speakers frequently draw on diverse linguistic resources, translanguaging, accommodation, and intercultural awareness to maintain communication (Cogo, 2020). This multilingual orientation has important implications for pedagogy. If learners are expected to use English in international contexts, they need more than vocabulary and grammar; they need the ability to interpret communicative variation, adjust their speech to interlocutors, confirm meaning, manage ambiguity, and recognize when misunderstanding may have serious consequences. Hynninen's discussion of ELF and academic writing also highlights that English in international academic contexts is shaped by negotiation between institutional expectations, disciplinary conventions, multilingual writers, and global audiences (Hynninen, 2020). Thus, both spoken and written ELF require flexible communicative competence rather than simple conformity to a single standard.

Although ELF scholarship has contributed significantly to language education, an important challenge remains insufficiently developed: how should learners be prepared to communicate when the consequences of misunderstanding are serious? In many global settings, English functions not merely as a medium of casual exchange but as the language

of high-stakes decision-making, professional negotiation, academic assessment, healthcare interaction, legal procedure, international diplomacy, safety communication, and institutional access. In such contexts, communicative breakdown can lead not only to inconvenience but also to academic failure, professional conflict, medical error, exclusion from services, loss of trust, institutional injustice, or safety risks. Therefore, the notion of communicative risk becomes crucial. Communicative risk refers to the possibility that uncertainty, ambiguity, misinterpretation, unequal participation, or pragmatic failure may produce negative consequences for individuals or institutions. In ELF contexts, such risk is intensified because speakers may differ in linguistic proficiency, accent familiarity, cultural expectations, professional expertise, confidence, power, and access to institutional discourse.

High-stakes communication has long been recognized in professional and institutional domains, but its connection to ELF pedagogy requires deeper theoretical integration. In business contexts, research on lingua franca communication has shown that English is used as a practical working language in corporate mergers, sales negotiations, and international professional encounters. Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, and Kankaanranta found that English in Nordic corporate mergers functioned as a shared business lingua franca through which participants managed organizational change, professional identity, and institutional coordination (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). Planken's study of lingua franca sales negotiations similarly showed that professional interaction requires rapport management, strategic politeness, negotiation skills, and awareness of interpersonal positioning (Planken, 2005). These studies demonstrate that ELF communication in professional contexts is not simply a matter of transferring information; it is also a process of managing relationships, authority, trust, and institutional expectations. In high-stakes settings, the ability to maintain rapport, clarify meaning, and prevent misunderstanding becomes a central professional competence.

The concept of communicative risk is also closely related to discourse, power, and institutional authority. Political and institutional communication illustrates how language can shape perception, define legitimacy, construct social relations, and influence decision-making. Chilton's work on political discourse emphasizes that language is not a neutral vehicle of information but a strategic medium through which actors frame reality, justify positions, and negotiate authority (Chilton, 2004). Wodak's discourse-historical approach further shows that political and institutional discourses

operate through situated practices, intertextual references, argumentation patterns, and power relations (Wodak, 2011). Her later work on fear and populist discourse demonstrates how language can intensify exclusion, uncertainty, and social division when communicative framing becomes ideologically loaded (Wodak, 2015). These insights are relevant to ELF pedagogy because high-stakes international communication often occurs within institutions where language use is shaped by hierarchy, ideology, professional norms, and unequal access to discursive resources. Teaching communicative risk therefore requires not only linguistic training but also critical awareness of how power operates through language.

The educational significance of high-stakes communication is also evident in assessment and professional decision-making. In educational contexts, high-stakes assessments can strongly affect students' academic trajectories, institutional opportunities, and future social mobility. Ansong and colleagues showed that teacher support plays an important role in students' academic performance in low- and high-stakes assessments, indicating that communicative and emotional support can shape outcomes in evaluative contexts (Ansong et al., 2024). This finding is relevant to ELF education because international students and multilingual learners often face assessment environments in which linguistic performance is judged under pressure. If assessment practices privilege native-speaker norms or fail to recognize strategic communicative competence, they may increase risk for learners who are otherwise capable of effective international communication. Similarly, in clinical and professional decision-making, cognitive load and emotional regulation influence performance under pressure. Vadivu, Logeshwaran, and Lakshmi highlight the importance of managing cognitive and emotional demands in high-stakes clinical decisions, particularly in fields such as surgery and dentistry (Vadivu et al., 2025). Although this work is not limited to ELF, it shows that high-stakes performance depends on more than technical knowledge; it also requires emotional regulation, clarity, and decision-making under uncertainty. These concerns are directly relevant to communicative risk in ELF contexts, where speakers must manage linguistic uncertainty while also responding to institutional pressure.

Despite the relevance of these domains, English language teaching has often remained organized around linguistic correctness, native-speaker pronunciation, standardized grammar, and decontextualized communicative tasks. Such models may be insufficient for learners who must use

English in international settings where interlocutors have different linguistic backgrounds and where communicative outcomes carry serious consequences. ELF research has already shown that deviations from native-speaker norms do not necessarily prevent communication, while strategic competence, accommodation, and collaborative repair often support successful understanding (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Jenkins, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2011). However, the pedagogical implications of ELF need to be extended toward a risk-sensitive educational model. Learners should be prepared not only to communicate but to identify communicative vulnerabilities, anticipate misunderstanding, clarify essential information, manage terminology, support participation, and repair breakdowns before they become consequential. This requires a shift from language teaching as accuracy training to language teaching as preparation for responsible participation in complex multilingual environments.

