

Transformation of The Role of Sociology Teachers in The Deep Learning Ecosystem (Case Study of High School Negeri 3 Panyabungan)

Khoirul Amri Rambe*, Desri Nora

Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

khoirulamrirambe0602@gmail.com*

Abstract

The transformation of teachers' roles in the Deep Learning Ecosystem is key to creating meaningful, collaborative, and student-centered learning experiences. This study aims to analyze the changing roles of Sociology teachers at High School Negeri 3 Panyabungan in implementing Deep Learning in the 2025/2026 academic year. The approach used was qualitative, with observation, interviews, and documentation methods for Sociology teachers and the vice principal for curriculum. The results show that Sociology teachers transformed in three main dimensions: as activators who spark students' curiosity through reflective questions and contextual problems, as builders of a learning culture that fosters a collaborative and empathetic environment, and as collaborators who play an active role with other teachers in designing cross-disciplinary projects. This implementation demonstrates a paradigm shift from content-based learning to competency-based learning and self-reflection. The results of this study confirm that teacher readiness and institutional support are crucial for the success of role transformation in the Deep Learning Ecosystem.

Keywords: Teacher Transformation, Deep Learning, Sociology, Independent Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Education in the 21st century faces increasingly complex challenges, demanding critical, collaborative, and reflective thinking skills from students (Damanik & Muhammad, 2025). It is not enough to just master the theory, students must also be able to apply social concepts in real life through a meaningful learning process (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). In the Indonesian context, the National Education System emphasizes that education aims to develop the potential of students to become people who are faithful, pious, have noble character, and have knowledge and skills that are useful for themselves and society (Republik of Indonesia, 2003).

Sociology as a subject plays a crucial role in achieving these goals because it focuses on the analysis of social structures, values, and human interactions within society (Hasan, 2012). However, in practice, Sociology instruction in many schools is still dominated by conventional approaches such as lectures and memorization, making it difficult for students to relate social theories to the realities of everyday life (Didi, 2018). Many studies have shown that overly teacher-centered learning methods tend to reduce students' analytical skills and engagement with social issues (Faridah, 2022).

In response to these challenges, the *Deep Learning* approach has emerged, emphasizing conceptual understanding, critical reflection, and the application of values and knowledge in real-life social contexts (Fitrah et al., 2025). This approach encourages students to connect learning experiences to everyday life

through collaborative and contextual activities. *Deep Learning* has also been shown to improve higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), curiosity, and motivation in students at various levels of education (Soca, 2020).

A major transformation within the *Deep Learning* approach occurs in the role of teachers. Teachers are no longer merely conveyors of information but have become activators, culture builders, and collaborators (Suyanto, 2025). As *activators*, teachers spark students' curiosity and active participation through question-and-answer strategies, discussions, and social projects. As *Culture Builders*, teachers create a learning environment that supports open interaction and mutual respect (Redana, 2023). Meanwhile, as *Collaborators*, teachers collaborate with colleagues, students, and the external community in designing contextual and relevant learning (Mulyanto et al., 2025).

This model aligns with the principle of New Pedagogies for *Deep Learning* (NPD). which emphasizes the importance of the teacher's role as a facilitator who fosters a collaborative learning culture. The shift in the teacher's role toward *Deep Learning Pedagogy* is considered capable of improving 21st century skills such as creativity, communication, and collaboration across social contexts. In Indonesia, the implementation of *Deep Learning* has been echoed since the new government era under the auspices of Prof. Abdul Mu'ti, M.Ed. as Minister of Primary and Secondary Education. One school that has implemented this approach is SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan, beginning in the 2025/2026 academic year. This school has conducted teacher training, dissemination, and integrative planning to adapt the new learning approach to student characteristics.

The previous study conducted by Greenhow & Galvin (2020) provides a vital contextual foundation regarding the reality of teacher adaptability within Indonesia's transitioning educational landscape. Through a qualitative case study focusing on the readiness of social science educators including Sociology teachers this research captures the emotional and professional dynamics teachers face when confronted with the paradigm shifts of *Merdeka Curriculum*. Amidst the mandate to transform their role from a central source of information into humanistic mentors and facilitators, educators are required to step out of their conventional teaching comfort zones. They must transition toward a *Deep Learning Ecosystem* that centers on fulfilling the unique needs and potential of individual students.

