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Minangkabau Proverbs as a Representation of Character Values Rooted in Cultural Wisdom

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Abstract The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the character values that are contained in the Minangkabau proverbs, or so-called papatah-petitih. This research addressed the increasing demand for character education programs, relevant to the culture in Indonesia, by examining values in a particular and culturally appropriate philosophical way of oral traditions. This study was descriptive and qualitative, using content analysis of the sourcebook of Minangkabau papatah-petitih. The study identified 10 character values: thinking (hiduik Baraka), virtue (hiduik babudi), tolerance (hiduik batenggang), faithfulness (taguah), fairness (berlaku adil), being economical and cheerful (hemat dan cermat), being careful and alert (hati-hati dan waspada), wisdom and prudence (arif dan bijaksana), diligence (rajin), and humility (rendah hati). This research concluded that Minangkabau papatah-petitih are more than just cultural assets; they are available and authentic instruments of ethical education that reinforce educational curricula. The study provided preliminary documentation on the implementation of local wisdom to be used in national education.

Keywords: *Character Education, Minangkabau, Proverbs, Cultural wisdom, Sociolinguistics*

1. Introduction

The use of colloquial proverbs, maxims, or phrases is a fundamental means of communication in many sociocultural systems of societies around the world, including Indonesia. These proverbs are really not merely ornamentals of the linguistic proverbs; they also serve as cultural intangibles, i.e., good values, and local wisdom that have been inherited through generations (Kadarisman, 2017; Kartika, 2016). In our daily conversations, these proverbs are frequently employed to convey a substantial message or provide some indirect advice without having to be explicit (Maneechukate, 2018; Wahyuni, 2020). Furthermore, this kind of use presupposes that the Indonesian society has priority politeness or ethics in communications. For example, these proverbs can be used pragmatically as language to support social interactions, assure congruence and solidarity communicatively, and avoid or limit disrespect (Bochina et al., 2021; Ermanto, Triwira Dhika et al., 2025). Ultimately, these proverbs indicate

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tangible proverbs of the intellectual heritage of the country in a language vehicle. The phenomenon represents a manifestation of the relationship between language and culture. This term is frequently associated with the influence of culture on a specific language (Pishghadam, 2013; Pishghadam, Ebrahimi et al., 2020; Pishghadam, Ebrahimi, Naji Meidani et al., 2020).

Within Indonesia's multicultural complexities, the Minangkabau, known for a certain kind of relativist egalitarianism, are widely known for their unique tradition of verbal oratory called "*papatah-petitih*" (Sya et al., 2021). They are nearly the only way philosophical teaching, knowledge, and life advice are conveyed in verbal form. *Papatah-petitih* convey rich meanings and sometimes prompt careful consideration and reflection. *Papatah-petitih* are not solely reserved for ceremonial occasions; as is often the case with oral traditions, they are used in mundane aspects of life, such as communal deliberations, child-rearing, or dispute resolution (Manik, 2021; Salliyanti et al., 2023). *Papatah-petitih* are proverbs of the Minangkabau worldview of life, the universe, and personal character. *Papatah-petitih* are invaluable means of transmitting Minangkabau cultural identity.

Previous studies have investigated the relationship between proverbs and character values, albeit in different cultural contexts. Among these, the research conducted by Dedy and Sudarsana (2017) examined character education within Balinese culture, Maknun (2017) in Javanese culture, Putra et al. (2021) in Malay Sambas culture, Wulandari and Bahar (2022) in Malay Kerinci culture, and Husin and Rifa'i (2024) in Banjar culture. While previous studies have examined how proverbs represent character values, their focus has been on other ethnic groups or languages, and no meaningful analysis of Minangkabau proverbs and character values has been carried out. This gap is notable, given the distinctive, philosophical nature of Minangkabau *papatah-petitih*. Therefore, in this study, we attempt to address that gap by discussing Minangkabau proverbs, an area that has not been mutually addressed in character building.

Based on the background as well as the research gap discussed previously, this study's core aim is to identify and analyze proverbs in the Minangkabau language that represent the inherent character values of the society. This research will specifically analyze how these proverbs reflect values such as gotong-royong (mutual cooperation), musyawarah (deliberation), and other local wisdom. The results are anticipated to yield an important understanding of the outcome of language, culture, and character, and will provide a significant contribution to the fields of linguistics, anthropology, and cultural studies.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Proverbs in Indonesia and in the Minangkabau Language

The study of proverbs in Indonesia has been previously conducted by several researchers, including Dedy and Sudarsana (2017), Maknun (2017), Putra et al. (2021), Wulandari and Bahar (2022), and Husin and Rifa'i (2024). Dedy and Sudarsana (2017) examined character education within Balinese culture, Maknun (2017) in Javanese culture, Putra et al. (2021) in Malay Sambas culture, Wulandari and Bahar (2022) in Malay Kerinci culture, and Husin and Rifa'i (2024) in Banjar culture. Theoretically, these studies contributed significantly to character education, particularly in Indonesia. The research by Dedy and Sudarsana (2017) and Maknun (2017) yielded a theoretical understanding of character education from the perspectives of Balinese and Javanese cultures, encompassing traits such as religiousness, tolerance, honesty, and others. The studies by Putra et al. (2021) and Wulandari and Bahar (2022) revealed in-depth character development as conveyed through the Sambas Malay and Kerinci Malay cultures. Furthermore, the research by Husin and Rifa'i (2024) explored character education based on the Banjar cultural perspective, specifically highlighting the trait of responsibility. While previous studies have examined how proverbs represent character values, their focus has been on other ethnic groups or languages, and no meaningful analysis of Minangkabau proverbs and character values has been carried out. This gap is notable, given the distinctive, philosophical nature of Minangkabau *papatah-petitih*.