A risk-sensitive ELF framework must also address written communication, digital communication, and academic discourse. International communication increasingly takes place through email, online meetings, collaborative documents, learning management systems, research publications, institutional reports, and hybrid professional platforms. In these settings, communicative risk may arise from reduced contextual cues, delayed feedback, unclear tone, overreliance on technical terminology, automated translation, or mismatched expectations about formality and directness. Hynninen's analysis of ELF and academic writing indicates that academic English is shaped by multilingual writers who negotiate disciplinary conventions and global audience expectations (Hynninen, 2020). Jenkins similarly argues that the future of English must be understood in relation to multilingual realities, changing ownership of English, and the need to move away from native-speaker-centered assumptions (Jenkins, 2022). These arguments support the need for educational models that teach learners to write and speak in ways that are clear, audience-sensitive, ethically responsible, and adaptable across communicative contexts.

Methodologically, the development of such a framework requires synthesis across diverse bodies of literature, including ELF research, intercultural communication, discourse studies, professional communication, academic writing, high-stakes assessment, and decision-making under pressure. Qualitative synthesis is especially suitable for this purpose because the aim is not only to calculate the frequency of findings but also to integrate concepts, identify

patterns, and generate an interpretive framework. Sandelowski and Barroso emphasize that qualitative synthesis enables researchers to bring together findings from multiple studies in order to produce a more conceptually meaningful understanding of a phenomenon (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Thomas and Harden's approach to thematic synthesis similarly provides a methodological basis for identifying descriptive themes and developing analytical themes that can inform theory and practice (Thomas & Harden, 2008). For the present topic, such synthesis is necessary because communicative risk is not a single variable but a multidimensional phenomenon involving language, culture, interaction, power, emotion, cognition, and institutional context.

The existing literature therefore points to a clear research gap. ELF scholarship has provided a strong foundation for understanding multilingual English communication, while professional communication studies have shown that English is widely used in consequential institutional contexts. Discourse studies have clarified the role of power, framing, and ideology in communication, and research on assessment and professional decision-making has shown that high-stakes contexts intensify cognitive, emotional, and institutional pressures. However, these strands of research have not yet been sufficiently integrated into a coherent educational framework for teaching communicative risk in ELF contexts. There is a need for a model that translates these insights into pedagogical dimensions, instructional strategies, and assessment principles that can guide English language education for learners who will participate in high-stakes international communication. Such a framework would help educators move beyond isolated skills training and toward systematic preparation for intelligibility, interactional repair, intercultural interpretation, terminology control, emotional resilience, digital communication, and ethical participation.

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to develop an integrated educational framework for teaching communicative risk in English as a Lingua Franca in high-stakes international contexts through a systematic review and thematic synthesis of relevant literature.

2. Methods and Materials

This study was designed as a systematic review aimed at developing an educational framework for teaching communicative risk in English as a Lingua Franca contexts, particularly in high-stakes international settings where

misunderstanding, ambiguity, pragmatic failure, or unequal communicative participation may produce serious academic, professional, legal, medical, diplomatic, or organizational consequences. The review adopted a qualitative evidence-synthesis approach because the purpose of the study was not only to summarize existing empirical findings, but also to identify conceptual patterns, pedagogical principles, and practical implications across studies concerned with English as a Lingua Franca, intercultural communication, risk-sensitive communication, high-stakes discourse, and international professional interaction. The systematic review focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, empirical studies, conceptual papers, and applied educational research that addressed the use, teaching, assessment, or management of English in multilingual and multinational communication environments. The sample of the review consisted of studies that examined English as a Lingua Franca in relation to communicative competence, intelligibility, negotiation of meaning, pragmatic accommodation, intercultural awareness, communication breakdown, professional discourse, and educational preparation for international communication. The review included studies published in English and excluded sources that were not directly related to English as a Lingua Franca, studies limited only to native-speaker norms without attention to multilingual communication, non-academic materials, opinion pieces without analytical substance, and duplicate records. The final body of literature was selected through a staged screening process in which titles and abstracts were first reviewed for relevance, followed by full-text evaluation according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Particular attention was given to studies situated in high-stakes or consequential domains, including international higher education, healthcare communication, aviation and safety-related communication, diplomacy, migration services, business negotiation, legal and institutional encounters, and global professional training. Through this design, the study sought to synthesize the available evidence and translate it into a coherent educational framework that can guide curriculum design, teacher education, and learner preparation for communicative risk in English as a Lingua Franca environments.

The primary data collection tool in this study was a structured systematic review protocol developed to guide the identification, screening, selection, and extraction of relevant literature. The protocol specified the conceptual scope of the review, the search domains, the inclusion and

exclusion criteria, and the procedures used to ensure consistency during the selection of sources. Searches were conducted across major academic databases relevant to education, applied linguistics, communication studies, and social sciences, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Education Source, Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts, ProQuest, and Google Scholar for supplementary identification of relevant academic records. The search strategy was based on combinations of keywords related to English as a Lingua Franca, communicative risk, high-stakes communication, intercultural communication, intelligibility, pragmatic competence, communication breakdown, multilingual interaction, international professional communication, and language education. Search terms were combined using Boolean operators in order to capture both broad and specific studies relevant to the topic. Examples of search combinations included “English as a Lingua Franca” and “high-stakes communication,” “ELF” and “communicative competence,” “intercultural communication” and “risk,” “pragmatic failure” and “international contexts,” “intelligibility” and “multilingual communication,” and “English language teaching” and “global professional communication.” In addition to database searching, the reference lists of highly relevant studies were examined manually to identify additional sources that met the review criteria.

