Article
Sustainable Societal Peace through the Integration of Bioethics Principles and Value-Based Education

Ravichandran Moorthy 1,*, Sivapalan Selvadurai 2, Sarjit S. Gill 3 and Angelina Gurunathan 1

1 Research Centre for History, Politics and International Affairs, Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor 43600, Malaysia; angienthin@gmail.com
2 School of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Taylor’s University Malaysia, Selangor 47500, Malaysia; sivapalan.selvadurai@taylors.edu.my
3 Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor 43400, Malaysia; sarjit@upm.edu.my
* Correspondence: drravi@ukm.edu.my

Abstract: We live in a world where hatred and conflicts divide individuals, society, and countries. Although all faith systems and school curriculums emphasize some degree of peaceful co-existence, love, and compassion, the real-world situation is indeed abysmal. How can a naturalistic and altruistic logic of bioethics enhance divine and human-centric values in enabling social cohesion? As such, this paper proposes the integration of bioethics and value-based education principles into the education curriculum to help mitigate social conflicts and promote harmony in society. By employing conceptual and theoretical reviews, the paper attempts to shed light on how these principles can help to mitigate hatred and conflicts in society. Further, through matrix analysis, the study shows the relationships between the four main bioethics principles, respect for autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice, and the values expounded in value-based education. The study finds that by integrating bioethics principles into value-based education, learners are able to internalize the values of social cohesion and tolerance, and reflect these values in their learning experiences. Bioethics principles amplify the expressions of values promoted in value-based education, and this, in turn, motivates the learners to change from social conflict behaviors to social cohesion aptitude while dealing with others in society. Social cohesion enables individuals and groups to develop social bonds and societal peace ownership.

Keywords: bioethics; divide; hatred; value-based education; peace; tolerance; teaching curriculum

1. Introduction

Social tensions in societies may lead to social conflicts when the tensions are not mitigated, managed, or resolved. Social tensions can arise from negative beliefs and attitudes towards other groups, which can manifest in the form of hatred, intolerance, stereotyping, stigmatization, fear of the other, etc. The conventional approach in managing social conflicts has primarily utilized two approaches: material and ideational. The material approach proposes that social tensions and conflicts occur when systemic expressions of inequality among groups in society can negatively impact group dynamics and relations. Thus, the approach asserts that socio-economic and socio-political initiatives should be undertaken to rectify societal exploitations, reduce inequality, and foster goodwill among groups [1,2]. On the other hand, the ideational approach claims that civic education [3,4] and religious inculcation [5] through formal and informal mechanisms may offer remedies for managing social tensions and conflicts. Nevertheless, this approach may also trigger further discontent among groups regarding which ethics framework to follow to facilitate social interactions.

Thus far, the study argues that both approaches have been less effective in providing a credible platform for peace and harmony enhancement in society. Literature has shown that religious inculcation has aggravated and deepened social tensions, leading
to greater social conflicts [6]. Religion has worsened social conflicts through emotional and ideological expressions. By spiritualizing social tensions, mitigation and resolution of conflicts have become problematic. In most cases, these religion-driven social tensions are manipulated by political elites for their political objectives. For example, the right-wing movement in Europe has mobilized mass support by demonizing certain minority religions. In many multiethnic nations, ethnic majority groups often use religious predispositions to justify marginalization. Therefore, this study attempts to provide an alternative model for managing social tensions and conflicts, emphasizing the integration of bioethics principles and value-based education. The objective of value-based education is to make learners aware that the world consists of a community of interdependent nations, and the survival and well-being of the human race depend on mutual cooperation [7]. The rationale for this model is that bioethics principles can provide naturalistic as well as altruistic moral reasoning and that it's adaptive to new methodologies and technologies, can offer practical solutions, and may cushion or neutralize organized faith-driven expressions. Meanwhile, integrating bioethics principles into value-based education through “experiential-internalization” pedagogy will enable learners to internalize values in formal and informal settings. The authors believe that this bioethical-value-based education model can generate socially beneficial belief systems that will have positive social consequences across socio-cultural divides, thus reducing social tensions and conflicts.

The study also believes that there is a credible link between a social conflict bioethics-value-based education nexus and sustainability discourse. The bioethics principles such as autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice are at the core of sustainability discourse. Human perspectives and decision-making regarding their environment culminate from the intrinsic notion of right actions and wrong actions, and bioethics can provide a suitable moral framework in dealing with these questions. According to Macer [8], bioethics can be used to manage sustainability-related issues in a human-constructed and designed world. There are three ways to view bioethics. Firstly, descriptive bioethics, which is how people view their life, moral interactions, and responsibilities with other species; secondly, prescriptive bioethics, which tells people what is ethically good or bad, or what principles are most important in making such decisions; and interactive bioethics, which refers to value-sets developed from discussion and debate between people and groups in society. No matter which framework is adopted, bioethics can “suggest or demand” some actions on individuals, groups, and communities to encourage sustainability thinking and actions. In this context, values-based education’s experiential learning of values is a crucial and credible vehicle to bring about thinking and actions about sustainability and societal change for human and nature-related issues.

Social diversity is a reality of most societies and is often associated with differences in ethnic, religious, ideological, and generational values as well as political orientations, sexual orientations, and gender constructs. This social diversity, in turn, is subjected to social categorization, where groups are characterized both in a positive and negative manner (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1](https://example.com/figure1.png)

**Figure 1.** Social diversity condition and the role of social negativity as a key causal element in shaping social conflict.