However, the narrative uncovered in their research reveals that the transformation toward a *Deep Learning Ecosystem* is often fraught with structural and cultural challenges. In the Indonesian context, Wijaya et al. (2022) highlight a significant gap between the idealism of the new curriculum and the realities on the ground, such as the uneven distribution of technological infrastructure and a deeply ingrained culture of rote memorization within the school environment. These obstacles frequently impose a psychological burden on educators, who must constantly juggle complex administrative demands while genuinely striving to build emotional connections and meaningful interactions with their students in the classroom.

The relevance of Wijaya et al. (2022) study to your current research lies in providing a realistic, localized benchmark for analyzing the phenomena at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan. While the previous study captures the readiness of social science teachers on a broader macro scale, your research steps in to fill a specific research gap by diving directly into how this role transformation is actualized by Sociology teachers in the Mandailing Natal region. Through the lens of this previous study, you can critically analyze whether the structural and cultural barriers found nationally also hinder the Sociology teachers at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan, or if the local school environment has successfully fostered a humanistic, adaptive academic ecosystem in the face of digitalized learning.

However, the transformation of teachers' roles within the *Deep Learning Ecosystem* is not always smooth sailing. Nevertheless, the implementation of *Deep Learning* is not without challenges. Therefore, an in-depth study investigation is needed to examine how Sociology teachers at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan

carry out their new roles as activators, culture builders, and collaborators within the *Deep Learning* framework. This study is expected to contribute to the development of teacher professionalism and improve the quality of Sociology instruction in the *Independent Curriculum Era*.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the transformation of sociology teachers' roles in within the *Deep Learning* Ecosystem at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan. This approach was selected because it enables researchers to describe social phenomena in a naturalistic manner through contextual and holistic descriptions (Moleong, 2019). Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and Documentation. Observations were conducted to examine teacher' behaviors and classroom learning interactions, while interviews were conducted with the vice principal for curriculum affairs and Sociology teachers to obtain information regarding the implementation of *Deep Learning* and teachers' roles as activators, culture builders, and collaborators. Documentation was used to complement data obtained from observations and interviews, such as teaching modules, training schedules, and records of *Deep Learning* implementation activities.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (Miles et al., 2014), which consist three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out to select relevant information, data display was done through narrative descriptions, while conclusions were drawn by identifying emerging patterns and meanings related to the transformation of teacher roles. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, source and methodological triangulation techniques were employed, by comparing finding obtain from interviews, observations, and documentation. This approach allowed researchers to obtain a complete and valid picture of how Sociology teachers adapt to the changing paradigm of *Deep Learning* within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Role Transformation Data

Empirical findings at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan reveal a fundamental shift in the instructional orientation of Sociology teachers, moving away from being a sole information provider toward acting as a facilitator and designer of learning experiences. Based on classroom observations in grade XI, the traditional monologue lectures that dominated the first half of the semester have been significantly reduced. Instead of spending the entire 90-minute session dictating abstract macro-sociological theories at the whiteboard, teachers now open the class with a brief, 15-minute introductory stimulus before handing the floor completely over to the student groups to drive the lesson.

The empirical evidence of this transition is most visibly captured by the evolution of conventional assignments into community-based social projects. Sociology teachers deliberately design field-based mini-research projects where students are required to observe interaction patterns in Panyabungan's traditional markets or analyze the social dynamics of local plantation workers. In an interview, one teacher confirmed, "I used to feel like a failure if I didn't explain every single chapter from the textbook in class. Now, my job is to throw a problem out there, make sure their observation instruments are correct, and guide them when they get stuck in the field. They are the ones moving; I am just guiding from the sidelines." This shift demonstrates that teachers have shed their authoritative roles to foster student agency.

Through the lens of the sociology of education, this role shift marks the dismantlement of the "banking concept of education" famously criticized by Paulo Freire. Teachers at SMAN 3 Panyabungan no

longer view students as passive, empty vessels waiting to be filled with memorized, abstract sociological theories. Conversely, through the architecture of these social projects, teachers position students as active subjects who co-create their own knowledge by engaging directly with the empirical realities of the Mandailing Natal community. This transition is essential within a *Deep Learning Ecosystem*, as deep sociological understanding can only be achieved when the classroom is transformed from a space of indoctrination into a democratic social laboratory (Kensington et al., 2022).