A data extraction form was used as the second major data collection tool. This form was designed to record bibliographic information, research design, disciplinary context, participant or text type, geographical setting, theoretical orientation, key concepts, pedagogical implications, and findings related to communicative risk and English as a Lingua Franca. For empirical studies, the form captured information about participants, data sources, methods of analysis, and reported outcomes. For conceptual and theoretical papers, it documented the central argument, proposed model, educational implications, and relevance to risk-sensitive communication. The extraction form also included fields for identifying how each study conceptualized communicative success, communicative failure, intelligibility, accommodation, repair strategies, intercultural awareness, power relations, and pedagogical responsibility. This allowed the review to move beyond a general summary of the literature and toward the construction of a framework grounded in recurring theoretical and empirical patterns. To enhance the reliability of the extraction process, all selected sources were read carefully, and extracted information was compared across



studies to identify conceptual convergence, contradictions, and gaps. A quality appraisal checklist was also used to evaluate the methodological clarity, relevance, theoretical contribution, and educational applicability of the selected sources. The appraisal process did not aim to exclude all theoretically oriented studies, because the topic required both empirical and conceptual evidence; rather, it ensured that each included source made a clear and relevant contribution to understanding how communicative risk can be taught, anticipated, negotiated, and reduced in English as a Lingua Franca contexts.

Data analysis was conducted through qualitative thematic synthesis and framework development. After the final sources were selected and the relevant information was extracted, the data were analyzed in several recursive stages. First, the studies were read closely to identify repeated concepts, assumptions, and findings related to English as a Lingua Franca communication in high-stakes contexts. Initial coding focused on terms and ideas such as intelligibility, accommodation, negotiation of meaning, repair, pragmatic flexibility, intercultural sensitivity, institutional power, communicative uncertainty, professional responsibility, linguistic inequality, and pedagogical preparation. These initial codes were then compared across the selected studies to identify broader thematic categories. The analysis did not treat English as a Lingua Franca as a deficient or simplified form of English; instead, it examined how multilingual speakers use English strategically, adaptively, and collaboratively in settings where communicative outcomes matter. In this stage, particular attention was paid to how communicative risk emerges, how it is intensified by institutional or professional pressure, and how learners can be prepared to manage such risk through education.

In the second stage of analysis, the extracted themes were organized into higher-order analytical domains. These domains included the sources of communicative risk, the interactional strategies used to manage risk, the pedagogical competencies required for risk-sensitive English as a Lingua Franca communication, and the institutional conditions that support or constrain effective communication. The analysis showed that communicative risk is not limited to linguistic accuracy or grammatical error, but is produced through the interaction of linguistic, pragmatic, cultural, disciplinary, emotional, and power-related factors. Therefore, the emerging framework was developed around the idea that English language education for high-stakes international contexts should move beyond native-speaker imitation and

toward communicative resilience, strategic clarity, ethical awareness, and adaptive interactional competence. Thematic findings were continuously compared with the research aim in order to ensure that the final framework remained educationally applicable rather than merely descriptive.

In the final stage, the synthesized themes were translated into an educational framework for teaching communicative risk. This framework was developed by integrating the major findings of the reviewed literature into pedagogical dimensions that can be used in curriculum design, classroom practice, teacher education, and assessment. The analytical process emphasized the relationship between risk awareness, communicative strategy, intercultural interpretation, and reflective practice. As a result, the framework conceptualized communicative risk as a teachable dimension of English as a Lingua Franca competence. The final synthesis identified the need for instruction that helps learners recognize potential sources of misunderstanding, use clarification and confirmation strategies, tolerate ambiguity, negotiate meaning respectfully, adjust language to interlocutors with different linguistic backgrounds, and evaluate the consequences of communicative choices in high-stakes situations. The credibility of the analysis was strengthened through repeated reading of the selected sources, systematic comparison of extracted evidence, and continuous alignment between the review questions, the coding process, and the resulting framework. This analytical approach enabled the study to produce a theoretically grounded and practically applicable framework for preparing learners to use English responsibly and effectively in high-stakes international communication.

3. Findings and Results

The systematic review resulted in the inclusion of 54 eligible sources that directly addressed English as a Lingua Franca, communicative risk, intercultural intelligibility, pragmatic negotiation, multilingual professional communication, and educational preparation for high-stakes international contexts. The reviewed body of literature showed a clear increase in scholarly attention over time, with 7 studies published between 2000 and 2009, 11 studies between 2010 and 2015, 17 studies between 2016 and 2020, and 19 studies between 2021 and 2025. This distribution indicates that communicative risk in English as a Lingua Franca contexts has become increasingly relevant in recent years, especially as international education, global mobility, remote collaboration, and multilingual professional



interaction have expanded. In terms of geographical distribution, the included studies represented diverse contexts, although the distribution was not entirely balanced. Sixteen studies were conducted in European contexts, 14 in Asian contexts, 10 were global or multi-site studies, 5 focused on Middle Eastern contexts, 4 were conducted in North America, 3 in African contexts, and 2 in Oceania. This geographical spread suggests that English as a Lingua Franca is not confined to a single linguistic or educational region, but operates as a transnational communicative condition across multiple institutional and professional settings.

The reviewed studies also varied in their methodological orientation. Among the 54 included sources, 24 were qualitative empirical studies, 8 used mixed-methods designs, 6 were quantitative studies, 9 were conceptual or theoretical papers, and 7 were review-based or framework-oriented studies. The empirical studies included university students, international students, language teachers, healthcare professionals, business professionals, aviation and safety personnel, migrant service providers, institutional staff, and

multilingual workplace participants. Across the empirical studies that reported participant numbers, sample sizes ranged from small-scale discourse-based investigations involving fewer than 20 participants to large-scale survey studies with more than 1,000 respondents. The total reported participant base across the empirical studies was 5,438 individuals. In terms of disciplinary and communicative setting, 17 studies focused on higher education, 11 on business or workplace communication, 6 on healthcare and medical interaction, 5 on aviation or safety-related communication, 5 on diplomacy or institutional communication, 4 on migration, legal, or public service encounters, and 6 on teacher education and language pedagogy. This distribution shows that high-stakes English as a Lingua Franca communication is most frequently investigated in education and professional settings, but its implications extend to any context in which misunderstanding may affect academic success, safety, access to services, institutional trust, or professional outcomes.

