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Evaluating the Student Facilitator and Explain (SFE) Model for Enhancing Critical Thinking in *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* at University Level

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Abstract

This study qualitatively evaluates the use of the Student Facilitator and Explain (SFE) model in enhancing students' cognitive skills in the '*Ilm al-Ma'ânî* course at the university level. It further explores the correlation between the implementation of the SFE model and student learning outcomes, particularly regarding their comprehension of '*Ilm al-Ma'ânî* concepts, communication skills, and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), in contrast to traditional instructional approaches. The data were gathered through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of relevant academic documents to gain insight into how the SFE model functions and influences the development of students' thinking abilities. The findings suggest that the model significantly improves students' critical, analytical, and creative thinking by actively involving them as facilitators and explainers among their peers. In addition, the model promotes interactive learning and deeper cognitive engagement, thereby enhancing the overall quality of classroom instruction. The study concludes by recommending broader implementation of the SFE model in higher education, particularly in courses that traditionally rely on classical methods, to support the growth of students' thinking and independent learning skills.

Keywords: *Student Facilitator and Explain (SFE), pedagogical implementation, 'Ilm al-Ma'ânî, higher-order thinking skills (HOTS)*

Introduction

'Ilm al-Ma'ânî, as one of the core disciplines within the study of language and literature, demands a deep understanding that is not only theoretical but also practical. In higher education, particularly in teacher education programs, *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* is a compulsory subject aimed at reinforcing students' competence in Arabic linguistics. However, the teaching of *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* faces several challenges, including students'

prior knowledge, instructional materials, limited textbooks, and underdeveloped learning media, all of which contribute to a stagnant learning experience that has remained unchanged over time.

The current instructional practices for *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* in universities are often unidirectional and lack of active student engagement. This results in a poor grasp of fundamental concepts, limited critical thinking, and underdeveloped communication skills among students. Therefore, there is a need for teaching strategies that enhance student participation and foster more active, creative, and critical learning environments. The Student Facilitator and Explain (SFE) model, which is part of the broader cooperative learning approach, emphasizes student activity in constructing their own knowledge (Suprijono, 2009). This model positions students not merely as recipients of information, but as facilitators who are responsible for explaining and guiding discussions among peers (Trianto). Such an approach is expected to make the learning process in *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* more interactive and profound, thus improving students' material comprehension and higher order thinking skills (HOTS) (Widodo et al., 2021).

In addition, the rapid development of technology and the evolving paradigm of global education require innovation in teaching methods to meet the increasingly diverse needs of students. The SFE model responds to this need by positioning students as active agents in their learning, rather than passive objects (Setiawan, 2018). Consequently, the model is anticipated to stimulate learning motivation and significantly increase student engagement (Usman et al., 2019).

Research across various disciplines has demonstrated the effectiveness of the SFE model in enhancing HOTS—particularly in developing students' critical, analytical, and creative thinking abilities. Nevertheless, there has been relatively little research into the application of this model in the context of *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî*. For instance, the study titled *Improving Students' Critical-Thinking Skills Through Student Facilitator and Explaining Model in Momentum and Impulse Topic* by Malik et al. (2018), an experimental study supported by pre- and post-tests, demonstrated that SFE enhances critical thinking in science education. Another study addressed students' difficulties in understanding *Balâghah* and proposed the "think-talk-write" strategy as a solution, which proved effective in improving learning outcomes (Widiatmika, 2015). Both of these studies, although quantitative in nature, emphasize the vital role of teaching models and strategies in boosting student motivation, creativity, and academic achievement.

The present research is expected to contribute practical insights for developing instructional methods and enhancing the quality of education in higher learning institutions, especially in the teaching of *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî*. A qualitative evaluation at the university level is essential for exploring students' subjective experiences and the dynamics of the learning process—factors often overlooked by quantitative data (Luo & Chan, 2022). Qualitative inquiry is strongly supported in the literature as a means of gaining a holistic view of instructional effectiveness, as well as identifying potential barriers and solutions (Nurbayan, 2014). Such an approach also holds great potential for curriculum development and realistic assessment of intercultural competencies, particularly in measuring soft skills and the dynamics of social interaction.

Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) refer to advanced cognitive processes such as analysis, evaluation, and creation (Nugroho). Unlike lower-order thinking skills, which involve only remembering or understanding information, HOTS require students to apply, connect, and critically examine various concepts and pieces of information. In the learning context, HOTS are essential for equipping students with the ability to solve problems, think critically, and innovate—skills that are indispensable in today's dynamic and complex world.

The application of learning models such as Student Facilitator and Explain (SFE), which places students in active facilitator roles, strongly supports the development of HOTS. Through discussion, explanation, and group facilitation, students are encouraged not only to understand the material, but also to critically and reflectively process and apply it.

This study focuses on examining how *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* is taught at the university level, how the SFE model is applied to foster HOTS, and what outcomes the model yields in relation to these cognitive skills. The study also includes a qualitative evaluation of SFE implementation, aiming to provide a comprehensive account of the teaching dynamics in *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî*. Therefore, particular attention is given to the qualitative dimensions of this research.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design (Moleong, 2018) with a case study approach (Yin, 2008), aiming to obtain an in-depth and holistic understanding of the implementation of the Student Facilitator and Explain (SFE) model in the teaching of *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* and its contribution to the development of students' higher order thinking skills (HOTS). The research subjects consist of students enrolled in the *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* course during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, encompassing two classes with a total of 50 participants. The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling—also referred to as judgmental or selective sampling—which was chosen because it enables the researcher to intentionally select participants based on their relevance, knowledge, and suitability to the research objectives.

Data were collected through multiple methods, including in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The documents analyzed comprised lecture texts, grade records, reports, and other academic materials relevant to the study (Rahmat, 2023). In addition, photographs and video recordings were utilized as complementary visual data to provide rich contextual and descriptive insights into the learning process, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings. The triangulation of these data sources ensured a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and minimized potential bias.

The data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of four interrelated components: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Mulyana, 2004). These stages were applied continuously and recursively throughout the research process, allowing for systematic categorization of information, the identification of emerging themes, and the generation of meaningful interpretations. This iterative process enabled

the researcher to refine insights, maintain analytical rigor, and develop conclusions that are empirically grounded and theoretically informed.

In order to ensure trustworthiness, this study employed several validation strategies, including methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, and careful documentation of research procedures (Miles & Huberman, 1992). These strategies were designed to enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study, thereby ensuring that the findings accurately represent the lived experiences of the participants and can serve as a reliable contribution to the field of Islamic education and language studies.

Result and Discussion

Teaching 'Ilm al-Ma'ânî in Higher Education

The course *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî*, a branch of *Balâghah*—which itself is composed of three subfields: *Ma'ânî*, *Badî'*, and *Bayân*—is part of the core curriculum in the Arabic Language Education (Pendidikan Bahasa Arab/PBA) program. It is classified under literary studies and is a mandatory course aimed at strengthening students' linguistic competencies. To enroll in this course, students are required to have passed foundational subjects such as *nahwu* and *sharf* (Tim Penyusun, 2024).

Unlike students enrolled in the Arabic Literature (Bahasa dan Sastra Arab/BSA) program, where *Balâghah* is divided into three separate subjects across three semesters, students in the PBA program study *Balâghah* in two consecutive semesters. *Ilm al-Ma'ânî* is offered in the even semester, while *'Ilm al-Bad î' wa al-Bayân* is covered in the odd semester. This condensed structure poses its own challenges, particularly in selecting appropriate material and balancing various pedagogical considerations, such as the limited availability of modern and contextually relevant learning resources, time constraints, curricular priorities, and the wide variation in students' proficiency in basic Arabic which significantly affects their grasp of advanced materials.

A major challenge lies in the diverse backgrounds of students, who enter the program with different educational experiences and varying levels of Arabic language proficiency. Some students come from general high schools with no prior exposure to Arabic; others are graduates of Islamic schools (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri) with limited foundational Arabic; and some have studied in traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) where Arabic is part of the curriculum (Zubaidah, 2020). While this diversity presents difficulties, it also serves as a motivator for instructors to teach Arabic in general and *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* in particular.