In the framework of the Minangkabau culture, oral proverbs cannot be genuinely classified as typical phraseology. "*Papatah-petitih*," a term often used by the Minangkabau people, refers to the oral tradition of proverbs, aphorisms, or metaphors, representing a lodge, a way of thought, a folk wisdom,

or a strong body of knowledge (Rahim, 2017; Rahmi et al., 2023). Their meanings cannot be understood in a conceptual sense, as they often contain a significant philosophical meaning, which is a local wisdom communally backed through generations. *Papatah-petitih* are a reflection of the way Minangkabau people construe their ways of thinking, with messages or information representing a strong moral or an ethical guide.

2.2. Character Values in the Minangkabau Culture

The character values that form the identity of the Minangkabau community are based on the customs of Islamic law. This principle emphasizes that every norm and custom must be based on Islamic teachings as the basis of social order (Rahmi, 2023; Wulandari et al., 2023). From these principles, values emerge that are associated with the ideals of mutual cooperation, deliberation, and consensus, shame or embarrassment triggered by socially inappropriate behavior, and obligation to the truth that go beyond theoretical notions, and instead are performatively enacted in practice and throughout a person's entire life, from family to social structure.

Proverbial sayings in the Minangkabau language (*papatah-petitih*) are the most dominant medium of communication used to pass down values of character (Manik, 2021; Salliyanti et al., 2023). Proverbs do not simply refer to something or describe it; they rather have a performative function in teaching or reinforcing a value or action. For instance, a proverb that references beauty in nature might have the performative function of teaching values in maintaining cleanliness to preserve the environment. Similarly, a proverb about water flowing in a river might performatively imply the notion of being flexible or being able to adapt (Chaniago, 2020; Putra et al., 2021).

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

The primary data source for the study is a poetry book entitled "*Pantun Minangkabau dalam Perspektif Budaya dan Pendidikan*" (Minangkabau Poems from a Cultural and Educational Perspective) by Erizal Gani in 2010. This book was used as a source of data because it contains a substantial collection of Minangkabau poems and proverbs with ethical and philosophical meanings. Furthermore, the book effectively represents the diverse proverbs within the Minangkabau culture. This is evidenced by the scarcity of documented sources or publications compiling a wide range of such cultural proverbs. The researchers' extensive search revealed that only this particular book systematically presents and collects these Minangkabau expressions in book format. Crucially, the text also provides explications of the meanings embedded in these documented proverbs. The proverbs in the text were selected because they are representatives of the genre, as these poems were collected by researchers with expertise in Minangkabau cultural studies. Indexical data were excerpts of the relevant proverbs that articulated character values of interest in the contemporary study, such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, and various aspects of local wisdom.

3.2. Procedure

3.2.1. Data Collection

The data were collected using the documentation technique (JR, 2024; Ningrum et al., 2022). In the documentation process, the researchers read, coded, and observed every proverb in the text that warranted further review (JR & Ermanto, 2023; Ermanto, JR et al., 2025). Once the proverbs were collected, the researchers categorized each proverb based on the investigative meaning and potential connections to the character values of this study. These categorizations provided a systematic and logical organization for subsequent data analysis.

3.2.2. Data Analysis

Data triangulation was used for data analysis, which means verifying meanings and understandings of the words from different data sources to ensure trustworthiness (Fauzan & Satria, 2023; Gonzales & Gonzales, 2024). The data analysis process consisted of three stages. The first stage was data reduction when the researchers identified the most relevant proverbs; the second stage was data display, when

proverbs were categorized by the corresponding values of character represented by an proverb, and the third and final stage included verification and drawing conclusions about how these proverbs serve as messages of character values where the researchers connected the results of the analysis of the proverbs to existing theories, wrote a logical argument, and grounded a final conclusion to the purpose of the research, analyzing the proverbs as messages of character values.

4. Results

Based on an analysis of Minangkabau proverbs in Erizal Gani's book, ten character values were identified. These values are thinking (*hiduik Baraka*), virtue (*hiduik babudi*), tolerance (*hiduik batenggang*), faithfulness (*taguah*), fairness (*berlaku adil*), being economical and cheerful (*hemat dan cermat*), being careful and alert (*hati-hati dan waspada*), wisdom and prudence (*arif dan bijaksana*), diligence (*rajin*), and humility (*rendah hati*). To provide further clarity, Table 1 presents the character values found in Erizal Gani's book on Minangkabau proverbs.

Table 1
Representation of Character Values in a Book of Minangkabau Poetry

Representation of Character Values in a Book of Minangkabau Poetry	Total Poetry
Thinking (*Hiduik Baraka*)	8
Virtue (*Hiduik Babudi)*	7
Tolerance (*Hiduik Batenggang*)	1
Faithfulness (*Taguah*)	3
Fairness (*Berlaku Adil*)	1
Being Economical and Cheerful (*Hemat dan Cermat*)	1
Being Careful and Alert (*Hati-hati dan Waspada*)	2
Wisdom and Prudence (*Arif dan Bijaksana*)	4
Diligence (*Rajin*)	1
Humility (*Rendah Hati*)	1

Based on Table 1, it can be understood that Minangkabau culture and customs are diverse in form and character, one of which is the practice of *papatah-petitih* (proverbs and maxims) in specific activities. However, these proverbs are not just meaningless traditions; they contain character-building values for the Minangkabau people. The following are some of the character values found within these proverbs.