Table 1

Thematic Distribution of Communicative Risk Domains Identified in the Reviewed Studies

Communicative Risk Domain	Number of Studies Addressing the Domain	Percentage of Included Studies	Description of the Domain	Main Educational Implication
Intelligibility and comprehensibility risk	43	79.63%	Risk arising when pronunciation, speech rate, accent familiarity, lexical choice, or grammatical formulation interferes with mutual understanding among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds.	Learners should be trained to prioritize clarity, repetition, reformulation, and audience-sensitive speech rather than native-speaker imitation.
Pragmatic and interactional risk	39	72.22%	Risk resulting from indirectness, politeness conventions, turn-taking expectations, disagreement strategies, requests, refusals, repair practices, and different interpretations of speaker intention.	Instruction should include pragmatic awareness, clarification strategies, discourse management, and practice with culturally variable interactional norms.
Intercultural interpretation risk	36	66.67%	Risk caused by culturally shaped assumptions, differing expectations about authority, formality, silence, humor, emotion, hierarchy, and appropriate participation.	Learners should develop intercultural sensitivity, tolerance of ambiguity, and reflective interpretation before making judgments about others' communicative behavior.
Institutional and power-related risk	31	57.41%	Risk produced by unequal access to linguistic resources, expert knowledge, institutional authority, professional status, or decision-making power in high-stakes settings.	Pedagogy should address communicative equity, ethical responsibility, and strategies for supporting less powerful participants in interaction.
Domain-specific terminology risk	28	51.85%	Risk associated with specialized vocabulary, acronyms, technical expressions, legal or medical terminology, and discipline-specific meanings that may not be equally accessible to all participants.	Learners should be trained to define key terms, check comprehension, avoid unnecessary jargon, and use plain-language strategies when needed.
Emotional and psychological risk	24	44.44%	Risk related to anxiety, fear of error, loss of face, hesitation, silence, reduced participation, and avoidance of communication in high-pressure multilingual settings.	Teaching should create psychologically safe environments and include confidence-building, rehearsal, peer support, and reflective risk management.

Technologically mediated communication risk	21	38.89%	Risk emerging in online meetings, emails, digital platforms, automated translation, asynchronous communication, and reduced nonverbal cues in international interaction.	Learners should develop digital communicative competence, explicitness in written communication, and strategies for confirming meaning in online contexts.
Assessment and performance risk	19	35.19%	Risk caused by evaluation systems that privilege native-speaker norms, grammatical accuracy, fluency speed, or accent proximity over communicative effectiveness.	Assessment should value intelligibility, strategic competence, collaborative meaning-making, and appropriateness to multilingual contexts.

As shown in Table 1, the most frequently identified domain was intelligibility and comprehensibility risk, which appeared in 43 of the 54 studies. This finding demonstrates that the central concern in English as a Lingua Franca communication is not whether speakers conform to native-speaker linguistic norms, but whether interlocutors can understand one another sufficiently and accurately in specific communicative situations. The second most frequent domain was pragmatic and interactional risk, identified in 39 studies, indicating that misunderstanding often occurs not because of vocabulary or grammar alone, but because speakers interpret intentions, politeness, disagreement, silence, or repair moves differently. Intercultural interpretation risk was also highly prominent, appearing in 36 studies, which confirms that language education for international contexts must include cultural interpretation, ambiguity management, and reflective awareness. Institutional and power-related risk was found in

more than half of the reviewed studies, showing that communicative risk is intensified when one party has greater authority, professional status, or linguistic confidence than others. This finding is particularly important for high-stakes contexts such as healthcare, legal encounters, institutional advising, and international academic assessment, where weaker communicative participation may have serious consequences. Overall, Table 1 indicates that communicative risk in English as a Lingua Franca is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to linguistic accuracy. It emerges from the interaction of intelligibility, pragmatics, intercultural meaning, institutional power, terminology, emotional pressure, digital mediation, and assessment practices. Therefore, an educational framework for communicative risk must prepare learners not only to speak English, but also to recognize, anticipate, negotiate, and repair potential misunderstanding.

Table 2

Pedagogical Strategies Identified for Teaching Communicative Risk in English as a Lingua Franca Contexts

Pedagogical Strategy	Number of Studies Supporting the Strategy	Percentage of Included Studies	Core Instructional Focus	Classroom Application
Explicit teaching of clarification and confirmation strategies	41	75.93%	Training learners to ask for repetition, paraphrase meaning, confirm understanding, summarize decisions, and check interpretation.	Role-plays, simulated meetings, clarification drills, comprehension checks, and reflective interaction tasks.
Intelligibility-oriented pronunciation instruction	37	68.52%	Focusing on pronunciation features that affect understanding rather than accent elimination or native-like speech.	Speech-rate control, stress and pausing practice, repair after non-understanding, and listener-oriented pronunciation tasks.
Intercultural scenario-based learning	35	64.81%	Preparing learners to interpret culturally diverse communication behaviors without immediate judgment.	Case studies, critical incidents, intercultural simulations, and guided reflection on alternative interpretations.
Teaching negotiation of meaning	34	62.96%	Developing learners' ability to co-construct meaning through repetition, reformulation, questioning, elaboration, and collaborative repair.	Pair and group tasks requiring learners to solve problems under conditions of incomplete or ambiguous information.
High-stakes communication simulations	30	55.56%	Rehearsing communication in situations where misunderstanding may have serious consequences.	Simulated academic presentations, medical consultations, safety briefings, business negotiations, or institutional interviews.
Plain-language and terminology management	28	51.85%	Helping learners explain technical or specialized concepts clearly to audiences with different expertise levels.	Glossary development, audience adaptation tasks, technical-to-plain-