At the institutional level, this transformation has triggered a redefinition of the learning culture within SMAN 3 Panyabungan. According to student reflection surveys, students initially experienced a form of culture shock when they were no longer spoon-fed instant material designed solely for formal exams. However, within a few months, the teacher's interventions as a guide successfully established solid independent thinking and collaborative skills among the students. Teachers no longer evaluate academic success based on a student's ability to rigidly memorize textbook definitions, but rather on their active engagement during consultations, their navigation of field challenges, and the depth of the sociographic reports they collectively produce (Damşa et al., 2021).

Interaction Pattern Data

The transformation of the sociology teacher's role in the *Deep Learning Ecosystem* marks a significant paradigm shift, from the teacher as a center of information to a facilitator of student-centered learning. In the context of Project-Based Learning sociology, teachers no longer simply deliver material in a one-way fashion, but also actively design social projects relevant to students' contexts, guide them through field investigations, and conduct authentic assessments encompassing cognitive, affective, and practical skills (Emilza, 2025). This transformation not only strengthens teacher professionalism but also makes sociology learning more meaningful, participatory, and contextual, in line with the demands of the Independent Curriculum.

As facilitators, sociology teachers act as guides in the learning process, guiding students without dictating, facilitating critical dialogue, and helping students develop a deep understanding of social phenomena through real-life experiences. Teachers also transform into flexible, contextual learning designers, developing learning themes relevant to students' social lives and the dynamics of the surrounding community. This role is crucial in creating a learning environment that facilitates active and reflective in-depth learning by students (Miftahul et al., 2025).

Sociology teachers in the *Deep Learning Ecosystem* also serve as mentors and role models who integrate social character values into the learning process. They foster meaningful social interactions, fostering attitudes of tolerance, justice, and social awareness through group discussions, collaborative projects, and internalizing values. This approach helps students not only understand theoretical concepts in sociology but also apply them in real life, enhancing their overall social awareness.

Furthermore, sociology teachers play a strategic role in utilizing technology as a dynamic and interactive learning medium. This transformation, increasingly important in the digital age, enables teachers to create engaging and effective learning experiences while adapting teaching methods to students' needs and readiness. Thus, teachers become drivers of change in the classroom, adapting to current developments and social demands (Suparno, 2024).

Interaction patterns within the sociology classrooms at SMAN 3 Panyabungan have also undergone radical reconstruction, moving away from low-level memory recall (LOTS) toward high-order thinking skill (HOTS) stimuli. When discussing the topic of social stratification, teachers no longer initiate interaction with rhetorical questions demanding rote memorization, such as, "What is social stratification according to Pitirim

Sorokin?" Instead, verbal interactions are sparked by presenting empirical realities close to the students' daily lives, such as variations in rice field ownership or the hierarchy of family clans (Marga) within the local Panyabungan customary structure. Teachers provoke critical discussion by asking: "Why do certain customary figures or clan structures in the Mandailing Natal community maintain their high social standing, even though economically they might not be as wealthy as the new palm oil entrepreneurs?"

This analytical demand forces students to perform high-order cognitive operations: deconstructing, correlating, and evaluating phenomena. Students are challenged to dissect differentiation and stratification multidimensionally by applying Karl Marx's class theory (Economic Ownership) and Max Weber's status theory (Social Honor/Tradition) directly to the local realities of Panyabungan. Classroom observation notes show that discussions become highly animated when students begin to debate the shifting social status between the older generation, who strictly adhere to the Dalihan Na Tolu customary laws, and the younger generation of Panyabungan, who increasingly measure stratification by formal education levels and digital capital accumulation.

From the pedagogical standpoint of a *Deep Learning Ecosystem*, this HOTS-based interaction pattern successfully relocates sociology from a dead subject on a page to a living analytical lens. Drawing upon Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, the prompt questions posed by the teacher function as interactive scaffolding that pushes students out of their superficial understanding zones into the zone of proximal development, where they can formulate sharp social critiques. Sociology is no longer studied as a collection of static dogmas, but as an analytical tool to conceptualize inequality, power dynamics, and social harmony existing just outside their school gates (Retnawati et al., 2018).

Ultimately, these interaction data indicate that the critical thinking skills of SMAN 3 Panyabungan students increase significantly when sociological theory is localized and contextualized. Teachers have successfully demonstrated that to comprehend complex sociological concepts, students do not need to distance themselves from their immediate environment. This dialectical question-and-answer pattern not only sharpens students' academic acuity in identifying social classes in Panyabungan, but also nurtures their social awareness and empathy. Students no longer just know what stratification is in theory; they understand exactly how it operates, shapes life chances, and influences power relations in everyday life.

