Jupiter: Jurnal Pendidikan Terapan
Homepage: https://journal.diginus.id/jupiter/index
Email: jurnalpendidikanterapan@gmail.com

p-ISSN : 2985-3214; e-ISSN : 2964-3171
Jupiter, Vol. 4, No. 4, September 2026
Page 374-385

Negotiating Masculinity in a Female-Dominated Educational Space: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Male Elementary Teacher Education Students in Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Submitted: July 27, 2026
Final Revised: Sept. 16, 2026
Accepted: September 21, 2026
Published: September 28, 2026

Keywords:
Masculinity Negotiation; Male Students; PGSD; Female Dominated Environment; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

ABSTRACT

The increasing feminization of teacher education has positioned male students in a minority position within Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD) programs. This study explores how male students experience and negotiate masculinity within a female-dominated educational environment. A qualitative approach with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design was employed to examine the subjective and contextual experiences of four male students in a PGSD program. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the IPA stages, with NVivo 12 used to support data organization and coding. The analysis identified six interconnected themes: (1) reasons for choosing PGSD, (2) experiences of being a minority in PGSD, (3) adaptation and self-adjustment in a female-majority environment, (4) dynamics of interaction and group work with female students, (5) experiences of gender stereotypes, and (6) negotiating masculinity among male PGSD students. The findings indicate that participants initially became aware of their minority position through experiences of awkwardness, inferiority, silence, and surprise toward female dominance. These experiences led to adjustments communication and social interaction, while some participants maintained personal boundaries to preserve comfort and identity. Experiences of group work and gender stereotypes further encouraged participants to reflect on how their identities were perceived and expressed. Across the four cases, masculinity was increasingly understood in terms of responsibility, role modeling, personal principles, communication, emotional management, and interpersonal boundaries. These findings suggest that negotiating masculinity involves both contextual adaptation and maintaining personally meaningful aspects of identity, although experiences varied across participants. This study`s contribution is limited to an idiographic and contextual understanding of four male students within one PGSD setting and should not be generalized to male PGSD students in Indonesia. The findings highlight the importance of developing gender-responsive and inclusive teacher education environments that provide equitable participation and support for students in minority positions.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.61255/jupiter.v4i4.1705

INTRODUCTION

The profession of elementary school teachers is historically and socially constructed as synonymous with women. The phenomenon of feminization in primary education not only affects the gender composition of the teaching profession, but also shapes social norms and expectations regarding gender roles in the educational environment (Salsabila et al., 2024; Ulfah & Karolina, 2023). In various social contexts, the primary school teacher profession is often associated with the values of nurturing, empathy, and care that are culturally attached to women (Francis & Skelton, 2001; Sargent, 2005). As a result, men who choose the profession of primary school teacher are often placed as a gender minority group who face stereotypes, social expectations, and assumptions about their gender identity (Pancaningrum

& Pasiningsih, 2023). This condition shows that gender construction not only affects perceptions of the teaching profession but also shapes the individual experience within it.

Masculinity in the context of education is understood as a social construct that continues to be formed, negotiated, and reproduced through social relations, institutional culture, and societal expectations (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Various studies show that male students in a female-dominated educational environment face challenges in building professional identities while maintaining their gender identity. Research on male pre-service teachers shows that male students negotiate their masculine identity to adjust to the academic culture and gender stereotypes that develop in educational environments (Eldred et al., 2022; Xu, 2025). Other research also revealed that male students tend to develop gender awareness and certain social adaptation strategies during their education. In addition, the concept of caring masculinity shows a transformation of masculinity towards a more relational, empathetic, and adaptive character in the education profession (Hookway & Cruickshank, 2024). However, male students and teachers in primary education still face social stereotypes, doubts about their professionalism, and gender role conflicts due to the incompatibility between dominant masculinity norms and the culture of the education profession.