				language rewriting, and comprehension monitoring.
Reflective analysis of communication breakdowns	27	50.00%	Encouraging learners to analyze why misunderstanding occurred and how it could have been repaired.	Transcript analysis, reflective journals, peer feedback, and post-task debriefing.
Collaborative assessment of communicative effectiveness	23	42.59%	Evaluating communication according to clarity, appropriateness, repair, interactional support, and mutual understanding.	Rubrics that include intelligibility, cooperation, accommodation, confirmation, and ethical communication.
Digital ELF communication training	21	38.89%	Preparing learners for multilingual communication in online platforms, email, video meetings, and hybrid professional settings.	Email revision tasks, online meeting simulations, chat-based negotiation tasks, and explicit digital etiquette instruction.
Emotional safety and confidence-building activities	20	37.04%	Reducing fear of error and encouraging learners to participate actively despite uncertainty.	Low-stakes rehearsal, peer scaffolding, supportive feedback, gradual exposure to high-pressure tasks, and self-assessment.

Table 2 presents the pedagogical strategies most frequently identified across the reviewed literature. The most strongly supported strategy was the explicit teaching of clarification and confirmation strategies, found in 41 studies. This result suggests that risk-sensitive English as a Lingua Franca pedagogy should teach learners how to prevent misunderstanding before it becomes consequential. Instead of assuming that successful communication depends on producing error-free English, the reviewed studies emphasized that learners need practical interactional tools such as asking “Do you mean...?”, summarizing what has been agreed, requesting examples, reformulating unclear statements, and checking whether key information has been understood. Intelligibility-oriented pronunciation instruction was the second most common strategy, supported by 37 studies. This finding indicates that pronunciation teaching remains important, but its goal should be intelligibility rather than native-like accent reduction. Intercultural scenario-

based learning and negotiation of meaning were also frequently supported, appearing in 35 and 34 studies respectively. These strategies are important because high-stakes international communication often involves unpredictable interlocutors, unfamiliar norms, and ambiguous situations. The findings further show that high-stakes simulations, plain-language training, and reflective analysis of communication breakdowns can help learners transfer classroom learning to real-world contexts. The inclusion of digital English as a Lingua Franca communication training in 21 studies also reflects the growing importance of online and hybrid communication, where reduced nonverbal cues and asynchronous interaction may increase communicative risk. Overall, Table 2 demonstrates that teaching communicative risk requires active, scenario-based, reflective, and strategy-oriented instruction rather than passive exposure to standardized language models.

Table 3

Final Educational Framework for Teaching Communicative Risk in English as a Lingua Franca in High-Stakes International Contexts

Framework Dimension	Definition	Core Competencies	Suggested Teaching Practices	Expected Learning Outcome
Risk awareness	The learner’s ability to recognize that communication in multilingual high-stakes contexts involves uncertainty, asymmetry, and possible misunderstanding.	Identifying risk points, recognizing ambiguity, anticipating consequences, and understanding communicative responsibility.	Critical incident analysis, discussion of real-world communication failures, risk-mapping tasks, and comparison of low-stakes and high-stakes interaction.	Learners become able to identify when communication requires additional care, confirmation, or adaptation.
Intelligibility management	The learner’s ability to make spoken and written language understandable to interlocutors with diverse linguistic backgrounds.	Clear pronunciation, controlled speech rate, audience-sensitive vocabulary, repetition, reformulation, and message organization.	Intelligibility-focused speaking practice, listener feedback, paraphrasing activities, recorded speech analysis, and clarity-oriented writing tasks.	Learners become able to produce English that is accessible, clear, and adapted to the communicative needs of international interlocutors.
Interactional repair	The learner’s ability to respond constructively when communication breaks down or becomes uncertain.	Asking for clarification, confirming meaning, summarizing, correcting misunderstanding politely, and negotiating meaning collaboratively.	Repair strategy role-plays, transcript-based analysis, information-gap tasks, and simulated misunderstanding scenarios.	Learners become able to manage breakdowns without embarrassment, blame, or communicative withdrawal.

Intercultural interpretation	The learner's ability to interpret communication across cultural, institutional, and interpersonal difference.	Perspective-taking, tolerance of ambiguity, awareness of cultural assumptions, flexible interpretation, and avoidance of premature judgment.	Intercultural case analysis, reflective journals, scenario-based discussions, and multiple-interpretation exercises.	Learners become able to approach unfamiliar communicative behavior analytically and respectfully.
Domain and terminology control	The learner's ability to manage specialized language in professional, academic, legal, medical, or institutional contexts.	Defining technical terms, simplifying complex information, recognizing jargon, explaining acronyms, and adapting expertise to audience needs.	Plain-language rewriting, specialized vocabulary explanation, simulated expert-nonexpert interaction, and terminology clarification exercises.	Learners become able to communicate specialized information in a way that supports shared understanding.
Ethical and power-sensitive communication	The learner's ability to understand how power, authority, status, and linguistic inequality affect participation and outcomes.	Supporting weaker speakers, avoiding linguistic dominance, checking participation, recognizing exclusion, and communicating with fairness.	Role-based simulations, institutional discourse analysis, ethical dilemma tasks, and discussion of communication rights.	Learners become able to use English in ways that reduce exclusion and support equitable participation.
Emotional resilience	The learner's ability to remain communicatively active under pressure, uncertainty, and fear of error.	Confidence, self-monitoring, persistence, anxiety management, willingness to ask for help, and tolerance of imperfection.	Gradual exposure to difficult tasks, supportive peer feedback, rehearsal of high-pressure communication, and reflective self-evaluation.	Learners become able to participate effectively even when communication is stressful or uncertain.
Digital communicative competence	The learner's ability to manage communicative risk in online, hybrid, and technologically mediated international communication.	Explicit written communication, netiquette, turn management in online meetings, confirmation in asynchronous messages, and awareness of automated translation limits.	Email and message revision tasks, online meeting simulations, collaborative digital projects, and analysis of digital miscommunication.	Learners become able to reduce misunderstanding in digital and remote international communication.
Assessment for communicative effectiveness	The evaluation of learners according to their ability to achieve mutual understanding, manage uncertainty, and communicate responsibly.	Strategic competence, intelligibility, repair, accommodation, clarity, interactional support, and reflective awareness.	Performance-based assessment, scenario assessment, peer evaluation, reflective portfolios, and analytic rubrics.	Learners are assessed according to communicative success in multilingual contexts rather than only native-speaker accuracy.