As illustrated in Figure 1, if certain groups are perceived to be socially positive by other groups, then the possibility of social conflicts is somewhat limited, but when groups are perceived as socially negative, then the risk of social conflicts is greater. Social negativity usually exhibits in the form of negative beliefs (stigmatization and stereotypes), negative attitudes (prejudices, hatred, and intolerance), negative practices and actions (discrimination and unfair treatment), expressions of dislike, and the rejection of other groups. This social negativity, in turn, brings about psycho-social effects of social tension,
exhibited in the form of anger, anxiety, fear, jealousy, stress, depression, lowering of life satisfaction, unhappiness, etc. Subsequently, these latent social tensions may erupt into social conflicts through open expressions of opposition and confrontation, sometimes even leading to violence. In most cases, social negativity expressions are often laden with historical, religious, and primordial arguments, which give justification for specific actions that are otherwise immoral. Therefore, the inability to manage social diversity well is at the core of social conflicts among groups in society.

The authors argue the observance of different sets of ethics and morality in society has somewhat contributed to social negativity. When certain groups feel dissatisfied with other groups and wish to express that dissatisfaction, they often choose favorable value-sets as moral reasoning to justify actions that usually defy the common rationality of being bad. In such cases, civic reasoning may not be favored due to their universalism, and groups may tend to favor ethnoreligious value-sets that support group insularity by projecting memories of victimization and marginalization. Historical and ancestral memories can be a powerful tool to define group identification. The authors acknowledge that humans are moral beings; their moral dispositions are often influenced and shaped by values acquired through their worldviews and interactions with their environment. Family, community, formal and informal schooling, apprenticeship, and belief-systems are sources for ethics and morality, affecting individuals in varying ways and degrees. The authors claim that out of these sources, formal civic education and belief-based systems have the greatest impact on individuals, as they provide more structured value-sets (see Figure 2).

As illustrated in Figure 2, in some countries, civic-value systems are used as the primary guiding principles for societal relations and conduct by promoting universal ethics, respect for all beings, and the environment, while in some others, religious scriptures, tenets, and pronouncements have become the primary sources of ethical and moral codes. At times, in socially diverse societies, religious minorities are subjected to these codes, which often prompts reluctance to accept a different religion’s values. This reluctance is often perceived by other groups as social negativity, and often the source of social conflicts in multiethnic societies. There are also countries with semi-secular systems that embrace both civic and religious-based value systems in their education system. For example, Malaysia has both Moral education and Islamic education in its formal education structure. Islamic education is reserved for Muslim students, and Moral classes for non-Muslim students. Again, the inculcation of different sets of value education has been cited as the primary source of social conflicts among ethnic groups.

Further, contemporary “civic and citizenship education” in many countries has not been able to resolve social conflicts. For example, multiethnic countries like Malaysia have embarked on civic and citizenship education to inculcate ideals such as personal development, nationalism, national identity, and harmonious living. However, the implementation of these values, more often than not, has been biased and propagandist in nature, as well as prompting limited enthusiasm among teachers in the delivery of civic and citizenship education [9,10]. As such, there is a need for an alternative model of value-based education to manage social conflicts effectively. Therefore, this paper seeks to answer the question of how bioethics principles can be integrated with value-based education to reduce social conflicts.
Therefore, based on the problems discussed, the authors stress the need for a new value-based education framework that can inculcate a new value-set to learners, which can foster social positivity in societies (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3. A new value-based education cultivating social positivity.](image)

In this new framework, the authors stress the need to integrate an enhanced civic education structure with bioethics principles to remedy the existing ethical presets’ shortcomings. The “enhanced civic education” (see Figure 3) refers to a value-based education framework that emphasizes values’ inculcation through lessons. It focuses on learners’ overall character building, which includes positive personality, knowledge, stability, desired values, and spiritual development. It aims to endow learners with the right attitude, value systems and moral reasoning capacity to face the world. The authors propose that these values are integrated with the principles of bioethics (see Figure 3). Bioethics is the philosophical study of ethical polemics faced by humans in their interaction with other beings and with the environment. Bioethicists address ethical questions that arise in various disciplines through its universal principles and naturalistic discourse. Bioethics principles have been studied and applied in medicine, life sciences, biotechnology, emerging technologies, philosophy, and theology. The author acknowledges the existence of various conceptions and principles of bioethics; however for this study, the authors propose these four principles of bioethics for analysis: (i) respect for autonomy, (ii) non-maleficence, (iii) beneficence, and (iv) justice [11,12]. These principles have equal position in their applications and have found relevance in explaining moral dilemmas in human endeavors. The authors believe that bioethics principles have a neutralizing effect, help moderate religious-based dispositions, and positively overcome the shortcomings of existing frameworks. The interface between the enhanced civic education and bioethics principles (illustrated in Figure 3) is examined in the compatibility matrix in Table 1. In this process, relevant literature by leading scholars was analyzed and compared to uncover the major assertions and arguments related to the research phenomenon. The study argues that the new value-based education framework will translate into the creation of a new belief-system that fosters social positivity and subsequently reduces social tension and social conflicts. Therefore, this study aims to offer an alternative model for managing social tensions and conflicts that stresses the integration of bioethics principles in value-based education. As such, this paper proposes the integration of bioethics and value-based education principles into the education curriculum to help mitigate social conflicts and promote harmony in society. The article is divided into five sections. After the introduction, Section 2 explores the relevant literature on social conflicts. Section 3 discusses the methodology adopted, and Section 4 discusses the results of the study, which is followed by the Conclusion in Section 5.
Table 1. Bioethical-value-based education model.