4.1. Thinking (Hiduik Baraka)

Hiduik baukua Jo Bajangko (Life is measured by Bajangko)

In leading their lives, the Minangkabau people are expected to always utilize their intellect, act with precise measurements, and possess clear plans and accurate estimations. What distinguishes humans from animals is the immense power they can wield effectively in navigating life. These three forces are the brain, the muscle, and the heart, which are used to improve an individual's life, as reflected in the following proverbs.

Alun rabah lah ka ujuang (Not over yet)
Alun pai lah babaliak (Not yet gone, has returned)
Alun di bali lah bajua (Not yet bought, already sold)
Alun dimakan alah taraso (Not yet eaten, already tasted)

Based on this proverb, it is expected that one should plan any task with the utmost thought and precision to avoid future regret. This is how life should be lived: with a clear vision and a defined sense of direction and purpose. In conducting their lives, the Minang people are expected to always use their intellect, be measured in their actions, and have a clear plan with accurate foresight. By effectively utilizing their intellect, humans can maintain a constant state of vigilance, as captured in the following proverbs.

Dalam mulo akhie mambayang (The end is imagined from the beginning)
Dalam baiak kanalah buruak (Within good, one knows bad)

Dalam galak tangieh kok tibo (Amidst great joy, tears may arrive)
Hati gadang hutang kok tumbuah (A generous heart often incurs debt)

The proverbs, as a whole, express important values in life that are connected and interrelated. They convey values about the realization of duality and the preparation we are tasked with. At the start, as indicated in the first line, "Dalam mulo, akhie mambayang," we are recognizing our understanding of foresight and obligation, and we understand that when we start something, we will find an outcome for its beginnings - this is a part of life. Additionally, "Dalam baiak, kanalah buruak" and "Dalam galak, tangieh kok tibo" remind us to retain humility and resiliency. We absolutely do not forget that things will eventually become challenging or difficult.

Dihawai sahabih raso (Aired to the taste/To be discussed thoroughly until a consensus is reached)
Dikaruak sahabih gauang (Dug all the way/To investigate a matter to its very root)
Dijarah sahabis lubang (Looted after the hole/To exploit something completely, leaving nothing behind)

The proverb "dihawai sahabih raso, dikaruak sahabih gauang, dijarah sahabis lubang" metaphorically exemplifies thoroughness and finish. Each element in the proverb represents a specific quality of this understanding. For example, "dihawai sahabih raso" (to be discussed thoroughly until a consensus is reached), communicates that every choice is to be measured meaningfully but holistically, not by calculative or nominalist standards. This proverb supports the notion that a life guided by reason is a purposeful life, one that values quality and caution. This approach aims to prevent future problems, especially in situations where actions must be fully measured until their completion, where poor performance could otherwise create further life complications. Therefore, these statements encompass a whole philosophy of value of quality and caution in and about both investigation and acknowledgment.

Mangaji dari alif (Studying from alif/To start from the very beginning)
Babilang dari aso (Counting from aso/To count from one)
Mancancang balandasan (Chopping the runway/To prepare the foundation)
malompek basitumpu (Jumping in a bunch/To move forward together)

When carrying out a joint task or operating within an organization, it's impossible to work in isolation. The feeling of "reluctance to be overshadowed" must be eliminated. One is expected to adapt to contemporary social patterns. It's no longer acceptable for an organization to be insular, operating only among its own members. In such a condition, the proverb "What he says is true, but what we do is our own" will prevail. Let us self-reflect and revisit the following teachings of the Minangkabau tradition.

Bajalan ba nan tuo (Walk with the elders/Learn and follow the wisdom of older generations)
Balayie ba nakhodo (Sail with the captain/Follow guidance from those who lead)
Bakato ba nan pandai (Speak with the wise/Use thoughtful, wise words)

The proverbs suggest that the ancestors of the Minangkabau people had already understood the patterns of modern organizational structures. Many people today still lack aspirations or life goals and are unsure of what they want to achieve in life. There are also those who have aspirations but do not know the path they must take to achieve them. The ancestors of the Minangkabau people, thousands of years ago, already knew what they wanted to achieve in this life and the means they had to employ to achieve those aspirations. Consider the following proverbs.

Nak kayo kuek mancari (To be rich, strong looking/If you wish to be rich, you must strive diligently)
Nak tuah bertabur urai (Just scattered/If you wish for good fortune, be generous)
Nak mulie tapeki janji (To honor the promise/If you wish to be honorable, keep your promises)
Nak namo tinggakan jaso (Want name leave service/If you wish to be renowned, leave a legacy of good deeds)
Nak pandai kuek baraja (To be good at learning/If you wish to be knowledgeable, you must study hard)

To be accepted into a social circle, it is essential for an individual to accurately read and comprehend the emotions of others. This ability has now been termed empathy, which is simply the ability to imagine oneself in another's circumstances. This highlights the fact that what one considers good may not be perceived as such by others.