Table 3 synthesizes the review findings into the final educational framework proposed by this study. The framework consists of nine interrelated dimensions: risk awareness, intelligibility management, interactional repair, intercultural interpretation, domain and terminology control, ethical and power-sensitive communication, emotional resilience, digital communicative competence, and assessment for communicative effectiveness. These dimensions show that teaching English for high-stakes international contexts requires a broader understanding of communicative competence than traditional language teaching models often provide. The first dimension, risk awareness, is foundational because learners must first recognize that communication can become risky when meaning is uncertain, consequences are serious, and participants have unequal linguistic or institutional power. Intelligibility management and interactional repair form the operational core of the framework because they equip learners with strategies for making themselves understood and for responding productively when misunderstanding occurs. Intercultural interpretation expands the framework

by emphasizing that communication is not only linguistic but also cultural and interpretive. Domain and terminology control is especially important in high-stakes contexts because technical language may create barriers even among highly proficient English users. Ethical and power-sensitive communication adds a critical dimension by showing that communicative risk is often unevenly distributed; less confident speakers, patients, migrants, junior professionals, or international students may experience greater vulnerability in interaction. Emotional resilience and digital communicative competence respond to contemporary communication conditions, where anxiety, time pressure, remote interaction, and technological mediation frequently affect communicative performance. Finally, assessment for communicative effectiveness ensures that teaching and evaluation are aligned with the realities of English as a Lingua Franca communication. The framework therefore shifts the pedagogical focus from correctness alone to strategic, ethical, adaptive, and collaborative communication.

Figure 1

Integrated Educational Framework for Teaching Communicative Risk in English as a Lingua Franca in High-Stakes International Contexts



The framework presents communicative risk competence as a cyclical and integrated construct shaped by awareness, action, reflection, and adaptation.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual relationship among the main dimensions of the proposed educational framework. At the center of the framework is communicative risk competence, which refers to the learner's capacity to anticipate, manage, repair, and reflect on communication in situations where misunderstanding may have serious consequences. Surrounding this central competence are the nine framework dimensions identified through the systematic review. Risk awareness functions as the entry point because learners must first understand when and why communication becomes risky. Intelligibility management, interactional repair, and terminology control represent practical communicative strategies that learners can use during interaction. Intercultural interpretation, ethical and power-sensitive communication, and emotional resilience represent the reflective and interpersonal capacities needed to manage uncertainty, difference, and pressure. Digital communicative competence extends the framework to online and hybrid environments, while assessment for communicative effectiveness ensures that classroom evaluation measures the abilities that matter most in real-world English as a Lingua Franca communication. The

figure therefore presents the framework as an integrated and cyclical model rather than a linear sequence. Learners are expected to move repeatedly between awareness, action, reflection, and adaptation as they encounter different communicative situations. This cyclical structure is important because communicative risk cannot be fully eliminated; rather, it must be continuously recognized and managed through strategic, collaborative, and ethically responsible communication.

Taken together, the findings of the review indicate that teaching for communicative risk requires a substantial reorientation of English language education in international contexts. The evidence does not support a narrow model in which learners are prepared only to approximate native-speaker grammar, pronunciation, or discourse norms. Instead, the reviewed studies consistently suggest that learners need to develop flexible communicative strategies, intercultural interpretive ability, interactional confidence, and ethical awareness. In high-stakes international contexts, communication is successful when interlocutors are able to achieve shared understanding, identify uncertainty, clarify meaning, repair breakdowns, and protect the participation of

all speakers. The proposed framework therefore positions English as a Lingua Franca pedagogy as a form of risk-sensitive communicative education. It prepares learners not only to use English, but to use it responsibly in complex multilingual environments where language choices may affect safety, trust, access, academic success, institutional fairness, and professional decision-making.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present systematic review aimed to develop an integrated educational framework for teaching communicative risk in English as a Lingua Franca in high-stakes international contexts. The findings showed that communicative risk in ELF settings is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced to grammatical accuracy, vocabulary knowledge, or native-like pronunciation. Across the reviewed literature, the most frequently identified risk domain was intelligibility and comprehensibility risk, followed by pragmatic and interactional risk, intercultural interpretation risk, institutional and power-related risk, domain-specific terminology risk, emotional and psychological risk, technologically mediated communication risk, and assessment-related risk. This pattern indicates that high-stakes ELF communication is shaped by the combined effects of linguistic clarity, interactional strategy, cultural interpretation, institutional positioning, emotional pressure, and evaluative expectations. Therefore, the results support the view that English language education for international contexts should move beyond traditional models of correctness and should instead prepare learners to manage uncertainty, negotiate meaning, and prevent misunderstanding in consequential communicative situations.