Studies on gender in the teaching profession are evolving. Still, most previous research has focused on public perceptions of male teachers, motivation to choose the teaching profession, or the experience of teachers who have worked in schools (Garza, 2022; Ossai & Ramsaroop, 2022). In addition, most of the research was conducted in the context of Western countries, so it did not fully represent the experience of male students in teacher education in Indonesia. Discussions about gender representation and stereotypes of male teachers still dominate research in Indonesia itself. In contrast, studies that specifically explore the subjective experiences of male students as a gender minority in the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program are still relatively limited (Pancaningrum & Pasiningsih, 2023; Wachidah & Fathoni, 2025). In fact, the process of forming professional and gender identity begins during the education of prospective teachers in higher education (Kammermeier et al., 2025). Thus, there is still a limited understanding of how male students interpret their experiences and negotiate masculine identities during their education as prospective elementary school teachers.

Based on these gaps, this study employs the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to examine how male students in the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program (PGSD) experience and interpret their position within a female-dominated educational environment. Rather than viewing masculinity solely through the lens of hegemonic masculinity or caring masculinity, this study seeks to understand how these students negotiate, interpret, and reconstruct their masculine identities through their academic and social experiences. IPA is considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of how individuals make sense of their lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: How do male PGSD students experience and negotiate masculinity within a female-dominated teacher education environment? The findings are expected to contribute to gender and education studies by providing a contextual understanding of masculinity negotiation among prospective elementary school teachers in Indonesia.

METHOD

Research Approach and Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design. The research design was chosen to understand the subjective experiences of male students in their academic and social lives in the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program (PGSD), which female students dominate. The research focuses on how male students experience, interpret, and negotiate masculinity in that context. The study emphasizes a deep understanding of individual experiences and the process by which participants give meaning to their life experiences (Creswell, 2014; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The analysis was carried out in an idiographic manner by first understanding each resource person`s experience in depth, then comparing the experiences between the resource persons to identify similarities and differences. Thus, the research is not directed to generalize to all PGSD male students, but to gain a contextual understanding of the experiences of the four resource persons in the PGSD environment.

Context and Research Participants

The research was carried out at the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program (PGSD), Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Purwakarta Campus. This environment was chosen because female students outnumber male students, making male students a numerical minority in academic and social life. The research involved four male students as resource persons. The number of speakers was adjusted to the characteristics of science, which prioritizes

in-depth exploration of individual experiences. The four speakers have relatively similar academic contexts, but have different experiences and meanings of their positions as male students in the PGSD environment.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Resource Persons

Code	Age	Semester	Length of Study	Relevant Characteristics/Experience
I1	21 years old	VI	3 years	Has experience interacting and working with female students in a PGSD environment.
I2	20 years old	IV	2 years	Have experience in social and academic interactions with female students in the PGSD environment.
I3	21 years old	VI	3 years	Have experience in academic interactions, group work, and self-adjustment in the PGSD environment.
I4	22 years old	IV	2 years	Have experience dealing with gender-related expectations and views in the PGSD environment.

Selection and Recruitment of Resource Persons

Resource persons were selected using purposive sampling techniques. This technique was used because science research requires resource persons with direct, relevant experience with the phenomenon being researched and the ability to reflect on these experiences in depth. Resource persons were selected based on several criteria, namely: (1) male students who are still active in the PGSD Study Program; (2) have experience participating in academic and social activities in the PGSD environment; (3) experiencing a lecture environment dominated by female students; and (4) willing to reflect on their experiences regarding their position as minority male students, interactions with female students, group work experiences, gender stereotypes, self-adjustment processes, and the meaning of masculinity. The researcher then contacted prospective resource persons who met the criteria and explained the research objectives and procedures. Resource persons willing to participate then gave their consent to participate in the interview process. To maintain confidentiality, the researcher disguised the source's identity using codes I1, I2, I3, and I4.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with four male students enrolled in the Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD) program at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Purwakarta Campus. The interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face in Indonesian from April 14 to 16, 2026. Before each interview, participants were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, and how interview data would be used. All participants provided informed consent, including permission to audio-record the interviews.