Balabieh ancak-ancak, bakurang sio-sio (Excess randomly, less in vain/Whether in excess or in lack, it is all without proper measure)
Diagak mangko diagiehi (Guessed then given/To give based on mere estimation)
Dibaliek mangko dibalah (Flipped then split/To be judged or decided upon from all angles)
Bayang-bayang sepanjang badan (Full-body shadows/Your shadow is only as long as your body)
Nan babarieh nan dipahek (The attached line/To follow the prescribed line)
Nan baukue nan dikabuang (The measured discarded/To discard what has been measured)
Jalan nan luruih nan ditampuah (The straight path traveled/To take the straight path)
Labuah pasa nan dituruik (The market street followed/To follow the well-trodden path to the market)
Di garieh makanan pahat (In the chisel food line/The chisel's sustenance is in the line it carves)
Di aie lapehkan tubo (In the water, release the tube/In the water, release the fishing line)
Tantang sakik lakek ubek (About pain medication/For every ailment, there is a remedy)
Luruih manantang barieh adat (Straight against the lines of custom/To be straight (honest) while still respecting the lines of custom)

The proverbs previously mentioned embody the virtue of "hiduik baraka", or "living wisely", and value balance, thinking of the future, and wisdom. The philosophy held by the Minangkabau indicates that everything must be done intentionally and in moderation. In addition, other maxims such as "Bayang-bayang sepanjang badan [Your shadow is only as long as your body]" and "Nan babarieh nan dipahek [To follow the prescribed line]" assert and advocate understanding one's own boundaries, in terms of ability and behavior.

4.2. Virtue (Hiduik Babudi)

Maintaining proper speech is of paramount importance. Numerous disputes arise solely from a failure to control one's words. Minangkabau tradition highly values courtesy in social interactions, and an individual's dignity is often measured by their noble character. Therefore, every Minangkabau individual is expected to possess strong ethical principles. This is reflected in some Minangkabau poems.

Nan kuriak iyolah kundi (The kundi berry is known by its curl)
Nan merah iyolah sago (The sago palm is known by its red hue)
Nan baiak iyolah Budi (The greatest virtue is a Moral soul)
Nan indah iyolah Baso (The finest beauty is Courteous speech)
Kuek rumah dek basandi (A house stands strong through its joints and beams)
Rusak sandi rumah binaso (The structure fails, the house will collapse.)
Kuek bangso karano budi (A nation stands strong through its moral dreams)
Rusak budi bangso binaso (Morality fails, the nation will collapse)

Anak ikan dimakan ikan (A small fish was eaten by a bigger fish)
Gadang di tabek anak tenggiri (It grew up in the pond of the great mackerel)
Ameh bukan perakpun bukan (It is not a thing of gold or silver)
Budi saketek rang haragoi (But a little kindness is valued by all)

For centuries, the Minangkabau tradition has held that if a nation's morality becomes corrupt, it will inevitably perish and be lost to history. Good character is valued more than gold and silver. Minangkabau customs clearly regulate proper etiquette in social interaction; one only needs to practice them diligently. As the proverb states:

Nan tuo dihormati (Respect those who are older)
Nan ketek disayangi (Cherish those who are younger)

Samo gadang bawo bakawan (Treat your peers as friends)
Ibu jo bapak diutamokan (And honor your father and mother above all)

Character, or budi pekerti, is a quality highly valued in the Minangkabau tradition. Similarly, a sense of shame and courtesy are considered mandatory virtues for the Minangkabau people. A Minangkabau proverb warns:

Dek ribuik rabahlah padi (Because of the storm, the rice falls)
Di cupak Datuak Tumangguang (in the measure of Datuak Tumangguang)

Hiduik kok tak babudi (A life without virtue)
Duduak tagak kamari cangguang (sitting and standing are awkward)

Rarak kaliki dek binalu (The papaya falls because of the thorns)
Tumbuah sarumpun ditapi tabek (It grows in clusters by the pond)

Kalau habih raso jo malu (If your sense of feeling and shame are gone)
Bak kayu lungga pangabek (Like a loose piece of wood in a joint)

The Minangkabau people's cultural ideal is to foster a secure and harmonious life. To achieve this, great emphasis is placed on proactive measures to prevent interpersonal conflicts. It is widely believed that cultivating strong moral character and practicing proper etiquette (basa-basi) in daily interactions are key to avoiding disputes. A person's good character, or budi pekerti, is a legacy that endures even after death, as encapsulated in some well-known poems.

Pucuak pauah sadang tajelo (The shoot of the pauah is gently tapped)
Panjuluak bungo linggundi (A bud of the linggundi blooms above)
Nak jauah silang sangketo (To avoid dispute and conflict apt)
Pahaluih baso jo basi (The best shield is refined and gracious love)

Pulau pandan jauah ditangah (Pandan Island lies far out in the bay)
Dibaliak pulau angso duo (Beyond the isle where two swans reside)
Hancua badan di kanduang tanah (Though the body in the earth will decay)
Budi baiak takana juo (The good you did will be remembered with pride)

Nak urang koto ilalang (If a person (from) Koto Ilalang)
Nak lalu ka pakan baso ((If) passing to the market of language)
Malu jo sopan kok lah ilang (If a person's shame and politeness are gone)
Habihlah raso jo pareso (Then lost is all their conscience and sense of right and wrong)

Anjalai tumbuah dimunggu (The anjalai grows upon the mound)
Sugi sugi di rumpun padi (The sugi-sugi in the rice field is found)
Supayo pandai rajin baguru (To be wise, be diligent in your quest for lore)
Supayo tinggi naiakkan budi (To be noble, raise your virtue evermore)

Acquiring knowledge is a result of diligently seeking to learn and accumulate wisdom. Meanwhile, honor is attained through a virtuous character. To achieve success and be accepted wherever they go, Minangkabau people must possess two essential qualities: diligence and high moral character.