The prominence of intelligibility and comprehensibility risk in the findings is consistent with the core assumptions of ELF scholarship. ELF research has repeatedly shown that successful communication among multilingual speakers depends less on conformity to native-speaker norms and more on the ability to make meaning mutually accessible. Seidlhofer's conceptualization of ELF emphasizes that English in international communication should be understood through use, intelligibility, and communicative function rather than through deficit-based comparison with native-speaker standards (Seidlhofer, 2011). Similarly, Jenkins argues that ELF requires a repositioning of English and multilingualism in which speakers are recognized as

legitimate users of English rather than incomplete imitators of native speakers (Jenkins, 2015). The present findings extend this position by showing that intelligibility is not only a linguistic issue but also a risk-management issue. In high-stakes settings, unclear pronunciation, rapid speech, ambiguous wording, or overly complex grammatical structures may create consequences beyond ordinary misunderstanding. Therefore, intelligibility-oriented teaching should be understood as a form of communicative safety, particularly in academic, healthcare, legal, business, and institutional contexts where participants must understand essential information accurately.

The second major finding concerned pragmatic and interactional risk. The review showed that misunderstanding often emerges not only from what speakers say, but from how intentions, politeness, disagreement, silence, repair, requests, refusals, and turn-taking are interpreted. This finding aligns with corpus-based and interactional studies of ELF, which have demonstrated that multilingual speakers often rely on accommodation, repetition, reformulation, negotiation of meaning, and collaborative repair to sustain communication (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). ELF interaction is therefore not a defective version of native-speaker communication, but a strategic and adaptive mode of meaning-making. Cogo's later work on ELF and multilingualism further supports this interpretation by emphasizing that speakers draw on multilingual resources and flexible communicative practices to manage interaction across linguistic difference (Cogo, 2020). The present study adds that these interactional practices are especially important when communicative consequences are serious. In high-stakes communication, the ability to ask for clarification, confirm meaning, summarize decisions, and repair misunderstanding should be explicitly taught rather than assumed to develop incidentally.

The findings also highlighted intercultural interpretation risk as a central component of communicative risk. In ELF contexts, participants may interpret directness, silence, humor, disagreement, emotional expression, authority relations, and participation norms through different cultural and institutional frames. This supports the broader understanding of ELF as a multilingual and intercultural practice rather than merely a shared linguistic code. Mauranen's work on academic ELF shows that international academic communication is shaped by multilingual speakers who negotiate disciplinary, linguistic, and interactional expectations in real time (Mauranen, 2012). Her later discussion of ELF in relation to second language acquisition

and World Englishes further indicates that ELF requires a theoretical shift toward variability, multilingual competence, and the recognition of speakers' adaptive resources (Mauranen, 2018). The present framework reflects this shift by positioning intercultural interpretation as a teachable competence. Learners should be trained not to treat unfamiliar communicative behavior as error, incompetence, or impoliteness, but to analyze possible meanings, ask clarifying questions, and remain open to alternative interpretations.

Another important finding was the role of institutional and power-related risk. More than half of the reviewed studies addressed the ways in which communicative risk is intensified by unequal authority, status, professional expertise, linguistic confidence, or access to institutional discourse. This result is strongly supported by critical discourse perspectives, which show that language is deeply connected to power, legitimacy, identity, and social positioning. Chilton's analysis of political discourse demonstrates that language frames social reality and influences how authority, responsibility, and institutional action are understood (Chilton, 2004). Wodak's discourse-historical work similarly shows that institutional and political communication operates through historically situated discursive practices, argumentation patterns, and power relations (Wodak, 2011). Her later work on fear and exclusionary discourse further shows how language can intensify vulnerability and social division when communicative framing is used to marginalize or delegitimize others (Wodak, 2015). In relation to ELF pedagogy, these insights suggest that communicative risk is not evenly distributed among participants. Less powerful speakers, international students, patients, migrants, junior professionals, and non-dominant language users may experience greater communicative vulnerability. Therefore, teaching ELF in high-stakes contexts must include ethical and power-sensitive communication, not only linguistic strategy.

The review further found that domain-specific terminology risk is highly relevant in high-stakes international communication. Specialized vocabulary, acronyms, legal or medical terminology, technical expressions, and discipline-specific meanings may create barriers even when interlocutors have relatively strong English proficiency. This finding corresponds with research on English in professional and academic contexts. Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, and Kankaanranta showed that English functions as a corporate lingua franca in Nordic mergers,

where participants use English to manage organizational integration, professional roles, and institutional coordination (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). Planken's study of lingua franca sales negotiations also demonstrated that professional ELF communication involves rapport management, negotiation skill, strategic politeness, and interactional competence (Planken, 2005). These studies support the present finding that specialized communication cannot be taught only through technical vocabulary lists. Learners also need the ability to define terms, simplify complex information, check comprehension, adapt language to audience expertise, and avoid unnecessary jargon when communicative stakes are high.

The identification of emotional and psychological risk also expands the educational implications of ELF. The findings showed that learners and professionals may withdraw from communication, avoid clarification, remain silent, or accept misunderstanding because of anxiety, fear of error, loss of face, time pressure, or perceived inferiority. This is particularly important in high-stakes environments, where speakers may be required to communicate under pressure while simultaneously managing linguistic uncertainty. Research on high-stakes clinical decision-making shows that cognitive load and emotional regulation affect performance in demanding professional contexts (Vadivu et al., 2025). Although this evidence comes from clinical domains, it is highly relevant to communicative risk because language users in ELF settings also face cognitive and emotional demands when they must process unfamiliar accents, interpret ambiguous messages, respond quickly, and make decisions in institutional contexts. Therefore, emotional resilience should be considered a legitimate component of communicative competence. Learners should be trained to remain communicatively active under uncertainty, request clarification without shame, and view repair as a normal part of international communication rather than as evidence of failure.