| Bioethics Principles | Values in Value-Based Education | Value Enhancement |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
|                      | Respect                         | Ability to show respect to others and express opinions. |
|                      | Courage                         | Courage to move out of comfort zone and express opinion. |
|                      | Optimism                        | Believe that problems can be managed and solved, there is always a silver lining for all problems. |
|                      | Cooperation                     | Believe in team effort to solve complex problems, trusting others with responsibility. |
|                      | Action                          | Take actions based on sound moral reasoning, also carefully considers the impact of actions. |
|                      | Transformation                  | Continuously learning process and bring progressive changes for the betterment of self and others. |
| Autonomy             |                                 |                   |
|                      | Do no harm                      | Internalizing the principle of ‘do no harm’ to others. |
|                      | Honestly                        | Positive moral character such as integrity, sincere, transparent, truthfulness, trustworthiness, straightforwardness. |
|                      | Tolerance                       | Ability or willingness to tolerate opinions, behaviours, and beliefs that are different from one’s own. |
| Non-maleficence      |                                 |                   |
|                      | People Focused                  | Cares of the people that one serves, being thoughtful and respectful of the needs of others. |
|                      | Values diversity                | Ability recognizes and embrace differences among individuals, and celebrate diversity as a valuable strengthening asset of society. |
|                      | Responsibility                  | Acting responsibly and avoid undesirable actions and behaviours. |
|                      | Compass                         | Ability to feel concerned for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. |
|                      | Friendship                      | Ability to show mutual affection between people. |
|                      | Understanding                   | Able to be sympathetic towards the feeling or position of others. |
| Beneficent           |                                 |                   |
|                      | Fairness                        | Being fair and respectful in dealing with others. |
|                      | Equality                        | Making all persons feel appreciated, valued, and accepted, despite their positions in society. |
|                      | Inclusion                       | Isolate and exclude unfair prejudices, stereotypes, or obstacles towards others. |
| Justice              |                                 |                   |

2. Literature on Social Conflicts and Value-Based Education

In recent years, ethnic-based hate speech and radicalism have been on the rise in many parts of the world. This situation is exacerbated by the proliferation of hate speech on the many platforms of social media. The false notion of the “right of free expression” without responsibility has overwhelmed the social media discourse. People show their displeasure with expressions of hate and abusive speech without any concern about others’
These groups harbor prejudices and hatred towards others who do not share the same beliefs, principles, and socio-cultural characteristics. There are many reasons for such hatred; for example, it can be caused by memories of specific grave incidents in the past experienced by particular individuals and groups. These memories may be invoked repeatedly to stir up hatred towards the other. According to Moorthy [13], “in the aftermath of the 9/11 incident, the world was confronted with numerous incidents of violence with different levels of severity, mostly carried out in the name of religious righteousness, ethnoreligious marginalization, political ideologies, economic deprivation, and others.” Interestingly, despite the promotion of the ideas of universalism, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, globalization, and acceptance of diversity worldwide, certain segments of societies have remained divided for many reasons. The issues of ethnic marginalization, socio-economic deprivation, suppression of political and social freedoms, and other forms of oppression exist in many modern societies, further hardening discontent, division, and hatred. As perplexing, while the notions of peace, love, justice, morality, ethics, and moderation have been cherished in religious teachings, contemporary religious discourse reveals an increase of disharmony and religious-based aggressive expressions.

There is a consensus among scholars that there are deep divides in societies all over the world. Some may argue that divisions are as old as human civilization. Divisions are essentially multifaceted. They can arise due to ethnic differences, religious beliefs, disagreements on political ideology, social class divisions’ socio-economic deprivation, occupational cultures, and the marginalization of weaker groups [14]. If not properly managed, these divisions may lead to fiery rhetoric, discontent, tension, and perhaps violence. Social categorization of race based on physical traits such as color, as well as ethnicity-based on common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background has constructively compartmentalized societies into ethnocultural categories. As such, ethnic identification has set boundaries distinguishing these groups based on symbolic and cultural characteristics. Some of these ethnic differences have led to stereotypes and attitudinal responses, which have manifested into increased disadvantages of vulnerable groups when combined with structural inequalities.

Therefore, ethnic inequality has led to ethnic conflict due to manipulation by elites, usually to meet their political ends [15]. Ethnic conflicts in the post-Cold war era have become a defining phenomenon of the “new world order” based loosely on “traditional” cultures and hostilities, through a process of remembering, forgetting, interpreting, and inventing as witnessed in conflicts in Sri Lanka, the Middle East, Rwanda and Burundi, Bosnia, and Quebec [16]. Fox’s [17] study drawing information from the Minorities at Risk dataset found that most ethnic conflicts involve religious issues. Religion can cause ethnic conflicts when religious faith is challenged by another group or when religious overzealous regulations and policies invite contestation. For example, the religious-ethnic nexus had an adverse effect in Nigeria in contesting state power, unequal resource distribution, economic stagnation, and ethnoreligious clashes [18].

Major world religions, such as the Abrahamic faith comprising Christianity and Islam, and those with origins in the Eastern faiths comprising Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism-Confucianism, all had their fair share of religious intolerance and hatred among people of different faiths and sects. For example, the 1990s witnessed the conflict between the Bosnian Muslims and their Serbian and Croatian Christian counterparts in the former Yugoslavia [19]. In the African continent, long-standing ethnoreligious Muslim-Christian conflict in Nigeria led to the culmination of Boko Haram’s excesses in recent years [20,21]. In the Middle East, the religious conflict is between Jews and Christians with the Muslims in Israel, Egypt, and Jordan, and conflict within the Muslim sectarian groups of Sunnis–Shite as witnessed in Iraq [18]. Meanwhile, the Eastern faiths are also not spared. Hindu-Muslim conflict has been on the rise in recent decades, as observed by religious intolerance in India [22,23], Buddhist–Muslim ethnoreligious conflicts in Southern Thailand, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka [24,25], Buddhist–Hindu ethnoreligious conflict in Sri Lanka [26], and the Han Chinese–Muslim Uyghurs ethnoreligious conflict in Xinjiang province in China [27].
The consequences of these conflicts and incidents have led not only to material effects such as displacement, segregation, and loss of livelihood, but also to non-material effects such as instilling a sense of fear, insecurity, low morale, and even uncertainty in the hearts and minds of people, especially amongst the vulnerable and minority groups [28].