Kok hilang raso jo malu (A person without shame and conscience)
Bak kayu lungga pangabek (is as useless as a peg that won't hold)

The Minangkabau phrase "Kok hilang raso jo malu, bak kayu lungga pangabek" articulates a significant alert about the bedrock of a person's character and morality. In this case, the value of a rational life is not simply envisioned as rational intelligence but instead in terms of the ability to resist bodily appetites and excesses and act instead based on what one thinks is rational wisdom, based on one's own feelings and shame.

Nak urang koto ilalang (If a person (from) Koto Ilalang)
Nak lalu ka pakan baso ((If) passing to the market of language)
Malu jo sopan kok lah ilang (If a person's shame and politeness are gone)
Habihlah raso jo pareso (Then lost is all their conscience and sense of right and wrong)

These proverbs serve as evidence of the implementation of 'adat' rules within Minangkabau society. The regulations mentioned above include various cultural products of the Minangkabau domain, including language, clothing, food, tools, economic activities, social organization and kinship, and the arts in the form of dance, music, and historical objects. The significance of morality (akhlak) is conveyed by the poets and sages.

4.3. Tolerance (Hiduik Batenggang)

The value of hiduik batenggang (empathy and mutual respect) teaches the importance of living with consideration for others. Human emotions are complex, easily hurt, and fragile; simply wounding someone's feelings can hurt deeply. Therefore, a socially positive interaction tends to be one where individuals are careful to manage the feelings of others. Wounded feelings can lead to conflict. For this reason, it is customary to practice caution when interacting socially, in the form of conversation, behaviors, and actions that will help avoid the possibility of offending others. Compassion is one of the moral virtues to which tradition encourages us very strongly. See the following proverb.

Bajalan paliharo kaki (Walking barefoot/When you walk, watch your step)
bakato paliharo lidah (Speak, keep your tongue/When you speak, guard your tongue)

Kaki tataruang inai padahannyo (His legs are covered with henna/A misstep may stain your feet with henna)
Lidah tataruang ameh padahannyo (Tongue covered with gold/But a misspoken word will cost you gold)

Bajalan salangkah madok suruik (Take a step back/Before you take a step, look ahead)
Kato sapatah dipikiaan (A word of thought/Before you speak a word, think first)

The word suggests a basic idea of shared happiness where one party's happiness somehow entails happiness for another party. This moral order shapes behavior in a way that parties want (not only to serve their self-interest) but care and think at some level about the interests of others in order to create social harmony. Collective moral regard in the idea helps to reduce social conflict culturally and intra-culturally. This moral order creates a non-violent social tolerance. The Minangkabau have retained this moral order, especially in diaspora, in such a way as to embrace their social engagement and creatively transition to new communities around the world.

4.4. Faithfulness (Taguah)

The significance of group loyalty or social solidarity is an important ethic to implant in the Minangkabau people, especially those who live in a diasporic environment or context. This can be stated in the following proverbs.

Tatungkuik samo makan tanah (When face down, still eat dirt)
Tatilantang samo minum aia (Lying on one's back, still drinking water/In success or failure, we stand together)

Saciok bak ayam (One chirp like a chicken)
Sadanciang bak basi (One clink like iron/To be in perfect harmony and unity)

Loyalty involves steadfast adherence to one's commitments, refraining from betrayal, and fostering a shared sense of destiny and unity within a family. This trait is the source of other qualities, such as comradeship, love for one's hometown, patriotism, and national identity. From this, a willingness to help, defend, and sacrifice for one another also emerges. With this quality, there is no room for envy among individuals. Check the following proverbs.

Malompek samo patah (Jumping equally broken/If we jump, we break together.)
Manyarunduak samo bungkuak (Bending down equally bowed/If we bend, we bow together)

Tarandam samo basah (Soaked equally wet/If we drown, we get wet together)

Rasok aia pulang ka aia (The absorption of water returns to water/What is water-soaked returns to water)
Rasok minyak pulang ka minyak (The absorption of oil returns to oil/What is oil-soaked returns to oil)

When faced with a conflict that necessitates taking a side, the Minangkabau people will invariably side with their kin. In such circumstances, their loyalty can be as fervent as the English, who famously uphold the principle, "Right or wrong, my country." Although Minangkabau society is guided by the principle of "barajo ka nan bana" (adhering to what is right), this core tenet is often set aside when they are compelled to choose a side. This behavior is rooted in their customary proverbs, which teach the following:

Adat badunsanak, dunsanak patahankan (If it concerns kinship, defend your kin)
Adat bakampuang, kampuang patahankan (If it concerns the village, defend the village)
Adat banagari, nagari patahankan (If it concerns the homeland, defend the homeland)
Adat babangso, bangso patahankan (If it concerns the nation, defend the nation)

Parang ba suku samo dilipek (War clans should be settled)
Parang samun samo diadoki (War against enemies should be faced together)

From the meanings contained in the proverbs, the value of taguah (steadfastness) denotes a multi-layered commitment and loyalty. This construct implies steadfastness principally not toward one person but a continuous sequence of increasing social circles; from dunsanak (relatives), kampuang (village), nagari (state/region), and finally to bangso (nation). Each of these circles demands to be steadfastly maintained. The meaning of this steadfastness is further reinforced through the proverb "Parang ba suku samo dilipek, parang samun samo diadoki," which conveys that, when facing an internal conflict ("war among tribes"), the concerns must be resolved in a peaceful and collective way ("folded" or united). However, when facing an external conflict ("war among robbers"), the communities involved must face the threat collectively and united. The value of faithfulness insists on a multi-layered commitment and solidarity. In the end, steadfastness relies not on one's individual ego but on unconditionally devoting oneself to a larger social order to preserve collective integrity and viability.