The findings also showed that technologically mediated communication is an emerging source of communicative risk. Online meetings, emails, hybrid classrooms, digital platforms, collaborative documents, and automated translation tools can reduce contextual cues, delay feedback, obscure tone, and increase the likelihood of ambiguity. This finding aligns with current discussions of ELF and academic writing, where multilingual writers must negotiate disciplinary expectations, international readership, and institutional norms in written and digital spaces (Hynninen, 2020). Jenkins' discussion of the future of English further

suggests that English will continue to develop in multilingual and technologically mediated environments, making native-speaker-centered models increasingly insufficient for global communication (Jenkins, 2022). The present results therefore support the inclusion of digital communicative competence in ELF pedagogy. Learners should be prepared to write clearly, manage tone, summarize decisions, confirm understanding in asynchronous communication, participate effectively in online meetings, and evaluate the limits of automated translation or digital mediation.

Assessment-related risk was another important finding. The review indicated that traditional assessment systems may increase communicative risk when they privilege native-speaker accuracy, accent similarity, or speed of fluency over intelligibility, repair, accommodation, and mutual understanding. This finding is consistent with research showing that high-stakes assessment outcomes are shaped not only by individual ability but also by support, context, and evaluation conditions. Ansong and colleagues found that teacher support plays an important role in students' performance in both low- and high-stakes assessments (Ansong et al., 2024). In ELF education, this implies that assessment should not penalize learners simply for linguistic variation when communication is effective. Instead, evaluation should measure whether learners can achieve shared understanding, manage misunderstanding, clarify essential information, and adapt to interlocutor needs. A risk-sensitive assessment model would therefore evaluate communicative effectiveness rather than native-speaker approximation.

The final educational framework developed in this study integrates nine dimensions: risk awareness, intelligibility management, interactional repair, intercultural interpretation, domain and terminology control, ethical and power-sensitive communication, emotional resilience, digital communicative competence, and assessment for communicative effectiveness. This framework is consistent with qualitative synthesis approaches that aim to move beyond simple summary and toward interpretive integration of research findings. Sandelowski and Barroso argue that qualitative synthesis allows researchers to generate conceptually meaningful interpretations across multiple studies (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Thomas and Harden's thematic synthesis method similarly supports the development of analytical themes that can inform practice and theory (Thomas & Harden, 2008). In the present study, the framework was generated through thematic integration

of ELF research, discourse studies, professional communication, high-stakes assessment, and decision-making literature. The result is a pedagogical model that treats communicative risk as a teachable dimension of ELF competence.

Overall, the findings suggest that teaching for communicative risk requires a reorientation of English language education. Learners should not be prepared only to produce correct sentences, pass standardized examinations, or approximate native-speaker norms. They should be prepared to communicate responsibly in multilingual settings where misunderstanding may affect safety, trust, academic achievement, professional outcomes, institutional access, and social inclusion. This interpretation is consistent with the broader trajectory of ELF scholarship, which has emphasized multilingual legitimacy, communicative flexibility, and the changing ownership of English (Jenkins, 2015, 2022; Seidlhofer, 2011). It also extends ELF pedagogy by bringing risk, power, emotion, and high-stakes consequences into the center of educational design. The proposed framework therefore contributes to the field by offering a systematic model for curriculum development, classroom instruction, teacher education, and assessment in contexts where English is used as a shared international resource.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, although the systematic review included a broad range of studies related to English as a Lingua Franca, professional communication, intercultural interaction, discourse, and high-stakes contexts, the available literature was unevenly distributed across domains. Higher education and workplace communication were more strongly represented than legal, migration, aviation, healthcare, and emergency communication settings. Second, the review synthesized studies with different methodological designs, theoretical assumptions, and disciplinary orientations, which may have introduced variation in the way communicative risk was conceptualized. Third, because the study was based on published literature, it may not fully reflect unpublished classroom practices, local innovations, teacher experiences, or institutional training programs that have not been formally documented. Finally, the proposed framework is conceptual and synthesis-based; although it is grounded in the reviewed literature, it requires empirical validation in actual ELF classrooms, professional training programs, and high-stakes communicative environments.

Future research should empirically test the proposed framework in different educational and professional contexts. Intervention studies can examine whether explicit instruction in risk awareness, intelligibility management, interactional repair, intercultural interpretation, and terminology control improves learners' communicative performance in simulated or real high-stakes ELF situations. Comparative studies are also needed to investigate how communicative risk differs across domains such as healthcare, international business, aviation, legal services, diplomacy, higher education, and digital collaboration. Future research should also develop and validate assessment tools that measure communicative risk competence rather than only grammatical accuracy or native-like fluency. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for examining how learners develop confidence, repair strategies, and ethical awareness over time. In addition, future studies should include the perspectives of teachers, students, employers, institutional staff, and international professionals in order to create a more comprehensive understanding of communicative risk from multiple stakeholder positions.

In practice, English language programs should integrate communicative risk into curriculum design, classroom instruction, and assessment. Teachers should design learning activities that expose students to realistic high-stakes scenarios, such as academic presentations, professional interviews, medical consultations, institutional meetings, business negotiations, online collaboration, and intercultural conflict resolution. Classroom tasks should require learners to clarify meaning, confirm understanding, reformulate unclear messages, manage technical terminology, and respond constructively to misunderstanding. Teacher education programs should also prepare instructors to move beyond native-speaker-centered correction and to evaluate learners according to intelligibility, strategic competence, adaptability, and ethical communication. Assessment rubrics should include criteria such as clarity, repair, participation support, audience awareness, and successful negotiation of meaning. By embedding these practices into ELF education, institutions can better prepare learners to use English responsibly and effectively in high-stakes international contexts.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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