The teaching of *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* in higher education is shaped by several interrelated challenges. The compressed curriculum reduces opportunities for deep practice and reflection, while the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students create both difficulties and opportunities for peer learning (Andini, 2016). Traditional lecture-based methods often fail to cultivate higher-order thinking, highlighting the need for more active strategies such as the SFE model, supported by differentiated instruction and formative assessment (Taylor, 2015). Limited access to modern resources and the heavy reliance on classical texts further restrict engagement, requiring the development of

tiered materials and blended approaches that integrate technology. These challenges also call for sustained professional development for lecturers, including training in cooperative learning, rubric design, and qualitative evaluation (Usman et al., 2019). Addressing these issues holistically can transform *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* into a platform for developing students' analytical, evaluative, and creative competencies in line with the goals of higher education.

Today's educational landscape emphasizes differentiated instruction (Herwina), which requires educators to be able to teach all learners, regardless of their prior knowledge or backgrounds (Kristiani et al., 2021). Learning is a fundamental right of every individual, each with distinct styles and needs. Another challenge relates to the expected learning outcomes of the academic program (Capaian Pembelajaran Lulusan/CPL). Given the compressed timeframe and complex content, instructors must navigate significant pedagogical and curricular pressures (Tim Penyusun, 2021).

The SFE Model and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)

Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) refer to the ability to think critically, analytically, creatively, reflectively, evaluatively, and to solve problems—skills that go beyond basic comprehension and memorization (Lastuti). These skills begin with the development of lower-order thinking abilities, such as remembering and understanding, and progress to more complex cognitive skills, including applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Qadir, 2014). This progression aligns with Bloom's Taxonomy, which serves as a foundational framework in education. HOTS are particularly crucial in higher education, where students are expected to become independent and innovative thinkers (Amiri, 2019).

The Student Facilitator and Explain (SFE) model is a cooperative learning method in which students are not only active learners but also take on the roles of facilitators and peer educators (Suprijono 2009). This method is especially suitable for *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî*, a discipline that demands students to be more creative, motivated, and critical in their thinking (Fathoni, 2014). The model encourages several key outcomes:

1. **Cognitive activation**, as students must fully understand the material in order to explain it to others. Students must first master the subject matter before explaining it to peers. This requirement ensures deeper cognitive engagement and prevents superficial understanding, as they are challenged to reconstruct knowledge in their own words.
2. **Development of analytical and synthetic skills**, since students need to organize their knowledge for clear presentation. The process of preparing explanations and facilitating discussions obliges students to analyze concepts, synthesize information from various sources, and structure it logically (Herwina, 2021). This activity mirrors the cognitive processes needed for analysis and creation within the HOTS framework (Bloom's Taxonomy).
3. **Enhanced evaluation and reflection**, as acting as facilitators requires them to solve problems and respond to peer inquiries. Acting as facilitators requires students to anticipate questions, evaluate peer responses, and provide

constructive feedback. This evaluative process strengthens critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to reflect on different perspectives (Febriani1 & Anasruddin, 2020).

4. **Deep and meaningful learning experiences**. ince learning is reinforced by the act of teaching others, the SFE model minimizes rote memorization and promotes meaningful internalization of knowledge. It transforms passive reception into active construction of understanding (Diputera et al., 2024).
5. **Collaborative learning**, which promotes critical discussion and collective problem solving. The model naturally fosters teamwork, as students are required to engage in dialogue, debate, and collective problem solving. This interaction not only enhances comprehension but also cultivates openness to alternative viewpoints.
6. **Soft skills development**, such as communication, leadership, and responsibility, all of which contribute to HOTS. Beyond cognitive outcomes, students develop essential non-cognitive competencies such as communication, leadership, responsibility, empathy, and negotiation skills. These are indispensable in 21st-century education and directly support the application of HOTS in both academic and real-world contexts.