Differences in political orientation and ideology have also divided societies. These have largely been attributed to structural and organizational dimensions of social factors, but of late have witnessed the importance of the role of social identities [29]. This is evident in the case of the religious and cultural divide in the political-ideological contestation between Democratic and Republican voters in the United States, which is widening, pointing towards an even greater partisan polarization and social tension [30]. This trend points to the potential socio-psychological effect of social identity polarization as the underlying cause. Economic inequality in developing countries has long been a flashpoint in the class conflict between the haves and have nots. Income inequality increased by 11 percent in developing countries and 9 percent in developed countries between 1990 and 2010 [31]. Two drivers for this trend were identified: firstly, the exogenous factors of integration of developing countries into world trade and financial markets, though beneficial for growth, has worsened the income distribution of groups; and secondly, the endogenous factors of policy reform have focused on price stability over growth and job creation to support global economic integration, thus weakening the bargaining position of labor support [32]. Increasing economic inequality interspersed with ethnic inequality and socio-political status can be a potential cocktail for political contestation leading to the social divide.

Meanwhile, economic inequality in the European context is on the rise and differences in individual income and wealth are growing [33–35]. Furthermore, immigration from non-European countries is not popular and politically resisted [36]. However, the free movement within the EU and the accession of new member states have led to high intra-European mobility [37], resulting in expanding socio-economic cleavages due to rising economic inequality. Economic inequalities create unequal opportunities and discontent and, consequently, deepen the political divide and perpetuate social divisions, leading to social conflict. The inequality challenge has become global and connected to megatrends in technological change, climate crisis, urbanization, and migration [38].

A recent survey conducted by the BBC, involving more than 19,400 people from 27 countries, revealed that most people think there exist divisions among people living in the same society. The divisions were attributed to nationalism, the decline of trust in traditional institutions, and the increase in the feeling that societal structures and systems are fragmented. Though there was a pessimism of social divide amidst diversity in societies, there is also a sense of optimism as social co-existence prevails due to the tolerance of diversity. Also, the common features amongst them provide hope for forging mutual understanding and respect amidst diversity, and fewer think diversity can lead to conflict. The younger cohort especially appears to be more tolerant and optimistic of the future, and can dilute the social divide [39].

Drawing from the Malaysian experience, the stated goal of education is to produce citizens who possess high knowledge and skills in conceptualizing, intelligence, appreciate values such as democracy, and having high problem-solving competencies [40]. In Malaysia, citizenship education is often regarded as obligatory for managing a plural society like Malaysia. The education system plays a vital role in shaping citizenship competence in Malaysia [41]. This is quite similar to Indonesia’s civic education, which also aims to produce awareness among students regarding the significance of nationalism, national identity, and peaceful living in an ethnically diverse society [42]. Going back to Malaysia, a study by Haniza Mahmood [10] reveals that citizenship education emphasizes good personal and patriotic citizenship values. Nevertheless, it lacks political literacy and active participation in a democratic society. The study also found that teachers lack the knowledge and commitment to address multicultural issues such as civic and citizenship education, and at times this is due to their socio-cultural prejudices. Therefore, the paper argues for a modification of civic and citizenship education that will accommodate the widening
political literacy and participation. In addition, the teacher-training curriculum needs to incorporate aspects like inclusive experiential learning, active participation, and community engagement. Teachers also need to be politically literate and not politically biased. In a somewhat similar fashion, at the tertiary level in Indonesia, Elly et al. [42] show that lecturers lack knowledge and skills about conflict resolution and prevention among students. They do not understand the stages involved in a peaceful conflict resolution process.

As such, this paper argues that hatred and divisions in society could be addressed and mitigated through the inculcation of bioethics principles and value-based education into the school curriculum and extracurricular activities. While school curriculums have dealt with some aspects of love, compassion, and peace in their teachings, learners have never really been taught in the context of a real-world situation, so it becomes difficult to internalized these values into thought and actions. To bridge the gap, the paper proposes that bioethics principles of respect for autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice are integrated into the value-based education philosophy of the school curriculum worldwide. Through this integration, learners will be exposed to more structured value-thoughts that they can invoke when dealing with ethical dilemmas and problems in their interaction with others. The value-based education philosophy is vital to inculcate the right experiential learning in individuals, which may influence them holistically and help alter and guide desirable behavior and actions.

3. Methodology

This review article adopts an “interpretive sociology approach” to analyze how integrating bioethics principles into a value-based education system can assist learners in embracing the values of societal peace and tolerance. The “interpretive framework refers to a set of assumptions, ideas, and principles that define a particular, theoretically informed perspective and a set of appropriate practices for the process of interpretation, thus opening the data to particular interpretations” [43]. The interpretive framework is also selected due to its suitability in analyzing philosophical concepts that deal with high levels of abstraction, such as in concepts like bioethics and values, that are addressed in this study. The interpretive framework allows for a review of the philosophical assumptions that underpin qualitative research and assess where these assumptions fit within the whole process of research. As such, this study uses the framework “to guide understanding of how philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks (paradigm perspectives and theoretical orientations) are situated within and influential to the research process” [44]. By using relevant literature on bioethics principles and value-based education, the study identifies the four main elements of bioethics principles and the corresponding values in value-based education. Further, an in-depth analysis of appropriate values was rationally linked in addressing social conflicts. This synthesis enables the formulation of the alternative model known as the bioethical-value-based education model. Relevant literature by leading scholars was analyzed and compared to uncover the major assertions and arguments related to the research phenomenon.

4. Results: Embedding Bioethics into Value-Based Education

4.1. Integration of Bioethics Principles

Bioethics is a philosophical study of how humans manage ethical controversies about their interaction with other humans and their environment. Bioethics scholars address ethical questions that arise from these interactions, mainly originating from the disciplines of education, theology, politics, law, philosophy, life sciences, biotechnology, medicine, and climate change. Bioethics is not about coming up with one specific correct solution to ethical problems but rather suggests different choices made after ethical reflections [45]. Bioethics posits that human beings are endowed with limitless internal ethical resources that may act as guiding ethical principles when humans are faced with ethical dilemmas as a result of their interaction with others. These ethical principles enable humans to adopt appropriate attitudes and behaviors, and this will, in turn, create a new ethical relationship.
between human beings and the environment [46–55]. Bioethics offers the foundation for balancing different “benefits, risk and duties,” facilitating critical and responsible thinking on ethical principles, which in turn, facilitate “educated” decision-making.

