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Jiddan, A. M., Ramadhani, D. L., Atullatipah, M., Asmaradani, M. A., Wulandari, N., Nurwahyuni, N. I., Silaturrokhimi, P. F., & Pujiati, E. (2026). The Strategic Role of Mentor Teachers in Supporting the Teaching Practicum of Pre-Service Teacher Professional Education (PPG) Students. *Journal of Applied Educational Study, 3*(1), 18-25. Doi: 10.64460/jaes.v3i1.155.

Journal of Applied Educational Study
P-ISSN: 3090-3726/E-ISSN: 3090-3866
https://journal.planthroper.com/jaes

The Strategic Role of Mentor Teachers in Supporting the Teaching Practicum of Pre-Service Teacher Professional Education (PPG) Students

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Abstract: Teacher professional education aims to prepare prospective teachers who possess pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies. One important component of the program is teaching practicum conducted in partner schools under the supervision of mentor teachers. This study aims to describe the strategic role of mentor teachers in supporting the success of teaching practicum undertaken by pre-service teachers at SMP Negeri 11 Malang. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach using reflective practice. Data were collected through classroom observations, mentoring documentation, reflective journals, and discussions conducted during the practicum. The findings indicate that mentor teachers play strategic roles as instructional mentors, facilitators, professional role models, evaluators, and motivators. Their guidance significantly improves lesson planning, classroom management, instructional strategies, assessment implementation, and students' engagement. Constructive feedback also enhances prospective teachers' confidence and professionalism. Therefore, the presence of mentor teachers becomes one of the determining factors in preparing competent and professional future teachers.

Keywords: mentor teacher; professionalism; reflective practice; teaching practicum; teacher professional education

Received: 12-01-2026	Accepted: 24-02-2026	Published: 29-03-2026

Introduction

Education is one of the fundamental pillars of national development, playing a significant role in improving the quality of human resources (Wahyudin & Aripin, 2025). The success of educational provision is strongly influenced by the quality of teachers as educators who interact directly with students. Teachers are not only expected to master subject matter but also to develop pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies to create effective, innovative, and student-centered learning environments. Therefore, the government continues to make efforts to improve teacher quality through various policies and programs, one of which is the Pre-Service Teacher Professional Education Program *(Pendidikan Profesi Guru Prajabatan or PPG Prajabatan)*.

Journal of Applied Educational Study
P-ISSN: 3090-3726/E-ISSN: 3090-3866
https://journal.planthroper.com/jaes

The *PPG Prajabatan* is a strategic program designed to prepare graduates from both educational and non-educational undergraduate backgrounds to acquire the competencies required of professional teachers in accordance with the National Education Standards (Sari & Atmoko, 2024). The program not only strengthens students' theoretical understanding of education through university-based instruction but also provides practical experience through Field Experience Practice (*Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan or PPL*) at partner schools. Through teaching practice, students have opportunities to implement learning theories, develop classroom management skills, apply various instructional models and media, conduct assessments, establish communication with students, and gain firsthand understanding of school culture (Ngatmini & Suyitno, 2025).

Teaching practice is one of the most essential stages of the PPG Prajabatan program because it represents a transition from theoretical learning to professional teaching practice. At this stage, student teachers are expected not only to demonstrate mastery of subject matter but also to make appropriate instructional decisions, adapt teaching strategies to students' characteristics, and engage in reflection to continuously improve the quality of learning. The success of teaching practice is closely associated with the mentoring and guidance provided by university supervisors and cooperating teachers, who serve as the primary mentors at partner schools (Pinardi et al., 2024).

Cooperating teachers are professional educators appointed by schools to guide PPG students throughout their teaching practice. Drawing on their teaching experience, cooperating teachers provide direction, supervision, guidance, evaluation, and professional role models in carrying out educational responsibilities. Their roles extend beyond administrative and technical aspects of instruction; they also serve as mentors, facilitators, motivators, evaluators, and reflective partners who support the development of students' pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies. Continuous mentoring enables student teachers to gain more meaningful learning experiences while identifying their strengths and areas for improvement throughout the teaching practice process.

