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Semiotic analysis of ramo-ramo tabang duo dance and its character education implications

Mairita Mairita^{*)}, Jupriani Jupriani, Indrayuda Indrayuda, Syilendra Syilendra

Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the semiotic meanings of Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance and examine their implications for student character education. This research employed a qualitative interpretative case study using Charles Sanders Peirce's trichotomy of signs: icon, index, and symbol. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the dance movements, costumes, and floor patterns contain symbolic meanings representing religiosity, harmony, discipline, cooperation, responsibility, integrity, and cultural awareness. These values are aligned with Indonesia's Character Education Strengthening Program. Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance can serve as a contextual medium for preserving local cultural heritage while strengthening student character through culturally responsive education.



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Corresponding Author:

Mairita Mairita,
Universitas Negeri Padang
Email: mairitasmk@gmail.com

Introduction

Traditional performing arts constitute an essential component of intangible cultural heritage because they preserve collective memory, cultural identity, and local wisdom inherited across generations. Beyond their aesthetic functions, traditional dances serve as cultural texts that communicate social norms, ethical principles, and philosophical beliefs embedded within community life. The preservation of traditional performing arts is increasingly important amid the declining transmission of local traditions among younger generations and the weakening of community engagement with cultural practices. Intangible cultural heritage therefore plays a strategic role in maintaining cultural diversity and social cohesion while simultaneously functioning as a medium for intergenerational value transmission (Espada-Mateos et al., 2025; Pantović et al., 2023).

The symbolic dimensions of traditional performing arts have increasingly attracted scholarly attention through semiotic perspectives. Semiotics regards artistic performances as systems of signs whose meanings are constructed through visual, verbal, and kinesthetic representations (Dube et al., 2025; Silva et al., 2025). Previous studies demonstrate that dance movements, costumes, and spatial arrangements function as cultural codes that embody community values and social norms (Bougiesi & Zisi, 2025; Richter, 2025). However, existing studies predominantly emphasize the aesthetic, educational, or health-related benefits of traditional dance (Kapodistria & Chatzopoulos, 2022; Lobo et al., 2025; Pitsi et al., 2026; Pournara et al., 2026; Tantiwiboonchai et al., 2026), while the application of semiotic frameworks, particularly Peirce's trichotomy of signs, remains relatively limited in explaining how symbolic meanings embedded in dance can become educational resources.

Within the Minangkabau cultural context, traditional dances represent the philosophical principle of *alam takambang jadi guru*, which positions nature as a source of learning and moral reflection. Movements inspired by natural phenomena and animal behavior frequently symbolize cooperation, leadership, perseverance, and social harmony (Lobo et al., 2025; Ma, 2025). One of the dances reflecting this philosophical orientation is Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance, an intangible cultural heritage originating from Sungai Pagu District, South Solok Regency, West Sumatra. Created by Syofian Sori, this dance was inspired by observations of butterflies, dragonflies, eagles, squirrels, snakes, and other fauna found in the surrounding environment. Through its movements, costumes, and floor patterns, the dance communicates philosophical messages concerning harmony, dignity, responsibility, and perseverance (Brunsdon & Layne, 2025; Pantović et al., 2023). Nevertheless, following the death of its creator in 2017, the frequency of performances has substantially declined and public understanding of its symbolic meanings has gradually diminished.

The decline of traditional cultural practices occurs simultaneously with growing concerns regarding character issues among younger generations. Previous studies have reported challenges related to declining social responsibility, discipline, mutual respect, and cultural awareness among students (Abdunabiyeva, 2025; Pataranutaporn et al., 2024). Consequently, character education requires contextual and meaningful learning experiences that connect moral values with students' cultural environments. Several studies have indicated that local culture-based education contributes positively to character formation and cultural identity development among learners (Arif et al., 2023; Handayani et al., 2023; Ibrahim & Sundawa, 2023; Rohman, 2024; Shawmi et al., 2025). However, the pedagogical utilization of symbolic meanings embedded in traditional dance as a medium for character education remains insufficiently explored.