The interview guide consisted of ten core questions focusing on participants' reasons for choosing PGSD, initial impressions of the female-majority environment, experiences as male students, interactions and group work with female students, experiences of being treated differently, perceptions of gender stereotypes, adaptation to a female-dominated environment, changes in perceptions of themselves as men, and ways of maintaining or adjusting masculinity in PGSD. The ten questions served as a flexible guide rather than a rigid sequence. Consistent with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, follow-up and probing questions were developed according to participants' responses to explore their lived experiences, feelings, interpretations, and the meanings they attached to those experiences.

Examples of the core questions included: "What made you choose to study in PGSD?", "What was your first impression when you entered PGSD and saw that most of the students were female?", "Can you tell me about your experience as a male student in the PGSD environment?", "How was your experience working in groups with female classmates?", "Have you ever felt that you were treated differently because you are a male student? Please tell me about it," and "How do you adjust yourself in an environment dominated by female students?" We used probing questions when participants shared experiences that required further elaboration.

The interviews lasted between 22:43 and 38:25 minutes and were conducted at locations agreed upon with the participants, including their homes and the university campus. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed in Indonesian. The Indonesian transcripts were retained as the primary reference during analysis. Selected quotations were subsequently translated into English and checked against the original transcripts to maintain their intended meaning and contextual nuances.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which emphasizes a detailed examination of participants's lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them. Using an idiographic approach,

The researcher first analyzed each participant's account as an individual case before comparing cases. The analysis began with repeated reading of each Indonesian interview transcript to become familiar with the participant's account. The researcher then made initial notes focusing on descriptive content, participants' language, and interpretative meanings related to their experiences as male students in a female-dominated PGSD environment. From these notes, the researcher developed emergent themes by identifying patterns of meaning within each case. The researcher then examined connections among emergent themes and grouped related experiential meanings while retaining distinctive or divergent experiences.

After analyzing the individual cases, The researcher conducted a cross-case analysis to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns across the four participants. Through this process, six broader themes were developed: (1) reasons for choosing PGSD; (2) experience of being a minority in the PGSD environment; (3) adaptation and self-adjustment in a female-majority environment; (4) dynamics of interaction and group work with female students; (5) experiences of gender stereotypes; and (6) negotiation of masculinity among male students in PGSD. The researcher used NVivo 12 to organize and manage the coding process and interview data. The software supported data organization and visualization, but the researcher interpreted participants' experiences and developed themes. Word frequencies, word clouds, and mind maps served only as supporting visualizations and were used to determine themes.

Credibility, Reflexivity, and Ethics

To support the credibility of the findings, the researcher maintained an audit trail throughout the research process, including records of interview transcripts, coding, theme development, and analytical decisions. The researcher also discussed theme interpretation and development with the research supervisor to assess the consistency of the analytical process.

The researcher considered reflexivity throughout the study, particularly because the topic concerns gender and masculinity. The researcher reflected on personal assumptions about masculinity and avoided treating particular masculine behaviors as universal or inherently appropriate for male students. Participants' accounts were therefore interpreted within the context of their individual experiences and the female-dominated PGSD environment.

The study did not receive formal ethical approval from an institutional ethics committee. Nevertheless, the researchers applied ethical procedures throughout the data collection process. Before each interview, participants were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality, and the intended use of the data. We obtained informed consent before the interviews, including permission to audio-record the conversations. We protected participants' identities by using codes (I1–I4) rather than real names, and we securely stored the interview data and used it only for research purposes.

RESULTS

The research results were obtained through in-depth interviews with four male students in the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program (PGSD). The analysis used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, supported by NVivo 12 to organize transcripts, codes, and citations. A mind map, and coding summary served as data-mapping tools, while interpretation was based on individual participant narratives and experiences. The analysis yielded six main themes: (1) the reasons for choosing PGSD, (2) the experience of being a minority in the PGSD environment, (3) adaptation and self-adjustment in the majority of women, (4) the dynamics of interaction and group work with female students, (5) the experience of facing gender stereotypes, and (6) the negotiation of masculinity of male students in PGSD.