Discussion

Structural Constraints: The Curricular and Institutional Pressures as Constraining Forces

In the context of Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory, the national curriculum guidelines, and rigid school regulations at SMAN 3 Panyabungan operate as a powerful "structure" that exerts a constraining (Constraining) force on teachers. This structural constraint manifests primarily through standardized national administrative requirements, compressed academic timelines, and a pervasive orientation toward high-stakes testing. Teachers are bound by formalized pacing guides that demand the superficial coverage of vast macro-sociological content, leaving little institutional room for deep dive learning. These systemic rules and resources create a restrictive environment where teachers feel pressured to revert to efficient, low-level rote learning to meet bureaucratic milestones (Budiaman et al., 2023).

Furthermore, these institutional structures reinforce passive student habits, acting as a historical constraint embedded within the school culture. Having been conditioned by years of conventional pedagogical structures that reward compliance and memorization over critical inquiry, students initially resist the cognitive demands of a *Deep Learning Ecosystem*. This cultural inertia, coupled with the administrative burden of documenting every teaching hour according to rigid ministerial formats, leaves sociology teachers with severely depleted time and energy. The structural rules of the institution, therefore, do not merely exist on paper; they

actively constrain the physical and intellectual space required to foster critical consciousness and deep pedagogical transformation (Conklin, 2020).

Consequently, this structural constraint creates an ontological insecurity among educators, where the desire to innovate constantly collides with the risk of non-compliance with state regulations. SMAN 3 Panyabungan's operational framework operates as a surveillance structure that measures teacher efficacy through completed syllabi and numerical test scores rather than deep conceptual understanding. For years, this structural duality has forced sociology education into a mechanical routine, where the abstract nature of the national curriculum becomes completely detached from the lived social realities of the Panyabungan community, trapping both teachers and students in a cycle of superficial compliance.

Teacher Agency: Enabling Deep Learning and the Incremental Reconstruction of Structure

Transforming the role of sociology teachers in the *Deep Learning Ecosystem* emphasizes that teachers must be adaptable, creative, and reflective in managing the learning process. This shift in role is crucial for optimizing the learning potential of sociology as a highly contextual and reflective discipline, demanding meaningful learning experiences, and stimulating students' critical capacities in understanding and navigating social life.

However, Structuration Theory posits that structure is not merely constraining; it is always dual it is also enabling (Enabling). At SMAN 3 Panyabungan, sociology teachers do not passively capitulate to these institutional limitations; instead, they mobilize their human agency and professional creativity to carve out spaces for *Deep Learning*. Recognizing that rules are subject to interpretation, these teachers utilize their reflexive monitoring to subtly manipulate structural constraints. They creatively adapt rigid curricular mandates by embedding local Mandailing Natal socio-cultural phenomena such as the Dalihan Na Tolu kinship system or local economic disparities directly into the mandatory national competencies, thereby satisfying administrative requirements while fostering critical thinking.

This exercise of agency is a vivid demonstration of what Giddens terms the "knowledgeability" of human actors. Sociology teachers deliberately exploit the structural cracks within the rigid schedule by designing hybrid learning models, such as blending required textbook readings with empirical, community-based field observations during out-of-school hours. They creatively reappropriate existing digital tools and local resources to establish a micro-ecosystem within their classrooms where collaborative and high-order thinking can thrive. By acting as autonomous agents, these educators transform the very constraints of the curriculum into an enabling apparatus that empowers students to analyze power relations, status, and social change within their immediate environment (Supardan et al., 2019).

Ultimately, these strategic actions lead to an incremental reconstruction of the educational structure itself from the bottom up. By consistently practicing transformative pedagogy, the sociology teachers at SMAN 3 Panyabungan are slowly changing the rules of the game, gradually reshaping student expectations, and shifting the school's micro-culture from a memory-based orientation to an analytical one. This demonstrates that structure is not a fixed, external monument but a continuous process produced and reproduced by daily practices; through their persistent agency, these teachers prove that even within a highly centralized educational system, structured boundaries can be progressively hollowed out and renegotiated to facilitate true *Deep Learning* (Heong et al., 2021).