As one of the partner schools participating in the PPG Prajabatan program, SMP Negeri 11 Malang plays an important role in providing a supportive learning environment for student teachers to develop into professional educators. Throughout the teaching practice, cooperating teachers provide guidance beginning with school environment observations, the preparation of teaching modules, the selection of instructional models and media, classroom teaching implementation, and post-teaching reflection. Such mentoring not only helps student teachers improve their teaching abilities but also builds their self-confidence, strengthens their ability to adapt to the school environment, and fosters professional attitudes in carrying out their responsibilities as educators.

The teaching practice experience at SMP Negeri 11 Malang demonstrates that the presence of cooperating teachers is an important factor supporting the successful implementation of instructional activities by PPG students. Constructive feedback, opportunities to discuss various instructional challenges, and direct examples of effective teaching practices provide valuable learning experiences that cannot be acquired solely through university coursework (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This mentoring process encourages student teachers to engage in continuous reflection, improve instructional quality, and develop innovative teaching practices in response to students' learning needs.

Based on this background, this article

Journal of Applied Educational Study
P-ISSN: 3090-3726/E-ISSN: 3090-3866
https://journal.planthroper.com/jaes

aims to describe the strategic role of cooperating teachers in supporting the successful teaching practice of PPG Prajabatan students at SMP Negeri 11 Malang and to explain how the mentoring provided contributes to the development of prospective teachers' competencies and professionalism throughout the teaching practice process.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design. This approach was selected because the study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the role of cooperating teachers in supporting the successful teaching practice of PPG Prajabatan students at SMP Negeri 11 Malang. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore phenomena through the experiences, perceptions, and interactions that occur throughout the mentoring process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 11 Malang, which serves as a partner school for the Pre-Service Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG Prajabatan) at Universitas Wisnuwardhana Malang. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, involving individuals directly engaged in the teaching practice process. The informants consisted of one cooperating teacher and PPG Prajabatan students undertaking Field Experience Practice (PPL) at SMP Negeri 11 Malang.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted throughout the teaching practice to examine the mentoring activities provided by the cooperating teacher. Interviews with the cooperating teacher and student teachers were conducted to obtain information regarding the forms of mentoring, experiences during teaching practice, and the benefits perceived by the participants. Supporting documentation included teaching modules, observation sheets, reflective journals, activity photographs, and supervision records.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, which consists of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles et al., 2018) . Data trustworthiness was established through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking with the informants to ensure that the research findings accurately reflected the actual conditions of the mentoring process.

Results

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation conducted throughout the implementation of the Teaching Practicum at SMP Negeri 11 Malang, the findings indicate that cooperating teachers play a highly strategic role in supporting the success of teaching practicum activities undertaken by pre-service teachers in the Pre-Service Teacher Professional Education Program. Their role extends beyond providing technical guidance during the teaching and learning process; they also serve as professional mentors who contribute to the development of students' pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies. The research findings are organized into five main themes: cooperating teachers as academic supervisors, professional mentors, learning facilitators, evaluators, and motivators.

Cooperating Teachers as Academic Supervisors

The findings indicate that cooperating teachers actively guide students from the initial stages of instructional planning. This guidance is provided through discussions on the development of teaching modules, alignment of learning objectives, selection of instructional models, preparation of assessments, and adaptation of learning

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P-ISSN: 3090-3726/E-ISSN: 3090-3866
https://journal.planthroper.com/jaes

materials to students' characteristics (Tomlinson, 2017) . One student explained:

> *"My cooperating teacher always reviews the teaching module I prepare before it is used in the classroom. They provide feedback on the learning objectives, student activities, and assessments to ensure that the learning process is more structured and focused."*

Observations further revealed that all instructional materials were reviewed by cooperating teachers before being implemented in the classroom. This process helped students understand the relationship between learning outcomes, learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessments, thereby enabling them to develop more systematic instructional materials.

These findings are consistent with studies on strengthening cooperating teachers' competencies, which position them as academic mentors responsible for guiding PPG students throughout their teaching practicum. Cooperating teachers do not merely supervise classroom instruction but also assist students in designing learning activities that align with the curriculum and students' needs.