Although bioethics originated from the field of medicine, it has found applications in other disciplines. Recognizing the need for ethical considerations in the execution of modern health care practices, Beauchamp and Childress in 1979 first proposed the use of the four principles of bioethics: (i) respect for autonomy, (ii) non-maleficence, (iii) beneficence, and (iv) justice, as a structured method in fronting various ethical quandaries in the medical field [11]. It is to be noted that these principles, as laid out by Beauchamp and Childress, all have equal importance, with none having primacy over the others. They have been described as prima facie binding, whereby should there be another moral consideration that is sufficiently prevailing, then that would override the principle [12]. Although meant mainly for medical practitioners and personnel in the field, the four principles, we argue, are universal enough and have a natural order to form the crux of a value-based education encompassing all fields. The following paragraphs will elaborate Beauchamp and Childress’ four principles of bioethics with some thoughts on how they can be juxtaposed with the realities prevailing in our societies that warrant the institutionalization and socialization of values in our education system.

Beauchamp and Childress’ first principle of bioethics is respect for autonomy. It is a concept stemming from the need to respect an individual. In the medical field, this can be understood as the requirement of a patient’s informed consent to proceed with a medical procedure. For this purpose, proper discussions on the treatment available should be pursued with the patient before finalizing the treatment. This, of course, does not end there, as further scrutiny regarding the patient’s competence in providing the consent would be required, as would the legalities surrounding the consent need to be verified. As such, respect for autonomy has to be seen in its context. Perhaps, a more contemporary take on this would be the measures imposed in light of the recent Covid-19 global pandemic. Even if some people did not provide informed consent for their quarantine, it would be a necessary measure, given public health concerns. Therefore, the respect for autonomy is not a license for selfish expression of individualism or a free pass for authoritarianism. Therefore, respect for autonomy should be exercised in society as a basis for allowing others to be themselves, but by no means should it be the ultimate one. A society is made up of many layers, and harmony within society depends on the nature of the interaction between these layers. These layers contain a cacophony of sorts due to racial, religious, and socio-economic divides. Therefore, not surprisingly, we see some semblance of this principle being exercised in community projects that bring people together for a common course. Efforts undertaken in schools to promote interactions among students all adopt a certain level of this principle. In the medical field, the application of this principle is undertaken hand-in-hand with careful consideration of various factors. Likewise, outside the medical field, the demarcation of where this deference for autonomy needs to end must be determined to avoid rendering this principle meaningless. In a nutshell, the principle of respect for autonomy paves the way for a deeper appreciation of the fact that people, no matter their benign proclivities or traits, at their core, are humans just the same. This fundamental understanding can go a long way in the fostering and strengthening of societal cohesion.

The next principle is the principle of non-maleficence. It basically means not committing harm or evil. Again, this principle also extends well beyond its literal meaning. This is because, according to Beauchamp and Childress, harm itself is not connoted as something wrong entirely. The act of causing harm may, in fact, be right, especially if it is a deterrence or a punishment for a wrongful act. Examples of violations of non-maleficence by the medical fraternity could be instructive to understand this principle better. These include purposely using harmful drugs against individuals and intentionally delivering an inaccurate diagnosis to cause further harm to the individual. The need to examine non-violence is critical given the shift in the conventional view of violence as an exter-
nalization notion of injurious behaviour involving physical force to an alternative view of injurious actions involving non-physical force such as threats, fear, and psychological harm. The progress in humanity is not only in averting physical violence but also non-physical violence, which has a long-lasting effect. Thus, in a social context, there is a need to understand non-violence in relation to the notions of self-restraint and ignorance as the overarching mechanism to overcome acts of non-physical violence that can hamper social cohesion in a multicultural society.

The following principle of beneficence, as the name suggests, is in light of a particular individual’s best interest. At any given time, a doctor’s responsibility would undoubtedly be in the patient’s best interest. This principle is attributed as the foundational value in the ethics of healthcare. It is the profession of “do no harm,” but it goes beyond that. It requires the pursuit of a positive balance of “good over risks or harms” in medical interventions [11]. So, while non-maleficence requires abstaining from doing harm, beneficence requires action to do good. Fundamentally, these seemingly complementary principles are found in all moral teachings. They allude to the common perception that ultimately, all religions teach their followers to do good and not do harm. Further clarity against the backdrop of contemporary moral dilemmas would allow these principles to better resonate with relevance for everyone. Similarly, Heuser [56] argues that social capital based on trust involves the internalization of social ethics, enabling citizens to engage in virtuous behavior for the common good, which will result in social cohesion amongst individuals across groups and organizations. For example, there was an incident in the 1960s when research was undertaken by injecting chronically ill patients with live cancer cells in the Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital (JCDH) in Brooklyn, US. This was implied as the “sin of omission” by Lerner [45] to denote the failure to do what one ought to do, because the physicians conducting the research did not inform the patients about the experiment. Another illumination can be found in a paper discussing the actions of the US intelligence throughout the Cold War period. Along with the “sin of omission,” which in this case was referring to the act by officials of ignoring certain red flags, there was also the “sin of commission” about specific actions being undertaken due to political pressure. The paper argues that these formed the strategic culture that also played a role in enabling the 9/11 terrorist attack on the US [57].