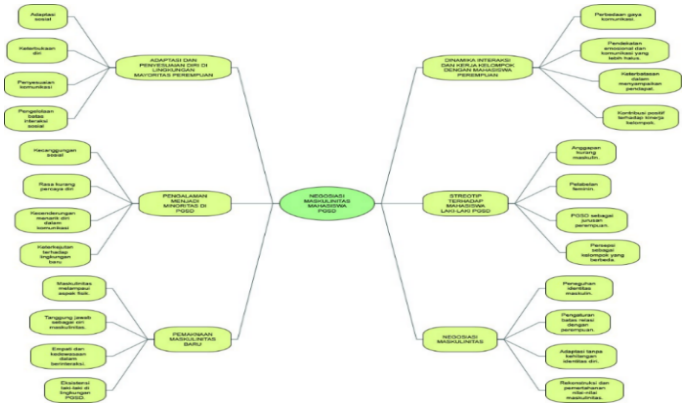


Figure 1. Mind Map of Male Students' Experience in Negotiating Masculinity in the PGSD Environment

Mind maps show the relationships between themes formed from participants' experiences. The visualization shows six key themes and conceptual relationships among early experiences, adaptation processes, social-academic interactions, gender stereotypes, and masculinity negotiations. The mind map maps the data structure, while the participants' experiences are presented through narration and quotes for each theme. Furthermore, the coding summary summarizes the process of grouping data from the initial codes into subthemes and themes. This table shows that the six themes are built on the participants' concrete experiences, not solely on the frequency of word occurrences.

Table 2. Summary of Coding Results

Main Themes	Subtheme	Initial Code
1. Reasons for Choosing PGSD	Considerations in choosing PGSD	Parental direction, job prospects, desire to become a teacher, inspiration from teachers
2. Experience of Being a Minority in the PGSD Environment	Early experience as a minority male student	Awkward, inquisitive, more silent, surprised at female dominance
3. Adaptation and Self-Adjustment in a Female-Majority Environment	Social adaptation and communication strategies	Opening up, trying to adjust, adjusting communication, limiting interactions
4. Dynamics of Interaction and Group Work with Female Students	Academic interaction and cooperation	Male perspective, unheard opinions, female friend character, difficulty expressing opinions
5. Experience Facing Gender Stereotypes	Forms and responses to stereotypes	Considered to have no other choice, considered less masculine, questions about PGSD choices, considered to have a female nature
6. Negotiation of Masculinity for Male Students at PGSD	Definition and identity defense	Responsibility, being an example, religious values, limits in interaction, staying oneself, maintaining a male identity

Reasons for Choosing PGSD

The first theme describes the context before the participants' experiences as male students at PGSD. The four participants had different reasons for choosing the study program. I1 and I3 emphasize parental influence, while I2 and I4 show a more personal drive, namely the desire to be a teacher and inspiration from previous experiences with teachers.

I1 explains:

> *"I chose PGSD because of the direction from my parents, especially because they think the job prospects after graduation are quite good."*

Meanwhile, I2 stated:

> *"I chose PGSD because I did have my own desire to become a teacher."*

I3 also attributes his choice to family:

> *"I chose to become a teacher because of the encouragement of my parents, especially since I am an only child."*

In contrast to the three, I4 attributes its choice to personal experience:

> *"I chose to become a teacher because I did have that desire, which arose because I idolized and was inspired by my teacher in elementary school."*

Thus, the decision to choose PGSD does not show a uniform pattern. For some participants, the choice was related to family considerations, while for others it departed from personal aspirations and inspiring experiences. This theme provides the initial context for understanding that their position as minority male students is an experience that arises after entering the study program, not the main reason for choosing PGSD.

Experience of Being a Minority in the PGSD Environment

The second theme shows how participants first realized their position as male students in a female-dominated environment. The main similarity among participants is awareness of their minority position, their responses to these conditions differ.

I1 experiences this awareness in an awkward and mindless form:

> *"I felt awkward and a little insecure because I realized that I was in the minority of boys in the class."*

The I2 experience is different. He does not directly describe himself as a minority, but chooses to reduce interaction:

> *"When I first entered PGSD, I was quieter and didn't interact much with my friends because I was still adjusting to the new environment."*

I3 also suffers from awkwardness, but without emphasis on inferior taste:

> *"At first, I felt a bit awkward when I was in the majority of the PGSD environment."*

Meanwhile, I4 emphasizes more surprise at the gender composition:

> *"I was quite surprised when I first saw that students at PGSD turned out to be dominated by women."*

These differences suggest that minority positions do not produce a single psychological response. I1 experiences inferiority, I2 responds by withdrawing temporarily, I3 experiences awkwardness, while I4 shows surprise. Thus, minority experiences become structurally the same, but are interpreted differently at the individual level.