Although previous studies have separately examined traditional dance and character education, empirical studies integrating semiotic analysis and culturally responsive character education remain limited (Amerotti et al., 2026; Mawasti et al., 2026; Ramadhani et al., 2025). Existing research generally focuses either on dance aesthetics and documentation (Amerotti et al., 2026; Ramadhani et al., 2025), the implementation of dance learning in educational contexts (Cao, 2024; Daryanti et al., 2025), or local wisdom-based character education (Anggito & Sartono, 2022; Ferdi Hasan et al., 2026; Handoko et al., 2023; Patras et al., 2023; Sakti et al., 2024). Few studies have systematically investigated how iconic, indexical, and symbolic meanings in traditional dances can be interpreted and transformed into pedagogical resources for strengthening student character. Furthermore, scholarly documentation concerning Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance remains scarce, particularly regarding its semiotic structure and educational significance.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the semiotic construction of icons, indices, and symbols embedded in the movements, costumes, and floor patterns of Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance and to examine their implications for student character education. The novelty of this study lies in three aspects. First, it applies Peirce's trichotomy of signs to comprehensively interpret the semiotic meanings of a relatively underexplored Minangkabau traditional dance. Second, it systematically maps the identified philosophical values onto the framework of Indonesia's Character Education Strengthening Program. Third, this study proposes a conceptual framework for utilizing traditional dance as a culturally responsive educational resource that simultaneously supports cultural preservation and contextual character education based on local wisdom.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using an interpretative case study design to explore the semiotic meanings and philosophical values embedded in Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance and their implications for student character education. An interpretative case study was selected because the research focused on an in-depth understanding of a single cultural phenomenon, namely Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance, as an intangible cultural heritage that contains complex symbolic meanings and contextual educational values. The study adopted Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework, particularly the trichotomy of signs consisting of icons, indices, and symbols, as the primary analytical lens for interpreting the visual and kinesthetic elements of the dance and relating them to the dimensions of character education.

The study was conducted in Sungai Pagu District, South Solok Regency, West Sumatra, Indonesia, which represents the place of origin and the primary center for preserving Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance. Participants were selected purposively based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the dance tradition and included dance artists, traditional leaders, cultural practitioners, and educational practitioners. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, literature review, and documentation studies. Participant observation was undertaken during rehearsals and performances to examine dance movements, costumes, floor patterns, and social interactions, while interviews explored participants' interpretations of the historical background, symbolic meanings, and educational values

embodied in the dance. Documentary sources, including historical records, photographs, archival videos, and previous studies on Minangkabau culture and traditional performing arts, were analyzed to enrich contextual understanding and support data triangulation.

The researcher functioned as the primary research instrument and was supported by observation guides, interview protocols, field notes, audio recordings, photographs, and video documentation. Data trustworthiness was established through source, method, time, and technique triangulation, as well as member checking with selected participants to verify the credibility of the interpretations. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analytical process began with identifying and categorizing signs derived from observations and interviews, followed by interpreting their iconic, indexical, and symbolic meanings according to Peirce's semiotic framework. Finally, the meanings extracted from the symbolic dimension of the dance were systematically mapped onto the five core dimensions of Indonesia's Character Education Strengthening Program religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity to formulate pedagogical implications for character education based on local cultural wisdom.

Results and Discussions

This study employed an interpretative qualitative approach to explore the semiotic meanings embedded in Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance and to examine their implications for student character education. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with artists, cultural figures, and educational practitioners, as well as documentation studies conducted in Sungai Pagu District, South Solok Regency. The findings are organized into six interconnected themes: (1) the historical background and current existence of Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance, (2) the semiotic construction of dance movements, (3) the semiotic construction of costume elements, (4) the semiotic construction of floor patterns, (5) the character values embedded in the dance, and (6) the pedagogical implications of these values for student character development. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance functions not only as a traditional artistic performance but also as a cultural text that preserves local wisdom and serves as a contextual medium for character education.

Historical Background and Current Existence of Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance

The findings indicate that Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance constitutes an important intangible cultural heritage originating from Sungai Pagu District, South Solok Regency. The dance was created by Syofian Sori and emerged from observations of the surrounding natural environment, particularly the movements and behaviors of local fauna. Historically, the dance functioned as a form of entertainment in wedding celebrations and customary ceremonies while simultaneously conveying ethical and philosophical messages embedded within Minangkabau culture. However, the death of the creator in 2017 significantly affected the continuity of the dance, resulting in reduced performances and limited transmission to younger generations. Although preservation initiatives are still carried out by Sanggar Sabilullah Matador, the lack of documentation and declining interest among youth pose substantial challenges to the sustainability of this cultural heritage.

Table 1. Historical Background and Current Existence of Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance

Aspect	Findings
Place of Origin	Nagari Pasia Talang Timur, Sungai Pagu District, South Solok Regency, West Sumatra
Creator	Syofian Sori (1940–2017)
Source of Inspiration	Observations of butterflies, dragonflies, eagles, squirrels, snakes, and other fauna in the natural environment
Initial Function	Entertainment during wedding ceremonies and traditional events
Artistic Characteristics	Consists of eight principal movements inspired by animal behavior and accompanied by Gandang Katindik and vocal chants
Current Condition	Declining performances and reduced public recognition following the death of the creator in 2017
Preservation Efforts	Maintained through Sanggar Sabilullah Matador and community-based cultural activities
Major Challenges	Limited documentation and low interest among younger generations

Semiotic Construction of Dance Movements

The analysis reveals that the movements of Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance function as a semiotic system composed of iconic, indexical, and symbolic meanings. At the iconic level, the movements imitate the behavior

of animals observed in nature. At the indexical level, they represent particular behavioral characteristics, including cooperation, persistence, adaptability, and leadership. At the symbolic level, these movements communicate philosophical values that are deeply rooted in Minangkabau culture, emphasizing harmonious relationships among humans, nature, and God. Consequently, the movements transcend mere aesthetic expression and become a medium for transmitting cultural knowledge and ethical principles.