Beauchamp and Childress’ final principle is the principle of justice. Justice is such an all-encompassing principle that it is possibly the most subjective. In the healthcare milieu, it is broadly understood to mean providing adequate healthcare to all who need it, without discrimination. Closely linked to the concept of social justice, this principle could be made complicated by the way the authorities structure the priorities of a society. For example, in most societies, the extent of the efficacy of policy structures that the administration establishes to level the playing field for all will determine the level of social justice. A specific issue related to social injustice is the issue of racism. Racism goes well beyond one’s appearance. It is a form of negative stereotyping that is commonly reinforced by unjust circumstances. In this regard, the role of bioethicists has been identified as crucial in addressing the issue of injustice towards American black communities in the US. The practitioners of bioethics have been called upon to play a greater role in various areas such as policy making, counseling, training, as well as teaching to address the issue of racism in the country [58]. Taking one step further, Berg et al. [59] argue for an institutional role in the area of administration and policy arena in the socialization of justice to enhance social cohesion.

In the field of medicine, these four principles are by no means exhaustive by themselves and are proposed to be used as compatible principles to the dominant philosophical, political, religious, as well as moral theories of healthcare workers [60]. Their compatibility is assured precisely because they embody the common moral thoughts that have prevailed throughout the years. This is also why these principles can be adapted to all non-medical-related situations and are perfect in laying the foundation for value-based education. No doubt there are challenges. The examples cited in the paragraphs above
show the interconnectedness of the four principles as well. One principle does not begin where the other ends. There are overlaps because ethical issues are not binary concepts. So, teaching about these principles would require a bespoke approach for it to be effective. Inculcating bioethics principles in the education system could go a long way in highlighting, accepting, and assuming collective responsibility for the major ethical problems present within a specific group or society.

4.2. Inculcation of Value-Based Education

The underlying reason for distrust, hatred, and divisions in society is the education system’s failure to instill good human and societal values that promote peace and harmony in society. Most education systems worldwide have been designed heavily to meet the demands of securing academic and professional certifications. In that pursuit, “value education” is often neglected and placed on the back burner for decades. Modern age values, such as wealth creation, overconsumption patterns, and competition at all costs, have become the new age mantras of existence, creating unstable organizations and societies. Revamping the education philosophy and refocusing it in the direction of a value-based framework is crucial to mitigate many social problems. Thus, such an initiative’s primary aim will be to integrate meaningful values into the education syllabus, which could help to re-mold learners into better human beings. Further, educationists, philosophers, other stakeholders, and special interest groups can play essential roles in generating awareness of value-based education among the public and policy makers.

What is value-based education? It is a form of education with more emphasis on the acquisition of living values by learners. Learners are exposed to values holistically by integrating them as principles that guide desired behaviour and actions [61,62]. Value-based education is essential to promoting a peaceful and harmonious society, and it also empowers learners to learn, contemplate, and reflect on the importance of respect, tolerance, peace, care, compassion, and other values. According to Nath et al. [63], value-based education is the study of moral and ethical values that make humans flawless persons endowed with knowledge, which illuminates the mind and soul. It builds positive character, strengthens learners’ self-esteem, and helps them exercise ethical judgment and social responsibilities. Supporters of value-based education often claim that educating young minds about values is more important than just teaching them living-skills subjects. Indian philosopher and freedom fighter M.K. Gandhi said that education does not only mold the new generation but also reflects a society’s fundamental assumptions about itself and the individuals that compose it [64].

Value-based education is a necessary component of holistic education. The inculcation of universal values such as compassion, courage, honesty, tolerance, and truthfulness will help nurture balanced individuals, elevate humans into personhood, and create a humane society. Three primary institutions influence value-based education—the home, the religious institution, and the school [63]. These institutions play important roles in shaping the younger generation’s minds as they participate in promoting a peaceful society. Educationists, special interest groups, and concerned individuals should aggressively promote this new approach to bring awareness and support from the public and policy makers. This new paradigm of education insists on an innovative approach to the teaching and learning of values, and emphasizes knowledge of values and the experiential component of those values. The holistic learning experience would help the learner internalize and translate them into their behavior.

There are many good examples of value-based education that could contribute to the development of good human beings. Value education can be carried out in any type of lesson, but the values can be drawn out in activities. For instance, in a math lesson regarding divisions, learners can be exposed to the notion of equity, equality, and social justice. Similarly, in a geography lesson regarding rivers and lakes, learners can be exposed to the principle of water for all (water equity), the right to access to clean water (human rights), as well as the responsibility to use water in a sustainable way (environmental
ethics). Perhaps in a science lesson about energy sources, the principles of sustainability, environmental ethics, and frugality can be inculcated. Intrinsically, value-based education enables learners to internalize the values in the learning experience. Through this approach, learners develop a strong sense of “self” and feel more empowered [13,65]. Another example is from the traditional Indian knowledge system, the practice of tolerance, non-violence, or “ahimsa,” and selfless service in the context of Indian traditions. These noble values and virtues were inherited and practiced by Indians through informal education for generations through the socialization process. However, with the advent of Western colonial education, traditional values have been neglected as the society has shifted its focus towards material development. However, we see a return of this tradition in formal and informal education systems in the Indian sub-continent. New media has been creatively used to make the value-content stimulating and thought-provoking, and has the capacity to reach millions of learners the world over.

Tolerance is one crucial value that could be promoted through value-based education. Recently, in this Covid-19 pandemic period, we have witnessed chaos and discontent among people worldwide. The pandemic is causing systems of work, education, finance, and domestic lives to grind to a halt, affecting nearly every aspect of people’s lives. Besides health and safety, this pandemic also causes havoc in people’s lives, in lockdowns, movement control, school closures, high levels of emotional distress, higher risks of violence, and increased food insecurity. The value of tolerance is crucial in dealing with these difficult situations, as it promotes peace in society. Tolerance can be instilled through knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought. Tolerance is capable of changing a culture of antagonism or animosity to a culture of peace and harmony. Tolerance moderates differences in behavior and actions in society, and makes them more palatable to all concerned parties [66]. Some scholars even claim that tolerance is a crucial feature in multiethnic societies with multiple power relations; without it, the society can go into turmoil. Tolerance promotes respect and the appreciation of cultural and religious diversity, and some even see diversity as a strength in organizations and societies. Tolerance could be taught in history lessons, drawing from historical events of our own or other’s past incidences, and learners can be asked to think about the usefulness of tolerance and respect for others in their pursuits.