4.5. Fairness (Berlaku Adil)

The value of fairness teaches individuals to always act justly toward everyone. Justice in this context means taking an impartial stance and adhering steadfastly to the truth. Such impartiality is particularly challenging when dealing with one's own kin. This difficulty arises, in part, due to a conflicting customary proverb: "Adat dunsanak, dunsanak dipatahankan," which translates to "Customary law of kin, kin are to be defended." This principle is a cornerstone of the Minangkabau customary law.

Bakati samo barek (Equal in weight)
Maukua samo panjang (Equal in length)
Mambilai samo laweh (Equal in portion)
Baragiah samo banyak (equal in share)

Tibo dimato indak dipiciangkan (when it comes to the eye, it is not blinked away)
Tibo diparuik indak dikampihkan (when it comes to the stomach, it is not rejected)
Tibo didado indak dibusuangkan (when it comes to the heart, it is not puffed out)

Mandapek samo balabo (Profits are shared together)
Kahilangan samo marugi (Losses are borne together)
Nan ado samo dimakan (What we have, we consume together)

Nan indak samo dicari (What we lack, we seek together)

Gadang kayu gadang dahannyo (A large tree has large branches)
Ketek kayu ketek bahannyo (A small tree has small twigs)
Gadang agiah baumpuak (A large portion is gathered for the whole)
Ketek agiah bacacah (A small portion is shared out piece by piece)

Hati gajah samo dilapah (the heart of an elephant is consumed together)
Hati tungau samo dicacah (the heart of a mite is shared)

The fairness value of these proverbs is broad, covering the domains of law, society, and economics. Taken as a whole, this collection of proverbs functions to describe justice as even-handed, proportionate, and fair. For example, the proverbs: “tibonyo di mato indak dipiciangkan, tibo di paruik indak dikampihkan” (when it comes to the eye, it is not blinked away, and when it comes to the stomach, it is not flattened rejected) show that justice must be impartial, devoid of ties or interests. This is further reiterated with the analogy: “nan ado samo dimakan, nan indak samo dicari” (What we have, we consume together, What we lack, we seek together). This frames justice within the context of sharing resources and responsibility collectively. The saying: “hati gajah samo dilapah, hati tungau samo dicacah” (the heart of an elephant is consumed together, the heart of a mite is shared) symbolically educates that, no matter one’s status or rank, one’s claim to justice is equal in large things or small things.

4.6. Being Economical and Cheerful (Hemat dan Cermat)

Minangkabau philosophical teachings also posit that everything in this world has a purpose. The universe contains nothing that is without benefit, as every element serves a function. This is articulated in a traditional proverb which states:

Nan buto pahambuih saluang (the blind are the flute blowers)
Nan pakak palapeh badia (the deaf are the gun firers)
Nan patah pangajuik ayam (the broken/lame are the chicken startled)
Nan lumpuah paunyi rumah (the paralyzed are the housekeepers)
Nan binguang kadisuruah-suruah (the confused are the ones to be ordered around)
Nan buruak palawan karajo (the ugly are the work opponents)
Nan kuek paangkuik baban (the strong are the burden lifters)
Nan tinggi jadi panjuluak (the tall become the reachers/pokers)
Nan randah panyaruduak (the short are the headbutters/pushers)
Nan pandai tampek batanyo (the knowledgeable are the sources to ask)
Nan cadiak bakeh baiyo (the smart are the sources to discuss/agree)
Nan kayo tampek batenggang (the rich are the sources to give assistance)
Nan rancak palawan dunia (the beautiful are the world’s opponents/companions)

This passage as a whole reflects the importance of being prudent and careful, based on the principles of optimizing resources and utilizing potential for judicious purposes. Each line of the poem maps a different limitation, such as blindness, deafness, being broken, or paralysis, and a strength, such as might, height, intelligence, or wealth, not as either an absolute deficit or advantage, but as potential capital that, no matter how limited, can be optimized for a specific purpose. Prudence and carefulness in this situation are not limited to governing physical property; it’s related more to the optimization of the human capital, as well as situational capital, of each individual during the one-day course.

4.7. Being Careful and Alert (Hati-hati dan Waspada)

In the course of human existence, it is critical to remain on continual guard against threats to personal safety from both nature and adversaries, as well as the perils that one’s own actions and decisions may cause. As a result, one should be careful about any judgments that are made. One should carefully consider the potential positive and negative implications of every determination made. This need for caution and prudence in decision-making and judgments is reflected in the following axiomatic proverb:

Maminteh sabalun anyuik (to bail out the water before drowning/drifting away)
Malantai sabalun lapuak (to put down the floor/plank before rotting)
Ingek-ingek sabalun kanai (to remember/be mindful before getting hit/afflicted)

The above considerations identify the necessity of being vigilant and circumspect about everything in life, whether it is with regard to our own actions, somebody else's actions, or the dangers that nature and other organisms may pose. The qualities of watchfulness and alertness are highly encouraged in Minangkabau customary law, as exemplified by the following proverb.

