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Framing of the Unified Examination Certificate by Malaysian Ethnic Newspapers

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Abstract

Media framing makes an issue salient. This study attempts to determine the frequency of episodic and thematic frames in news about the Unified Examination Certificate issue and identify the framing dimensions and valence used. Textual analysis of the content and headlines was performed on 100 news articles from newspapers of two languages. Results indicate that all the articles were framed episodically, with the “attribution of responsibility” dimension used most frequently, followed by the “human interest” and “conflict” dimensions. Chinese articles tended to use neutral valence, whereas Malay articles mostly used negative valence. These findings provide insights into ethnic politically-influenced and reader-oriented presentations of an

issue by different newspapers. Future studies may focus on newspapers using the same language and investigate the framing effects by mainstream and alternative media.

Keywords

framing – valence – Unified Examination Certificate – ethnopolitics

1 Introduction

As a multiethnic and multilingual country, Malaysia is not free from lingering ethnic issues between its majority Malays and other ethnic groups. Unfair treatment by the government toward the majority and other groups in political, economic, social, and cultural aspects since colonial times tends to spark ethnic tensions (Kua 2010). Among them, education – an area prioritized by the Malaysian–Chinese – frequently triggers national-level debates. The supposedly political-free educational debates are commonly amplified under an ethno-political lens (Segawa 2013), a distinctive characteristic of Malaysia's political ecology in which political parties strive to manipulate ethnic bonds to gain inter-ethnic support while instilling fear among ethnic outsiders. In conveying progress to the public, the media offers a convenient platform. However, the media's ownership and political inclination further influence the way they frame the intended message. Within this context, this study examines the framing of the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC), an academic qualification in Malaysian–Chinese education that is not yet recognized by the government, by local Malay and Chinese newspapers.

2 Background of UEC

Graduates of Chinese primary schools in Malaysia typically further their studies in Malay-medium secondary schools or in Chinese-medium Chinese Independent Secondary Schools (CISS), among other options. CISS's existence resulted from not observing the Education Act 1961, which called for a single stream education policy (i.e., changing the medium of instruction first to English, and then Malay); hence, schools were left to their own devices to survive. The government also suspended secondary school examinations conducted in Chinese from 1961 (Huang and Wei 2018). As CISS graduates needed a standardized evaluation system to pursue higher studies, the Unified