Cooperating Teachers as Professional Mentors

In addition to providing academic guidance, cooperating teachers also serve as professional mentors who offer practical examples of teachers' professional responsibilities. During the teaching practicum, students learn not only about instructional processes but also about professional ethics, communication with members of the school community, work discipline, and their responsibilities as educators.

Based on the interviews, students explained that their cooperating teachers' attitudes and professional conduct served as examples of how to establish positive relationships with students and fellow teachers. One student stated:

> *"I learned how my cooperating teacher communicates with students firmly while still showing them respect. This has become an example for me when teaching."*

Observations showed that cooperating teachers consistently demonstrated how to open a lesson, establish a conducive classroom environment, and address problems that arose during the learning process.

These findings reinforce previous research indicating that cooperating teachers serve as mentors, facilitators, supervisors, and role models in developing the professionalism of PPG students through continuous mentoring .

Cooperating Teachers as Learning Facilitators

Cooperating teachers provide students with opportunities to develop their creativity in designing instructional activities. Students are given the flexibility to use various instructional models, digital media, educational games, and project-based learning approaches according to the characteristics of their students. Throughout the teaching practicum, cooperating teachers do not restrict students' creativity but provide guidance whenever the selected strategies are considered unsuitable for classroom conditions. One student explained:

> *"My cooperating teacher gave me the freedom to use interactive learning media and then provided feedback after the lesson. This helped me identify the strengths and weaknesses of my teaching."*

Such mentoring encourages students to become more confident in developing instructional innovations and strengthens their ability to manage classrooms effectively.

These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that mentoring by cooperating teachers can enhance the creativity, pedagogical competence, and professionalism of PPG

Journal of Applied Educational Study
P-ISSN: 3090-3726/E-ISSN: 3090-3866
https://journal.planthroper.com/jaes

students through reflective and collaborative learning processes.

Cooperating Teachers as Evaluators

Evaluation is an essential component of the mentoring process provided by cooperating teachers (Hudson, 2013). Observations revealed that cooperating teachers consistently conducted reflective discussions after students completed their teaching sessions. The aspects evaluated included subject matter mastery, classroom management, communication with students, the use of instructional media, time management, and the implementation of assessments. One student stated:

> "*After I finished teaching, my cooperating teacher invited me to discuss the lesson I had delivered. They highlighted the aspects that had gone well and provided suggestions for improving my teaching in subsequent lessons.*"

The evaluation process was conducted constructively, ensuring that students did not feel judged but instead had opportunities to improve the quality of their instruction in subsequent sessions.

The findings indicate that reflective discussions with cooperating teachers help students develop their self-evaluation skills and continuously improve their instructional practices. This is consistent with the concept of teaching practicum supervision, which positions reflection as an essential component in shaping the professional identity of prospective teachers (Prastikawati et al., 2024).

Cooperating Teachers as Motivators

Beyond providing technical guidance, cooperating teachers also serve as motivators for PPG students. At the beginning of their teaching practicum, some students admitted feeling nervous about teaching in front of a classroom. In response, cooperating teachers provided moral support, encouragement, and reassurance that every teaching experience represents a learning process that must be undertaken. One student explained:

> "*My cooperating teacher always tells me that making mistakes while teaching is normal, as long as we are willing to learn from them and make improvements.*"

This encouragement positively influenced students' self-confidence, enabling them to become more willing to experiment with different instructional strategies and manage their classrooms more effectively.

This supportive approach demonstrates that cooperating teachers do not function solely as evaluators but also as learning partners who help students develop into professional teachers (Ambrosetti, A., & Dekkers, 2010).

Discussion

The findings indicate that cooperating teachers play a multidimensional role in supporting the professional development of students enrolled in the Pre-Service Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG Prajabatan). These roles include academic supervisors, professional mentors, learning facilitators, evaluators, and motivators, which collectively contribute to strengthening students' pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies. These findings suggest that effective mentoring should not focus solely on supervising classroom instruction but should also form part of a comprehensive process of prospective teachers' professional development.