Sio-sio nagari alah (A nation is lost for nothing)
Sio-sio utang tumbuah (and debt grows without purpose)

Mangecek Siang dicaliak-caliak (By day, look carefully when you speak)
Mangecek malam didanga-danga (by night, listen intently when you speak)

Bajalan paliharolah kaki (When you walk, watch your step)
Bakato paliharolah lidah (When you speak, guard your tongue)

The proverbs above express the attitudes of carefulness and conscientiousness as two crucial principles for living one's life. "Sio-sio nagari alah, sio-sio utang tumbuah" reminds us that we will eventually face failures and problems (debt, or otherwise) at our own peril, if we are careless or neglectful. Therefore, we should think and become conscious before we speak or act. "Mangecek Siang dicaliak-caliak, mangecek malam didanga-danga" implies that any time one talks, day (publicly) or night (in privacy), people are constantly watching and listening. This embodies the value of shame for reputation and having integrity.

4.8. Wisdom and Prudence (Arif dan Bijaksana)

A wise person is one who can understand the perspectives of others. They are able to comprehend both what is explicitly stated and what is implied. "Tanggap" signifies the ability to fend off any impending danger. "Sabar" means being able to accept all trials with a calm heart and find solutions with a clear mind. These three virtues are highly valued in the Minangkabau tradition, as encapsulated in the following proverb.

Tahu dikilek baliuang nan ka kaki (Knowing the flash of the adze that is aimed at the foot)
Kilek camin nan ka muka (Seeing the flash of the mirror that is aimed at the face)

Tahu jo gabak diulu tando ka ujan (Knowing the dark clouds upstream is a sign of rain)
Cewang di langik tando ka paneh (Knowing bright skies are a sign of heat/fair weather)

Ingek di rantiang ka mancucuak (Remembering the branch that will prick)
Tahu didahan ka maimpok (Knowing the large branch that will fall)
Tahu diunak kamanyangkuik (Knowing the thorn that will catch/snag)

Pandai maminteh sabalun anyuik (smart/skillful at cutting across before drifting away)

This is how Minangkabau culture describes individuals who are wise and responsive to impending challenges. It teaches us to always be vigilant and cautious in all matters, from our own actions and those of others, to things that come from nature and other organisms. Next, a prudent attitude is exemplified by the following proverb.

Gunuang biaso timbunan kabukik (A mountain is usually a collection of hills)
Lurah biaso timbunan aia (A valley is usually a collection of water)
Lakuak biaso timbunan sampah (A hollow is usually a collection of trash)
Lauik biaso timbunan ombak (a sea is usually a collection of waves)

Nan hitam tahan tapo (What is black endures staining)
Nan putiah tahan sasah (What is white endures washing)

Di sasah bahabih aia (When washed, it consumes all the water)
Dikikih bahabih basi (When scraped, it consumes all the iron).

The proverb above teaches the importance of having a broad perspective, being careful in every action, and knowing one's own capacity. This prevents a person from recklessly voicing opinions or making statements, as is highly valued in Minangkabau proverbs.

Ingek di rantiang ka mancucuak (Remembering the branch that will prick)
Tahu didahan ka maimpok (Knowing the large branch that will fall)
Alu tataruang patah tigo (the pestle stumbled and broke into three)
Samuik tapijak indak mati (the ant stepped on does not die)

Becoming a person with the qualities of wisdom and prudence is essential, especially in one's actions and speech. A Minangkabau person must be able to gauge their own capacity and position themselves appropriately. This involves being firm in acting upon truth with great wisdom. This quality of prudence is also evident in their speech, ensuring it is appropriate for the context so as not to offend others or harm themselves, as reflected in the following proverb.

Mangecek malam, danga-dangai (speak at night, listen closely)
Mangecek siang caliak-caliak (speak during the day, look around)

This proverb shows that one's speech should not be careless, as it could damage relationships with others. When speaking, one should be cautious and mindful of the specific context. Not all topics of conversation are suitable for every setting; rather, one must adjust one's discourse to fit the particular circumstances.

4.9. Diligence (Rajin)

In any field, success is not solely achieved through intelligence alone; it also requires diligence and perseverance. By being diligent and perseverant, one can achieve one's aspirations. With perseverance, all obstacles and laziness can be overcome. It also means being able to utilize time as effectively as possible. For the Minangkabau people, diligence is the main asset for achieving a better life, as expressed in the following saying.

Duduak Marauik Ranjau (Sitting, sharpening the bamboo spikes for a trap)
Tagak Maninjau Jarak (Standing, surveying the distance)

The Minangkabau proverb on life explains that one should be diligent in many aspects, capable of utilizing time as effectively as possible without being willing to waste it. Furthermore, one should carry out all obligations sincerely.

4.10. Humility (Rendah Hati)

It is estimated that more than half of the Minangkabau people live in rantau. Living in Rantau means living as a minority within an environment dominated by other ethnic groups. Those who migrate to Jakarta may not feel as though they are part of a minority group. However, those who migrate to Bandung, Semarang, Malaysia, Australia, Europe, or the United States live among people from different cultures. How should Minangkabau migrants behave? Minangkabau custom provides the following guidance:

Kok manyauak di hilie-hilie (If you're looking downhill)
Kok mangecek dibawah-bawah (Why talk down)

Tibo dikandang kambiang mangembek (When you are in the goat's pen, bleat like a goat)
Tibo dikandang kabau manguak (When you are in the buffalo's shed, bellow like a buffalo)

Dimano langik dijunjuang (Where the sky is elevated)
Disinan bumi dipijak (There the earth is trodden)
Disitu rantiang di patah (There the branch was broken)

Based on these proverbs, an immigrant or newcomer must be skillful in adapting and be self-aware of their status. If one can successfully adapt to the new environment, they can even become a role model and a community figure. At that point, they no longer need to "manyauak di hilie-hilie" (fetch water downstream) but may even be "disauakkan dihulu-hulu" (have water fetched for them upstream), meaning they are given precedence and elevated in status. They might be appointed as a leader, like a penghulu (traditional chief) among their people. This signifies that an outsider living in a different cultural environment, as a minority group, must be self-aware and adept at positioning themselves to be accepted wherever they are.