Adaptation and Self-Adjustment in a Female-Majority Environment

After realizing the minority position, participants developed different ways of adjusting to the environment. Adaptation does not happen through a single strategy, but through openness, increased interaction, communication adjustments, and interaction restrictions.

I1 describes adaptation through openness:

> *"I adjusted to the way I opened up and didn't get defensive when interacting with friends."*

I2 chooses to be more active in following the environment interaction pattern:

> *"I try to fit in with the environment: one way is by interacting and finding out gossip or the latest information from friends."*

Meanwhile, I3 shows a form of adaptation that maintains itself:

> *"I stayed myself, but while learning to adapt to how I communicated with the environment."*

Different from the three, I4 opted for a more limited strategy:

> *"I chose to limit my interaction with friends in the PGSD environment."*

These findings suggest that adaptation does not necessarily mean increasing social closeness. I1 and I2 tend to expand social engagement; I3 combines adjustment with self-defense, while I4 uses interaction restrictions to maintain comfort. This variation shows that participants actively determine the level of adjustment they consider appropriate.

Dynamics of Interaction and Group Work with Female Students

The fourth theme shows that interaction and group work are important spaces for participants to experience and negotiate their social positions. Participants' experiences included contributions, obstacles to conveying their voices, and observations of group work patterns.

I1 views the position of men as an opportunity to provide a different perspective:

> *"I feel that as a male student, I can bring a different perspective so that it can enrich the discussions in the group."*

In contrast, I2 experiences situations when their contributions do not always elicit a response:

> *"In group discussions, I sometimes feel like my voice or opinion is not being heard."*

I3 does not emphasize obstacles, but pays attention to the character of female friends in group work:

"I see that my female friends at PGSD have a creative and neat character, especially when doing group assignments."

Meanwhile, I4 expressed difficulties in expressing opinions:

"I sometimes have a hard time expressing my own opinion when I'm in a group."

The findings suggest that the group's work experience is not uniform. I1 experiences groups as a space for contribution: I2 and I4 highlight obstacles to voicing opinions, while I3 offers positive observations about the work patterns of female friends. Thus, the environment for most women is not solely perceived as a limiting space, but also an interaction space that produces positive experiences, as well as experiences of exclusion when participants' voices are not accommodated.

Experience Facing Gender Stereotypes

The fifth theme shows participants' experiences when choices about PGSD and their gender identity are associated with gender expectations. Stereotypes arise in the form of the assumption that men choose PGSD because they have no other choice, are considered less masculine, have their choices questioned, or are associated with certain traits that are considered feminine.

I1 reveals:

"I once found the notion that men who choose PGSD are considered to have no other choice."

I2 experiences stereotypes that are more directly related to masculinity:

"I face the view that male students at PGSD are considered less masculine or have traits that are considered feminine."

Meanwhile, I3 has more questions about its choices:

"I have been asked questions such as 'Why choose PGSD?', as if this choice is not common for men."

The findings suggest that stereotypes don't always appear as direct labels. In some participants, stereotypes arise as a question of study choice; in others, they arise as a judgment of masculinity. Thus, stereotyped experiences relate to how educational choices and male identities are positioned within broader gender expectations.

Negotiation of Masculinity for Male Students at PGSD

The last theme shows how participants interpret and maintain masculine identity after experiencing minority positions, adaptation processes, social interactions, and gender stereotypes. Based on the coding summary, the meaning includes responsibility, being an example, religious values, limits in interaction, remaining oneself, and maintaining male identity. In this theme, participants' experiences show that adjustment to the environment is not always understood as a change in identity. Instead, participants seek to determine which parts of themselves can be adjusted and which parts remain retained.