The implementation of the SFE model in this study took place in the fourth semester of the 2024/2025 academic year in the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program. The topics chosen were *musnad* and *musnad ilaih*, as well as *muthlâq wa muqayyad*. The selected materials for this course, to be covered over 16 sessions, are as follows:

Table 1. List of selected materials

بين علم المعاني والتداولية Pragmatics	The *Taqâbuliyah* Method
تطور علم البلاغة والعلماء فيه	*Qawâʿid*, Translation, and Discussion
البلاغة	*Qawâʿid*, Translation, and Discussion
الفصاحة (الكلمة، والكلام، والمتكلم)	*Qawâʿid*, Translation, and Discussion
تقسيم الكلام (الخبري والإنشائي)	مناقشة واستشهاد بالآيات القرآنية
الخبري وأنواعه حسب أغراض (استشهاد بالآيات القرآنية)	مناقشة واستشهاد بالآيات القرآنية
الإنشائي (الطلبي وغير الطلبي)	مناقشة واستشهاد بالآيات القرآنية
الأمر والنهي والاستفهام، التمني، النداء (استشهاد بالآيات القرآنية)	مناقشة واستشهاد بالآيات القرآنية
تعريف لغة واصطلاحا مع المثل من الكتب ثم تحليل الآيات القرآنية.	Application of the SFE Model
مسند ومسند إليه	Application of the SFE Model
الاطلاق والمقيد (١٠ تفاصيل مقيدة)	PJBL (Project-Based Learning)

PJBL (Project-Based Learning)	القصر
PJBL (Project-Based Learning)	الفصل والوصل
PJBL (Project-Based Learning)	الإيجاز والإطناب والمساواة

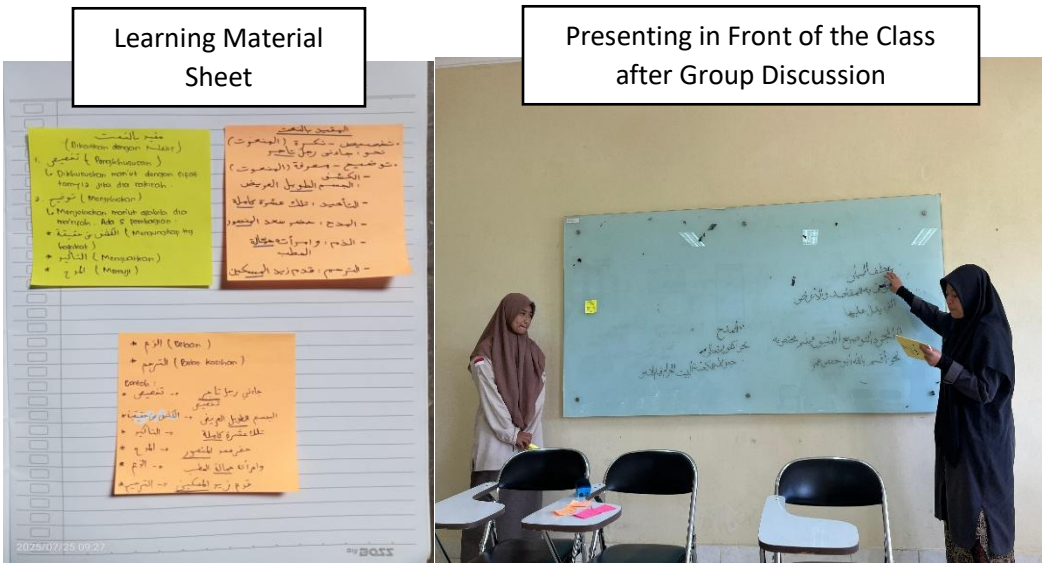
The selection of these materials is based on the fact that they involve numerous detailed aspects requiring in-depth explanation. Moreover, the group-based implementation allows each team to actively engage in explaining the content in both Arabic and Indonesian, thereby fulfilling the intended learning objectives. The steps taken by the instructor are as follows:

1. Dividing students into groups while introducing the assigned material to be studied collectively, to explain the learning objectives, provide the scope of the material, and communicate the expected outcomes, to establish initial tasks, read the instructions, and plan the division of responsibilities, starting from understanding and application (C2–C3) and progressing toward analysis (C4) as they begin to organize information.
2. Asking students to stand and count off from one to ten in order to form ten randomly assigned groups, preventing students from choosing their own teammates, Students are asked to stand and count off from one to ten, forming ten randomly assigned groups. This strategy prevents cliques, ensures diversity within groups, and fosters interaction among students from different backgrounds. The instructor's role is to manage the procedure efficiently to avoid unnecessary time loss while reinforcing the expectation of cooperation. For the students, this step requires adapting to new group dynamics, identifying the strengths and knowledge assets of each member, and establishing collaborative rapport. Pedagogically, this process cultivates social skills that underpin higher-order thinking, such as engaging in analytical discussions, evaluating ideas, and negotiating multiple perspectives.
3. Distributing colored paper to each group as identifiers. The distribution of colored paper as group identifiers serves multiple pedagogical purposes. It supports classroom management by providing a clear visual marker for each group, thereby simplifying the distribution of tasks, feedback, and assessment. For the instructor, these identifiers function as practical tools for organizing activities and monitoring student performance. For students, the group identity facilitates coordination, enhances collaboration, and provides a symbolic sense of belonging, which strengthens group cohesion. From a cognitive perspective, this practice encourages accountability within groups, fostering reflective and evaluative thinking processes (C5) that align with the development of higher-order thinking skills.
4. Guiding each group to read sourcebooks and related journal articles, then extract key points in both Arabic and Indonesian and read sourcebooks and journal articles, then extract key points in both Arabic and Indonesian, serves as an important strategy to strengthen students' bilingual academic skills. This activity trains them in producing concise academic summaries while also

encouraging deeper comprehension of the material. The instructor plays a central role in providing carefully selected texts, offering guidelines for information extraction—such as identifying main ideas, supporting arguments, and linguistic examples—and demonstrating effective note-taking techniques, including annotating and concept mapping. For students, the task involves engaging in critical reading, analyzing argumentative structures, and formulating bilingual summaries. Pedagogically, this step is highly relevant to the development of higher order thinking skills, particularly analysis (C4) and evaluation (C5), and it also prepares the foundation for creation (C6) when followed by assignments that require original outputs.

5. Having students present the results of their discussions and readings in front of the class, serves multiple purposes: it functions as a platform for knowledge dissemination, provides practice in academic communication, and creates a mechanism for intergroup learning. The instructor's role in this stage is to facilitate the question-and-answer session, act as a moderator, and provide formative feedback. For students, the activity involves presenting their findings, responding to questions, and both giving and receiving constructive feedback. From a pedagogical perspective, this stage directly supports higher-order thinking skills, particularly evaluation (C5) through critical engagement with peer input, and, when students are required to generate new arguments or original products, it can extend to the level of creation (C6) as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Student presentation

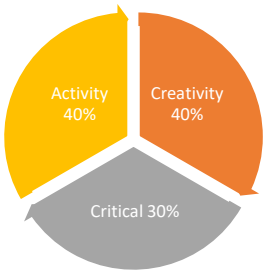


SFE Model Outcomes in Relation to HOTS

The Student Facilitator and Explain (SFE) model is a cooperative learning strategy (Suprijono) that emphasizes three key elements: student activity, creativity, and critical thinking. These traits correspond to the levels of HOTS based on Bloom's

Taxonomy: Analyzing (C4), Evaluating (C5), and Creating (C6) (Zubaidah, et al.). Based on the observations and interviews conducted with fourth-semester students during the 2024/2025 academic year, the findings can be categorized as follows:

Figure 2. Interview Data Results



The data in the figure above demonstrate that the SFE model positively impacts students' activeness, creativity, and critical thinking in *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî*, learning. These insights are drawn from the diverse responses gathered through a sample group that addressed the research questions. With regard to HOTS, the application of the SFE model appears to have reached the levels of analyzing (C4) and evaluating (C5), although it has not yet fully attained the creating level (C6).