The role of cooperating teachers as academic supervisors enables PPG students to design instructional activities that are aligned with curriculum objectives, appropriate teaching strategies, and relevant assessment practices. Continuous guidance in developing instructional materials helps students understand the relationship between curriculum implementation and learners' needs. This finding is consistent with previous research

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P-ISSN: 3090-3726/E-ISSN: 3090-3866
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emphasizing the importance of cooperating teachers in strengthening students' pedagogical competencies through structured academic mentoring.

The findings also highlight the importance of cooperating teachers as professional role models for PPG students. By observing professional ethics, communication with learners, and decision-making in authentic instructional situations, students gain practical experiences that cannot be fully acquired through university coursework alone. This reinforces previous research suggesting that mentoring relationships make a significant contribution to the development of prospective teachers' professional identities and professionalism.

Furthermore, cooperating teachers' willingness to provide students with opportunities to develop instructional innovations, accompanied by constructive feedback, creates a supportive learning environment for professional growth. This approach not only enhances students' creativity in designing and implementing learning activities but also builds their confidence in applying student-centered instructional strategies. Reflective evaluation following each teaching session also helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to make continuous improvements to their instructional practices.

Overall, these findings confirm that the success of PPG students' teaching practicum is influenced not only by the competencies they possess but also by the quality of mentoring provided by cooperating teachers. Systematic, collaborative, and reflective mentoring creates opportunities for students to develop their teaching competencies, strengthen their reflective abilities, and prepare themselves to become professional and adaptable educators capable of addressing the various challenges of future education.

Conclusions

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that cooperating teachers play a strategic role in supporting the successful implementation of the teaching practicum for PPG Prajabatan students at SMP Negeri 11 Malang. This role is demonstrated through five key functions: academic supervisor, professional mentor, learning facilitator, evaluator, and motivator. Through continuous mentoring, cooperating teachers assist students in developing instructional materials, managing classrooms, selecting appropriate teaching strategies and media, and reflecting on their teaching practices.

The findings further demonstrate that mentoring provided by cooperating teachers contributes positively to the development of students' pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies. Beyond improving their teaching skills, this guidance also strengthens students' self-confidence, reflective abilities, adaptability to the school environment, and professionalism in carrying out their responsibilities as prospective educators.

The implications of this study highlight that the success of PPG students' teaching practicum depends not only on their individual preparedness but also on the quality of mentoring provided by cooperating teachers. Therefore, strengthening cooperating teachers' capacities through professional development and continuous training is essential. Furthermore, closer collaboration among universities, partner schools, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors needs to be fostered to prepare professional, adaptable, and competent PPG graduates who can respond effectively to the challenges of future education.

Suggestion and Recommendation

Based on the findings regarding the strategic role of cooperating teachers in supporting PPG Prajabatan students'

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P-ISSN: 3090-3726/E-ISSN: 3090-3866
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teaching practicum at SMP Negeri 11 Malang, several recommendations are proposed to improve the quality of teaching practicum implementation.

Partner schools and cooperating teachers are encouraged to maintain and strengthen collaborative, reflective, and continuous mentoring practices. Such mentoring should address not only instructional skills but also students' professional, social, and personal competencies through role modelling, discussions, and constructive feedback.

PPG program providers and universities should strengthen professional development programs for cooperating teachers, particularly in mentoring, feedback provision, instructional supervision, and student guidance. Effective coordination between universities and partner schools is also essential to create a supportive teaching practicum environment.

PPG Prajabatan students are encouraged to actively engage in mentoring activities, participate in discussions, reflect on feedback, and develop innovative instructional practices suited to students' characteristics and school needs.

Future research should examine the role of cooperating teachers across a wider range of partner schools and participants. Mixed-methods or quantitative approaches may also be employed to measure the influence of mentoring quality on the development of PPG students' competencies more systematically.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Universitas Wisnuwardhana Malang through the Pre-Service Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG Prajabatan). Special thanks are extended to the Principal of SMP Negeri 11 Malang, and all teachers, staff, and students of SMP Negeri 11 Malang for their guidance, support, and cooperation throughout the teaching practicum and research. The authors also gratefully acknowledge everyone who contributed to the successful completion of this article.

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