5. Discussion

This research aims to analyze the character values represented through proverbs in the Minangkabau language. The results of this research illustrate that Minangkabau proverbs or *papatah-petitih* have an abundance of noble character values that can serve as a guide for life. *Papatah-petitih* contains a variety of values, from the value of generosity to the value of perseverance implicit within these phrases. Overall, these results support findings reported by Dedy and Sudarsana (2017) that identified character education values in the Balinese Geguritan Suddhamala. The two of us arrived at a similar conclusion, that traditional literature or traditional proverbs are strong media for integrative noble character values. A very large distinction is simply the source of the values. Geguritan Suddhamala is based on Hindu religious tenets, whereas Minangkabau *papatah-petitih* are grounded philosophically in "adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah," involving the religious teachings within traditional customs.

In comparison with Maknun's (2017) analysis of Javanese moral education in the Serat Wasitawala, there are both similarities and differences. Maknun's study described how the Serat Wasitawala is a significant spiritual and ethical education for Javanese people, and it teaches noble values, including keikhlasan (sincerity) and ketenangan batin (inner peace). This study is in agreement with our study, which found that Minangkabau *papatah-petitih* represent local ethics and wisdom. On the other hand, Minangkabau *papatah-petitih* are more focused on practical guidance for interaction with one another in social and moral life, more specifically on how to conduct oneself with others, conduct oneself in the community, and conduct oneself in life with honor. The Serat Wasitawala is more philosophical and offers a stronger spiritual influence.

Furthermore, our study identified a strong parallel with the study by Putra et al. (2021), which explored using Sambas Malay proverbs for character education. Both studies confirm the continuing significance of traditional proverbs for character education in this fast-paced millennial age. In both societies (Minangkabau and Sambas), people still looked towards local wisdom to inform the younger generation. Still, our study provides more specific information about the values associated with character education, such as a distinctly Minangkabau value of responsibility (hiduik babudi) and being cautious (hati-hati dan waspada). Here, we can see that every ethnic group in Indonesia has its wealth of local wisdom, serving as a potentially unending source of inspiration for character education.

In addition, our findings share an essential similarity with the research of Husin and Rifa'i (2024), which focused on the Banjar proverb "Haram Manyarah Waja Sampai Kaputing [Never surrender; persist until the very end]". That study demonstrated how a single proverb can encapsulate strong values such as perseverance, resilience, and responsibility. This commonality reinforces our conclusion that proverbs or wise sayings are a cultural method of summarizing and condensing important teachings. The difference lies in the fact that our study analyzed a broader spectrum of *papatah-petitih*, successfully identifying ten distinct character values, whereas Husin and Rifa'i's research centered on a single proverb in depth.

Further to our more focused presentation, these findings also contribute more broadly to the use of proverbs in character value representations in Indonesia. The consensus of our study, and previously of the Balinese, Javanese, Sambas Malay, and Banjar ethnicities, is that this is not simply a tradition but a viable cultural strategy for sustaining identity and morality (Dedy & Sudarsana, 2017; Husin & Rifa'i, 2024; Maknun, 2017; Putra et al., 2021; Wulandari & Bahar, 2022). While it has been noted in Indonesia, this is recognized as a trend globally. Societies worldwide utilize mythology, folk tales, and proverbs to instill moral values, ethical behavior, and social norms (Pishghadam, 2013; Pishghadam,

Ebrahimi et al., 2020; Pishghadam, Ebrahimi, Naji Meidani et al., 2020). For example, Chinese proverbs tend to emphasize the importance of hard work and patience (Lin & Liu, 2024; Sang & Nardone, 2024), while proverbs from the Middle East stress the importance of honor and wisdom (AL-Sanjari, 2022). Hence, the study of Minangkabau proverbs is a strong case for supporting this global trend, confirming that local wisdom is a precious, relevant resource as an underpinning for character education anywhere.

On an academic level, the research findings contribute to the body of literature in sociolinguistics and character education around local wisdom. By identifying the 10 character values that exist in social contexts, this study demonstrates that language is not only a medium for communication but also one of the most effective ways of representing and conveying value-laden morals and ethics from generation to generation. On a practical level, the findings of this study can inform educators and policymakers. In particular, educators, as practitioners, can develop curricula built on local wisdom. Educational practitioners can employ *papatah-petitih* as content and pedagogical tools to authentically and relevantly deliver character education to students with cultural contextualization.

While the present study makes several contributions to the literature, it is not without its shortcomings, which can be addressed in future studies. First, the study considers only proverbs and sayings from a single primary source. Secondly, this study offers a qualitative and descriptive perspective only and is not able to measure the effectiveness of proverbs and sayings towards the character of students empirically. Accordingly, future research is advised to examine the effectiveness of the proverbs and sayings at improving students' character in schools through quantitative or quasi-experimental means.

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