I3, for example, explicitly states:

"I stayed myself, but while learning to adapt to how I communicated with the environment."

The statement suggests that adaptation and identity preservation are positioned simultaneously. Participants do not see communication adjustments as a necessity to abandon their identity, but as a way to live interactions in different environments.

In other participants, identity negotiation appeared through an emphasis on responsibility and role modeling, while other participants emphasized religious values, personal boundaries, and the ability to maintain self-principles. Thus, masculinity in participants' experience is understood not only through physical characteristics or dominance, but through how they determine their responsibilities, limitations, behaviors, and positions in social relationships.

These findings suggest that the negotiation of masculinity takes place through a gradual process: being aware of the position as a minority → facing social responses and stereotypes → adjusting the way they interact → defining boundaries → maintaining aspects of identity that are considered important. However, the process did not unfold the same way for all four participants. Some participants were more open to the environment, while others chose to limit interaction; some felt their opinions were not heard, while others saw themselves as able to provide a different perspective. This variation is an important characteristic of the idiographic experience of the four participants (Andrš Fárová, 2026; Kammermeier et al., 2025).

DISCUSSION

The experience of male students in this study shows that numerical minority status is the initial context in the process of negotiating masculinity, but not the single factor that determines the meaning of identity. The awareness that they are in a female-dominated PGSD environment gives rise to diverse responses, ranging from awkwardness, inferiority, being more careful in interacting, to being surprised by gender composition. This variation suggests that minority experiences are idiographic and shaped by how each individual reads their social situation. Thus, being a minority cannot be understood simply as a condition of permanent marginalization, but as a social position that can encourage individuals to reflect on their interactions, personal boundaries, and position in the academic environment (Gao et al., 2026; Magill et al., 2026; Xu, 2025).

The findings align with Connell and Messerschmidt's view that masculinity is a social construct shaped through relationships and context, rather than a fixed character inherent in men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this study, awareness of minority positions requires participants to read the applicable interaction norms and determine the form of involvement considered appropriate for them. This process can be seen in changes in communication patterns and interaction strategies carried out by participants. Some participants became more open and adjusted their communication, while others maintained certain interaction boundaries to preserve personal comfort. These findings show that adaptation is not the same as full adjustment to the majority group. Participants negotiate by choosing behaviors they can adjust without abandoning their principles or sense of self. Rather than simply adapting to the dominant group, participants selectively adjusted how they communicated, participated, and managed social boundaries. These adjustments emerged from concrete experiences of being a numerical minority, encountering different expectations in interaction, and responding to stereotypes about male students in teacher education. In this sense, adaptation became part of how participants negotiated remaining themselves while functioning effectively within the female-dominated environment.

In the masculinity perspective, the pattern suggests that male identity can be negotiated through relational, communication, and self-management abilities, not just through characteristics traditionally associated with dominance, power, or assertiveness. This aligns with caring masculinity, which frames care, relationships, and emotional involvement as part of male identity (Hookway & Cruickshank, 2024). However, this study's findings did not show that participants completely moved from traditional masculinity to caring masculinity. Participants maintain certain principles, personal boundaries, and an understanding of themselves as men. Therefore, the negotiations are better understood as a selective process: participants develop communication and relational capacities according to environmental, but still retain aspects of identity they consider important. This distinction matters because participants' experiences cannot be reduced to caring masculinity alone. Although communication, cooperation, and relational sensitivity became part of their adaptation, participants also emphasized responsibility, personal boundaries, self-principles, and maintaining a male identity. Thus, the findings indicate selective negotiation rather than a complete replacement of one masculinity orientation with another.

This dynamic also appears group work. Female-dominated environments do not always put male students in the same position. In some situations, participants feel their perspective offers a different point of view, while in others, their opinions are less heard or harder to convey. This difference shows that minorities' position depends not only on numbers, but also on communication patterns, acceptance of contributions, and the distribution of opportunities to participate in groups. Thus, minorities' experiences should be understood as social relations that can change with the situation, not as a position that automatically results in subordination.