The transformation of the teacher's role in the context of *Deep Learning* represents a fundamental paradigm shift, from being a *Transmitter* of knowledge to a *Learning Designer* and *Facilitator* in the learning process. Within the context of the Independent Curriculum, teachers are required not only to transfer knowledge but also to create meaningful, contextual learning experiences oriented toward the development of

21st century competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Interviews with sociology teachers at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan indicate that teachers now play an active role as activators, collaborators, and builders of a learning culture in the classroom. This change is a consequence of the *Deep Learning* policy, which requires teachers to create a learning environment that encourages students to understand social concepts reflectively and contextually (Priestley et al., 2021)

As *Activators*, Sociology teachers function to initiate and stimulate student-centered learning activities. Teachers are no longer the primary source of knowledge, but facilitators who foster curiosity through reflective activities, group discussions, and social projects based on local contexts. This aligns with research by Soca (2020), which confirms that teachers acting as activators contribute significantly to increasing student engagement and motivation in active classrooms. Field observations at SMA N 3 Panyabungan showed that Sociology teachers used project-based learning methods and social case studies that required students to connect theory to the realities of life in the surrounding community. This approach builds deep conceptual connections between ideas and strengthens higher-order thinking skills (Suyanto, 2025).

Furthermore, in their role as *collaborators*, Sociology teachers at SMA N 3 Panyabungan prioritize cross-disciplinary collaboration, both among teachers and with students. This collaborative learning aligns with the concept of a *Professional Learning Community* (PLC), which emphasizes shared reflection, sharing of good practices, and continuous evaluation of the learning process (Fitrah et al., 2025). This collaboration also strengthens social relationships between teachers and students and fosters social empathy, which is at the core of Sociology. Redana (2023) explains that schools implementing a *Deep Learning* approach show significant improvements in collaboration between stakeholders due to the ongoing feedback system and teacher training. At SMA N 3 Panyabungan, the teacher-initiating training program and seminars on the application of *Deep Learning* serve as important platforms for strengthening teachers' collaborative skills.

The next role is that of a *Culture Builder*. Sociology teachers not only educate students cognitively but also foster values, attitudes, and a reflective culture within the school environment. In a *Deep Learning* Ecosystem, teachers are expected to be role models in fostering a culture of critical, open, and collaborative thinking (Fullan et al., 2018). Observations show that Sociology teachers at SMA N 3 Panyabungan encourage students to actively engage in discussions, respect diverse social perspectives, and practice social values in their daily lives. This learning culture strengthens the Pancasila Student Profile, particularly in the dimensions of mutual cooperation, critical reasoning, and creativity (Mulyanto et al., 2025).

Conceptually, the transformation of the teacher's role in *Deep Learning* demonstrates a shift toward *reflective pedagogy* and *student-centered learning*. Teachers now function as designers of learning experiences that are adaptive to the social context and students' needs. This aligns with the *Deep Learning* model developed by the Learning Policy Institute (2023), where learning success depends on the extent to which teachers are able to create meaningful and cognitively challenging learning processes. Therefore, the successful implementation of *Deep Learning* at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan is largely determined by teachers' ability to manage this changing role adaptively, collaboratively, and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the transformation of the sociology teacher's role at SMAN 3 Panyabungan demonstrates a dynamic shift from a traditional information provider to a strategic facilitator (The guide on the side), who successfully fosters a *Deep Learning* Ecosystem by employing high-order thinking skill interaction patterns anchored in local Mandailing Natal socio-cultural realities. Although teachers constantly navigate the severe constraining pressures of rigid national curricular structures and bureaucratic accountability, their professional knowledgeability and creative agency serve as enabling forces that allow them

to strategically integrate indigenous wisdom like Dalihan Na Tolu with modern digital-social projects. Ultimately, rather than submissively capitulating to institutional limitations, these educators actively practice a form of transformative pedagogy that incrementally reconstructs the school's instructional micro-culture from the bottom up, proving that structured boundaries can be continually renegotiated to achieve true pedagogical depth.

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the implementation of in-depth learning at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan has significantly shifted the paradigm of the role of Sociology teachers. Teachers no longer act as centers of knowledge, but rather as facilitators and drivers of a learning ecosystem that fosters student independence, collaboration, and critical reflection. This transformation is reflected in three main roles: activators who encourage active student participation, builders of a learning culture who create a positive climate in the classroom, and collaborators who work across subjects to build interdisciplinary knowledge connections. Determining factors for the success of this transformation include teacher training, support for the independent curriculum, and a culture of continuous reflection in schools. Thus, in-depth learning in the context of sociology not only enriches students' conceptual understanding but also strengthens social values, empathy, and critical awareness of societal realities.

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