Table 2. Semiotic Interpretation of the Dance Movements

Dance Movement	Icon	Index	Symbol
Sambah	Greeting posture with palms joined and head bowed	Indicates humility and respect	Symbolizes religiosity and courtesy
Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo	Two butterflies flying together	Indicates harmony and complementary roles	Symbolizes togetherness and social balance
Tupai Bagaluik	Agile squirrel movements	Indicates adaptability and alertness	Symbolizes independence and resilience
Pipik Tabang Duo	Birds flying collectively	Indicates collective action and shared objectives	Symbolizes cooperation and solidarity
Sipotong Mandi	Dragonflies hovering over water	Indicates calmness and adaptation	Symbolizes patience and purity
Alang Babega	Eagle flying majestically	Indicates authority and confidence	Symbolizes leadership and integrity
Pijantuang Manyasok	Bird searching for nectar	Indicates persistence and diligence	Symbolizes perseverance and hard work
Anggang Makan	Hornbill feeding behavior	Indicates prudence and carefulness	Symbolizes dignity and self-control
Ula Bagaluik	Continuous snake movement	Indicates flexibility and responsiveness	Symbolizes wisdom and adaptability

Semiotic Construction of Costume Elements

The costume elements employed in Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance represent more than decorative components of performance. Semiotic analysis demonstrates that each costume element carries philosophical meanings associated with social values and cultural identity. Baju Gadang signifies wisdom and leadership, Sarawa Galembong represents openness and flexibility, while Destar symbolizes honor and self-respect. Collectively, these visual elements reinforce the cultural identity of Minangkabau society and strengthen the symbolic messages communicated through the dance performance.

Table 3. Semiotic Interpretation of Costume Elements

Costume Element	Icon	Index	Symbol
Baju Gadang	Traditional Minangkabau male attire	Indicates authority and social position	Symbolizes wisdom and dignity
Sarawa Galembong	Loose and wide trousers	Indicates freedom of movement and readiness for action	Symbolizes openness and courage
Destar	Traditional Minangkabau head covering	Indicates honor and responsibility	Symbolizes self-respect and cultural identity

Semiotic Construction of Floor Patterns

The floor patterns identified in Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance also contain significant semiotic meanings. The facing formation represents direct social interaction and mutual respect among individuals. Circular movements symbolize continuity and interdependence within communal life, whereas triangular formations signify order, stability, and balanced social relationships. These findings indicate that spatial arrangements within the choreography contribute to communicating cultural values and social philosophies embedded in Minangkabau tradition.

Table 4. Semiotic Interpretation of Floor Patterns

Floor Pattern	Icon	Index	Symbol
Facing formation	Two individuals interacting directly	Indicates communication and reciprocal relationships	Symbolizes cooperation and mutual respect
Circular movement	Cyclical movement in nature	Indicates continuity and interdependence	Symbolizes unity and collective life
Triangular formation	Balanced spatial arrangement	Indicates order and role distribution	Symbolizes stability and social cohesion

Character Values Embedded in the Dance

The findings indicate that Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance contains a variety of character values that are highly relevant to educational objectives in contemporary society. Religiousness and respect emerge from ceremonial movements, whereas discipline and responsibility are developed through structured training and collective performance. Cooperative movements encourage mutual support and solidarity, while leadership symbolism promotes integrity and self-confidence. Furthermore, participation in traditional dance activities strengthens students' appreciation of local cultural heritage and reinforces cultural identity.

Table 5. Character Values Embedded in Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance

Character Value	Representation in Dance
Religiousness	Sambah movement and expressions of gratitude toward God
Respect	Greeting gestures and appreciation of others
Discipline	Structured movement sequences and regular rehearsals
Cooperation	Collective and synchronized movements
Responsibility	Individual roles within group performances
Independence	Adaptation and perseverance reflected in animal-inspired movements
Integrity	Leadership symbolism represented in Alang Babega
Cultural Awareness	Preservation and appreciation of local traditions

Pedagogical Implications for Student Character Development

The pedagogical implications of Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance demonstrate its potential contribution to character formation among students. Through participation in dance activities, students practice discipline, cooperation, responsibility, and respect within authentic social situations. The symbolic meanings embedded in the dance movements also encourage the development of integrity and self-confidence. Moreover, exposure to traditional cultural practices promotes students' appreciation of local heritage and strengthens their sense of cultural identity. Therefore, Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance can function simultaneously as a medium for cultural preservation and an effective educational resource for character education based on local wisdom.