Findings on gender stereotypes further show that the negotiation process takes place through the intersection of personal identity and social expectations. Questions about the reasons for choosing PGSD, the assumption that men enter PGSD because they have no other choice, and the perception that male students are less masculine show that elementary school teacher education can still be perceived through certain gender constructs. However, participants' responses to these stereotypes varied. Some experience it as an inconvenience, while others do not make it a major determinant of identity. This suggests that stereotypes don't work automatically; their influence depends on how the individuals interpret social judgments and how relevant they consider them (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Sun & Leili, 2026).

In that context, it is important to distinguish between personal attributes and gender constructions. Empathy, caring, communication skills, neatness, and the ability to manage emotions are not inherently feminine traits, just as assertiveness and strength are not exclusively masculine traits. When these attributes are rigidly associated with gender, the choice to become a teacher can be perceived as a deviation from certain masculinity norms. Conversely, participants' experiences showed that these attributes can become part of a prospective teacher's professional competence without losing their identity as a man. These findings reinforce the view that masculinity in teacher

education needs to be read as an identity negotiated through professional demands and social relations (Hookway & Cruickshank, 2024).

Overall, the participants' understanding of masculinity seems to shift in a broader direction. Masculinity is not only associated with strength or assertiveness, but also with responsibility, being an example, maturity, communication skills, self-management, and the ability to maintain personal boundaries. This change does not mean that research finds a new form of masculinity that is universally applicable. The term adaptive masculinity used in this study should therefore be understood narrowly as a descriptive term for the empirical pattern found: adjusting behavior and relational skills to environmental demands, accompanied by efforts to maintain personal principles and identity. The concept is grounded in the convergence of several empirical patterns identified across the cases. Participants described changes in communication, differences in the level of social interaction, difficulties and opportunities in group work, responses to gender stereotypes, and efforts to maintain personal boundaries and identity. Taken together, these patterns indicate that adaptation was not merely a social adjustment but a way of negotiating masculine identity within a specific educational context. Thus, adaptive masculinity in this study is not a new concept that stands parallel to hegemonic masculinity, caring masculinity, or hybrid masculinity, but rather a way to explain the negotiation mechanism that emerged among the four study participants (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

This position also helps clarify how the findings relate to hegemonic masculinity. Participants did not completely reject more conventional masculinity norms, but also did not passively follow them. Instead, they selectively negotiated these expectations through communication, cooperation, self-management, and boundary maintenance. This suggests that hegemonic norms remained part of the social context in which participants understood masculinity. Still, their responses to those norms varied according to individual experiences and the demands of the PGSD environment. This negotiation shows that masculinity can be shaped acceptance, adjustment, and selection of social norms. With only four participants in one institutional context, this interpretation should be understood as a contextual account of their experiences, not as evidence that all PGSD male students experience or develop the same form of masculinity.

The findings also have a special meaning because participants are in the process of forming their identity as prospective elementary school teachers. The meaning of responsibility, example, communication, and maturity relates not only to gender identity but also to the professional demands of being an educator. The teacher's educational environment can expand understanding that professional competence is not determined by gender. However, the experience of having opinions less heard or the choice to become a teacher questioned shows that the process is still ongoing in a social space that has gender expectations. Therefore, teacher education needs to provide an environment that allows students to build a professional identity without conforming to stereotypes about professions considered more suitable for men or women.

The practical implication of these findings is the need for a gender-responsive PGSD environment that provides equal participation opportunities for all students. Institutional support does not have to be in the form of special treatment for male students: still, it can be realized through mentoring mechanisms for students in minority positions, increased sensitivity of lecturers to gender stereotypes, group work management that guarantees opportunities to speak and contribute, and learning that does not associate teaching competence with a particular gender. These efforts are important so that both male and female students can develop communication skills, empathy, caring, responsibility, and leadership as professional competencies without associating certain attributes with specific genders.