In describing religious tolerance, Talib et al. [67] argue that “common values” are needed to achieve religious tolerance in society. This means a set of shared values that are acceptable to the respective religious teachings and cultures in the context of a multiethnic and multi-religious society. By identifying these common values in each religion, which are acknowledged by the followers, it could be easier to reach points of agreement that might ease any tension or disagreement. Religious tolerance may sound too ideal to some, especially after 9/11, when inter-religious relations in many places were strained, especially in multi-religious societies. According to Vaezi [68], speaking and listening are essential components of peaceful social co-existence, which can be used effectively based on reason and rationality. Besides talking, listening to the words of others also project signs of having tolerance. These skills can be inculcated through value-based lessons on respect for others and being unselfish. Value-based education expresses the idea of individuals being social-beings, and that the “other” matters equally. Learners will appreciate the importance of listening and appreciating others’ points of view more, which in turn helps in a friendly interaction process. Practicing intellectual dialogue is a tool for increasing tolerance towards others.

In describing the implementation of value-based education, Nath et al. [63] have outlined five strategies. The first strategy is to ensure the selection of quality and inspired teachers to serve as role models for youth. Second, the educational institution may introduce some aspect of universal spiritual education in the curriculum that can transform youth for self-actualization and holistic growth. Third, the scope of teaching in educational institutions should cover a larger section of society. This will enable the development of a large pool of knowledgeable individuals who will grow in both mind and heart, and
learn the special virtues of life Fourth, value-based teaching should be directed at youth to develop intrinsic values like punctuality, honesty, integrity, and sincerity. Finally, in particular, government authorities should keep a strict watch on the functioning of educational institutions towards the attainment of value-based education in society.

4.3. Bioethical-Value-Based Education Model

Based on an interpretive approach, the authors propose an alternative model to incorporate bioethics principles and value-sets in value-based education. This model emphasizes nature–social links, action-based learning, and experiential learning as part of learners’ value-building process. Table 1 illustrates the interfaces between bioethics principles and the desired values expounded by value-based education, and how these values are enhanced. The assumption is that the values in value-based education, which are closely associated with bioethics principles, will have a natural and universal inclination to integrate. The unbiased nature of bioethics, which is devoid of ethnocentric or religious biases, allows social cohesion to take root.

As shown in the matrix above, the autonomy principle enhances the achievement of the value-based education values of respect, courage, optimism, cooperation, action, and transformation among learners. Through autonomy, individuals can attain a greater expression of social unity by respecting and acknowledging others’ interests and needs, which eventually enables good reciprocal relations. “Respect begets respect”—respect in relationships builds feelings of trust, hope, safety, and overall well-being. The feeling of optimism and goodwill are also important to reduce racial and societal prejudices, and to stimulate individuals to see beyond differences and look for common ground for cooperation based on their objective morality. Autonomy also denotes a belief and trust in oneself and others, performing actions and resolving issues through moral reasoning. It also denotes individuals’ ability to embrace change in their lives bravely and take reasonable risks. These characteristics can be an impetus of change for learners to move social conflict to social cohesion when dealing with society.

The second bioethics principle, non-maleficence, more pointedly refers to the principle of not doing harm to others [69]. This is an important value that prevents individuals from taking any action that could damage relations with others in society. By refraining from any negative actions, new conflicts can be avoided, and old conflicts will remain status-quo, with no further opportunities to exacerbate conflicts. This principle can be used as the foundation for conflict management and resolution in society. For this principle to be operationalized, two associate values need to be adhered to—honesty and tolerance. Honesty is a primary value that encompasses many value traits such as integrity, sincerity, being transparent, being truthful, trustworthiness, and straightforwardness. These values will help build trust and confidence among groups in society, which together form the bedrock for cooperation. The second value, tolerance, is vital to exhibit goodwill and the willingness to accept differences among groups. This enables groups to talk more freely regarding their positions, concerns, and needs, and to seek resolution through negotiation.

The third bioethics principle, beneficent, simply implies the constituent of “benefit for all.” Thoughts and actions of individuals should be directed to gain positive impacts and for the greater good of all. As such, thoughts and actions contrary to beneficent should be avoided. This principle emphasizes a people-centered approach, which means being thoughtful and respectful of others’ needs, embracing individual differences in society, and celebrating diversity in society. To be beneficent, one has to act responsibly without harming anyone, and act compassionately towards others’ problems. Expressing friendship and understanding is also essential to expressing the beneficent principle; individuals should express mutual affection and be sympathetic to the feelings and problems faced by others. By focusing on societal benefits, these values help to reduce negativity and dissatisfaction among groups in society. This principle also helps people and groups to come together by embracing their differences and encourage them to embrace societal diversity. Furthermore,
this principle also promotes the values of compassion, friendship, and understanding that bind individuals on emotional and spiritual levels.

The fourth bioethics principle, justice, refers to individuals’ unbiased behaviors and actions, which manifest through the values of fairness, equality, and inclusion in society. In contrast, injustice, be it latent or manifest, triggers the feeling of unfairness, and creates divisions among groups in society. Only through the expression of justice will individuals and groups feel respected, appreciated, and treated fairly by others, notwithstanding their positions in society. To achieve this, individuals and groups should refrain from expressing negative feelings such as prejudices and stereotypes towards others in society. Elements of social injustice, marginalization, and oppression in all forms will further divide society. The authors expound that only through the expression of peace, social justice, empowerment, and genuine respect for other people can social conflict be managed effectively.