Table 6. Pedagogical Implications of Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance

Character Value	Student Behavioral Indicators	Educational Implementation
Discipline	Punctuality and adherence to rules	Dance rehearsals and performance preparation
Cooperation	Effective teamwork and communication	Group choreography and collective performances
Responsibility	Commitment to assigned duties	Preparation and execution of performances
Respect	Appreciation for teachers and peers	Learning etiquette through Sambah movement
Integrity	Confidence and consistency in behavior	Leadership roles during dance activities
Cultural Awareness	Appreciation and preservation of local culture	Extracurricular activities and local-content learning

The findings demonstrate that Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance constitutes a cultural text that records the relationship between humans, nature, and Minangkabau local wisdom. The dance was created through observations of butterflies, squirrels, birds, dragonflies, eagles, hornbills, and snakes, reflecting the Minangkabau philosophical principle of *alam takambang jadi guru*, which positions nature as a source of learning and moral guidance. This finding confirms that traditional dance functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for preserving cultural memory and transmitting ethical values across generations (Pitsi et al., 2026; Pournara et al., 2026; Tantiwiboonchai et al., 2026). The declining frequency of performances following the death of Syofian Sori in 2017 further indicates that the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage remains highly dependent on

documentation, intergenerational transmission, and educational institutional support (Jin & Snook, 2022; Patras et al., 2023).

Semiotic analysis reveals that the dance movements form an integrated system of icons, indices, and symbols. Iconically, the movements imitate the behavior of fauna observed in the natural environment; indexically, they indicate behavioral characteristics such as cooperation, persistence, adaptability, and leadership; and symbolically, they communicate philosophical meanings concerning harmony, wisdom, patience, and social responsibility. The transformation of animal behavior into symbolic values demonstrates that traditional dance is not merely a representation of movement but also a cultural mechanism through which communities construct and communicate social norms and moral principles (Amirulloh & Badaruddin, 2024; Mu'min, 2023; Mustikamah et al., 2025). This finding extends previous studies by showing how Peirce's semiotic framework can systematically explain the relationship between natural representations and culturally constructed meanings in traditional dance performances.

The costume elements and floor patterns further strengthen the symbolic structure of Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance. Baju Gadang, Sarawa Galembong, and Destar symbolize dignity, openness, responsibility, and cultural identity, indicating that costume elements function as signs connecting aesthetic forms with collective values and social status (Kapodistria & Chatzopoulos, 2022; Rohman, 2024). Likewise, the facing formation, circular movements, and triangular formations represent reciprocal communication, continuity, interdependence, balance, and social cohesion (La'biran, 2024; Sakti et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the philosophical orientation of *alam takambang jadi guru* by demonstrating that choreography and visual elements of dance become symbolic representations of harmonious relationships among individuals, communities, and their natural environment.

The character values identified in Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance are closely associated with the five core dimensions of Indonesia's Character Education Strengthening Program, namely religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity. The Sambah movement reflects religiousness and respect, paired movements represent cooperation and solidarity, animal-inspired movements symbolize adaptability and independence, while Alang Babega embodies leadership and integrity. These values become meaningful because they are not introduced as abstract concepts but are directly experienced through movement, rhythm, discipline, and collective performance (Arif et al., 2023; Handoko et al., 2023; Ibrahim & Sundawa, 2023). Therefore, traditional dance provides an experiential learning environment in which students internalize character values through authentic cultural practices and social interaction.

The findings have important pedagogical implications because they demonstrate that Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance can function as a culturally responsive medium for character education. Through curricular and extracurricular activities, students are encouraged to develop discipline, cooperation, responsibility, confidence, and cultural awareness while simultaneously participating in the preservation of local cultural heritage (Daryanti et al., 2025; Ferdi Hasan et al., 2026; Handayani et al., 2023; Shawmi et al., 2025). Unlike conventional character education that often relies on decontextualized moral instruction, integrating traditional dance into educational practice enables students to experience values in concrete social and cultural situations. Consequently, this study proposes that traditional dance should be positioned not only as an object of cultural preservation but also as a pedagogical resource capable of strengthening character education through culturally grounded and contextually meaningful learning experiences.

Conclusions

This study concludes that Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance embodies a complex semiotic system comprising icons, indices, and symbols represented through its movements, costumes, and floor patterns. These semiotic elements convey philosophical meanings and character values rooted in Minangkabau local wisdom, including religiosity, harmony, discipline, cooperation, responsibility, integrity, and cultural awareness. Furthermore, these values are consistent with the core dimensions of Indonesia's Character Education Strengthening Program. Therefore, Ramo-Ramo Tabang Duo Dance possesses significant potential not only as an intangible cultural heritage that requires preservation but also as a culturally responsive and contextual medium for fostering student character development through both curricular and extracurricular educational activities.

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