However, the expansion of masculinity's meaning must be interpreted carefully. Participants' statements about responsibility, empathy, maturity, and communication may reflect their identity. Still, The interview context, the researcher-participant relationship, and the participant's desire to present a positive self-image may also influence them.. In addition, minority experiences do not always result in constructive identity learning. Feelings of inferiority, caution in interacting, difficulty expressing opinions, and experiences of dealing with stereotypes suggest that negotiation of masculinity can take place through tension as well as adjustment. Therefore, being a minority in this study is better understood as a context that opens up the possibility of reflection and negotiation of identity, rather than as a direct cause of changes in masculinity.

Overall, this study provides an idiographic understanding of how four male students interpret their position in a female-dominated PGSD environment through awareness of minority positions, experiences of dealing with stereotypes, communication adjustments, management of interaction boundaries, experiences in group work, and the expansion of the meaning of masculinity. The research contributes not by identifying a new type of masculinity or generalizing about PGSD male students in Indonesia, but by explaining how identity negotiation unfold within a particular teacher education program. Further research can expand the context by involving several universities and different socio-cultural backgrounds, comparing female-dominated study programs with programs with a more balanced gender composition, and using a longitudinal design to follow changes in the meaning of identity from college to entering the teaching profession.

CONCLUSION

This study shows male students' experience in a PGSD environment dominated by female students unfolds through a gradual, contextual identity negotiation process. The process begins with awareness of one`s position as a minority, which initially appears as awkwardness, a sense of inferiority, a more cautious attitude in interaction, or surprise at the dominance of female students. This is followed by adjustments in communication and interaction patterns, both through greater openness and social engagement and through limiting interactions to maintain personal comfort.

Experience in group work and subsequent social interactions shows that minority positions do not always result in the same experiences. Some participants viewed their existence as an opportunity to provide a different perspective, while others had difficulty expressing their opinions or felt less heard. At the same time, stereotypes about men who choose PGSD are also part of the participants' experience. Responses to these stereotypes varied, but overall the experience encouraged participants to reflect on how they understood their identity as men and prospective teachers.

The meaning of masculinity in the four participants showed an expansion of meaning, from an understanding that was not only related to physical characteristics or male image, but also included responsibility, role models, communication skills, self-management, maturity, personal values, and the ability to set boundaries in interaction. However, the process did not indicate that participants abandoned their previous masculine identity. Instead, they seek to adapt their behavior to the environment while maintaining the aspects of themselves they consider important. These findings suggest that the negotiation of masculinity takes place through a balance between social adaptation and identity defense.

Conceptually, this study provides a contextual understanding that the negotiation of masculinity in teacher education is a relational, dynamic process influenced process by the socio-academic context. In this study, adaptive masculinity is used an interpret these patterns of experience, not to establish a new universally applicable category of masculinity. Because the study involved four students from one study program, the findings could not be generalized to all PGSD male students in Indonesia.

Practically, teacher education programs need to build a gender-responsive learning environment, so that male and female students have equal opportunities to participate, express opinions, and develop professional identities without being limited by gender stereotypes. This support can be done through mentoring for students who are in minority positions, strengthening lecturers' understanding of gender stereotypes, and an academic culture that does not associate the profession of elementary school teachers with certain genders.

The research can further expand the context through studies at several universities with different socio-cultural backgrounds, compare study programs dominated by women with study programs with a more balanced gender composition, and use longitudinal research to track changes identity from college through participants' entry into the teaching profession.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank all participants who have been willing to take the time and share their experiences so that this research can be carried out well. The author also expresses his appreciation to the supervisor and the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia Purwakarta Campus, for the guidance, support, and input provided during the research process until the preparation of this article. The author also expresses his gratitude to both parents and families for their endless prayers, support, and motivation during the research process. In addition, the author would like to thank those who have provided support, encouragement, and assistance during the process of preparing this research so that the research can be completed properly.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

MDs contribute to research conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript writing. SI plays a role in research supervision, preparation of research design, provision of methodological direction, and review and revision of manuscripts. WM contributes to the preparation of research design, interpretation of findings, and critical review of manuscripts. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) during the manuscript preparation process to help with language editing, improve sentence clarity, and adjust the structure of the manuscript to journal guidelines. After using the tool, the author has reviewed, revised, and verified the entire content of the manuscript and is fully responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the content of the publication.

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