This aspect manifests in numerous social engagement activities, for example, through bioethics clubs. Through these clubs, university students in India address issues like infanticide and neglect of elderly persons among low-income families. By adopting these families, the students try to inculcate ethical values, such as respect for life, compassion, tolerance, and inclusion. In many Eastern societies, communal volunteerism is encouraged as a part of desired social engagement activity. The idea of societal participation is taught and encouraged by family and schools. In Malaysia, besides social activities in school, students are encouraged to participate in communal work (gotong-royong), such as cleaning common areas, beautifying gardens, and helping out in open-house festivities such as marriages, religious events, and funerals. In multiethnic societies, such activities will promote opportunities for interaction and friendship among neighbors. In addition, Malaysian secondary schools introduced a program called the Pupils Integration for Unity Plan (PIUP) in 1986. “The plan aims to enhance unity among multiracial students of different school types through specially designed for integration activities and produce a generation of students who are knowledgeable, possesses superior spirit and personality, with high sense of unity and capable of facing challenges collectively and comprehensively” [9,40]. The findings reveal that values such as respect, cooperation, tolerance, compassion, and inclusion can strengthen social engagement among students in various types of schools in Malaysia and among varying ethnic groups.

5. Conclusions

As discussed earlier, civic and religious education alone is no longer adequate to mitigate social conflicts in society. The shift in educational focus has made the present society more materialistic, parochial, and self-centered. This study has argued that value-sets in value-based education and bioethics should be incorporated into the current curriculum to produce good, inclusive, and ethical individuals. However, the authors are cognizant of the reality that societies do not subscribe to similar traits and behaviors when it comes to social conflicts. Societies may have different social conflict appetites and resilience levels; some may accept higher levels of dissent without many manifestations of overt conflict behaviors, while others may be easily offended and express their dissent openly. The authors are also conscious of the fact that the education or schooling system alone may not be a singular remedy to social conflicts. Human reactions and behaviors, individually or in a group, are influenced by their intellectual and physical abilities, gender orientations, ethnic, racial and religious proclivities, and their perception and attitudes toward their own realities and others. Therefore, it is indeed difficult to control their moral and ethical makeup, other than when they attend formal education or schooling in their childhood and adolescence. In schools, value education should be taught and inculcated, in their formative age, when personality and behaviors can be more easily molded. Although in its formative stage, this model is an essential contribution to the study of value-education and social conflicts in Asia and in the broader context.

Through the proposed bioethical-value-based education model, the integration of value-sets of value-based education and bioethics principles can promote a deeper incul-
cation of values among learners. For example, the principle of autonomy in bioethics can strengthen and deepen learners’ understanding of values such as respect, courage, optimism, cooperation, action, and transformation (see Table 1). The bioethics principles express natural moral reasoning and questioning aptitude across societal divides, and focus on developing opinions and judgments based on naturalistic dispositions. Therefore, learning becomes enjoyable, experiential, and personal to learners, which warrants greater attention and treatment of issues by learners. The teachers’ role transforms from classroom information providers to being facilitators of experiences through in-class and outside-class activities. This model promotes a practical and real-life learning approach that involves real societal issues and problems, making learners more sensitive to their environment and beyond.

Thinkers have alluded that the end of education is “character,” in which mental and moral qualities distinctive to the individuals are manifested. Philosophers like Mahatma Gandhi have claimed that education’s primary aim is to develop a human personality, which exhibits in the body, mind, heart, and spirit of individuals. This will, in turn, contribute to a peaceful society and nation. To achieve the above goals, parents’ and teachers’ roles are vital, as they are in close contact with the children and have the capacity to observe their attitudinal and behavioral changes at close range. Parents and teachers should themselves have knowledge of and confidence in value-based education before instilling it into their children’s minds. Value-based education inspires society to embrace and live positive human values in everyday life. The learning process does not only arouse the spiritual, intellectual, and physical strength of the individual, it also inculcates the notions of sympathy, fellowship, and love of self and others. Therefore, individuals will be better prepared to manage differences through dialogue, tolerance, friendship, reconciliation, and confidence-building.

The authors are mindful of several limitations in this study. Firstly, the authors recognize that social conflict dynamics and behaviors differ among individuals and societies due to different psychological and socio-cultural temperaments. The study has acknowledged this limitation in the analysis and the development of the bioethical-value-based education model. Secondly, this proposed value-laden model may contradict other pre-existing value-sets like socio-cultural and religious values. In such situations, individuals may face moral dilemmas in deciding which values are acceptable to themselves and their society. The study has not sufficiently addressed the issues of selection and moral dilemmas, as these are not the primary aims of this study. The third limitation is perhaps the lack of quantitative analysis in this study. Nevertheless, the authors have argued earlier that the study is conceptual, which adopts the “interpretive sociology” approach on relevant literature and cases observed in several Asian countries.

Research on social conflicts has appeared in various fields, including ethnic relations, religion and faith systems, politics, inter-state relations, psychology, the environment, science, communication, and other human-activity-related fields. Many of these works have focused on the conflict description, conflict processes, and conflict management of the social conflicts studied. In this study, the authors offer two key contributions. Firstly, they establish the links between social conflicts and societal peace within the discourse of sustainability. Secondly, the study presents pioneering work on mitigating social conflicts through a learning system that integrates value-based education and bioethics principles. Further, the study presents the bioethical-value-based education model that highlights the interaction between bioethics principles, values in value-based education, and the value enhancements that can be achieved in this integration. For further research, researchers can focus on applying this model in classroom situations in schools and education systems in various societies. Such research will reveal the levels of usability and efficacy of this model and the possible enhancement of the model. The second area that researchers can focus-on is the “interactions of values” in social conflict situations. Since humans are key players in social conflicts, it is essential to study how they use different value-sets in their arsenal of
values to manage different types of social conflicts, such as family conflicts, work-place conflicts, faith-based conflicts, ethnic-based conflicts, and others.

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