This indicates that while students are able to engage in higher-order processes such as breaking down concepts, comparing arguments, and assessing the quality of explanations, they still face challenges in generating original ideas or producing innovative solutions. The limited attainment of the creation stage (C6) may be attributed to factors such as the novelty of the SFE approach in *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* learning, the students' reliance on traditional instructional methods in prior experiences, or insufficient scaffolding to encourage creative output. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that SFE successfully builds a solid foundation for analytical and evaluative thinking, which are essential prerequisites for fostering creative capacities in subsequent learning cycles. Therefore, future iterations of the model could benefit from the integration of project-based tasks, problem-solving activities, or collaborative design assignments aimed specifically at enhancing the creative dimension of HOTS.

A Qualitative Evaluation of Learning through the Student Facilitator and Explain (SFE) Model

One of the essential competencies of a university lecturer is pedagogical competence, which entails not only the ability to design instruction but also the capacity to evaluate it (Putri Mtd et al., 2023). Evaluation, in this context, refers to the process of assessing learning outcomes in order to determine the effectiveness of instructional implementation and to serve as a reference for future improvements (Arifin). In educational settings, evaluation plays a vital role, standing on equal footing with the learning process itself (Arikunto). If education is understood as a process of behavioral change in students, then evaluation becomes key to monitoring and measuring that transformation (Putri et al. 2023). It involves a series of activities that include data collection, analysis, and interpretation to determine the extent to which learning objectives have been achieved by students (Sudjana 1989). A robust evaluation system

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helps clearly articulate the quality of instruction, thereby assisting educators in planning and refining teaching strategies (Sukardi 2011).

Qualitative assessment serves not only to measure the outcomes or effectiveness of a program but also functions as a learning tool that encourages students to reflect on their own development. It is an evaluative approach that relies on descriptive data—such as interview transcripts, observations, and documents—to gain a deep understanding of a given phenomenon. Thus, evaluation becomes an ongoing learning process rather than a mere assessment of end results.

Qualitative methods are designed to provide deep insights into phenomena, uncover meaning and context, develop hypotheses and theories, and enhance the quality of educational interventions. Techniques such as interviews, written reflections, learning journals, and in-depth discussions offer richer and deeper learning experiences. These approaches assess not only students' knowledge, but also their attitudes, values, and skills (Luo and Chan 2022). This stands in contrast to quantitative assessments, which are more likely to measure fixed, numerical aspects of learning.

Qualitative evaluation of instruction utilizing the SFE model focuses on the overall development of student competencies and the dynamics of the learning interactions involved. Such evaluation considers not only the final outcomes but also the learning process itself—how students participate actively as facilitators and explainers in their groups, how constructive collaboration unfolds, and how reflective thinking emerges. The findings from this evaluation provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the SFE model in fostering motivation, engagement, higher-order thinking skills, and learner autonomy.

Additionally, qualitative evaluation provides valuable insights for lecturers in terms of pedagogical reflection and professional growth. By analyzing narratives, observations, and student reflections, lecturers can recognize both the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional design. This recursive process not only validates the effectiveness of the SFE model but also offers actionable feedback that informs future innovations in *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî* instruction. Ultimately, the integration of qualitative evaluation ensures that assessment is aligned with the broader goals of higher education—equipping students with the analytical, evaluative, and creative capacities required in a complex and rapidly evolving academic and professional landscape.

Conclusion

This study affirms that the Student Facilitator and Explain (SFE) instructional model offers an effective solution to the challenges encountered in teaching *'Ilm al-Ma'ânî*, particularly in classrooms characterized by students with diverse academic backgrounds. The implementation of this model successfully transforms students from passive recipients into active, creative, and critical participants. Concretely, the SFE model has proven capable of promoting students' attainment of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), specifically at the levels of analyzing (C4) and evaluating (C5). At these stages, students demonstrate not only an understanding of the material but also the

ability to dissect and critically assess it in depth. Moreover, the process inherently cultivates essential soft skills such as communication, leadership, and teamwork.

Nevertheless, findings indicate that achieving the creating level (C6)—the highest tier in HOTS—remains a challenge within the current application of the SFE model. Thus, the study concludes that while SFE serves as a valuable pedagogical bridge for making classical studies more relevant and engaging, it still requires refinement. As a follow-up, it is recommended that the SFE model be integrated with other instructional approaches, such as creative project-based assignments, to provide stronger stimuli for students to produce original work and fully master the spectrum of higher-order thinking skills.

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