

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 valance, 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

Examination was formulated and first held in 1975. Candidates who pass the examination are awarded the UEC, a certificate governed by The United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia (also referred to as Dong Zong). As of December 2020, the examination reached its 46th year, with a total of 695,717 candidates having taken it (Choong 2020; Dong Zong 2018).

Interestingly, although the UEC is academically equivalent to the Malaysian Higher School Certificate and A-level and is widely recognized by higher education institutions in countries such as China, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States, it is yet to be recognized in Malaysia (Hong 2018). If the UEC is recognized, then CISS graduates may attend national universities and ultimately serve as public officials (Dong Zong 2018). Despite meetings between the Dong Zong and Malaysia's Minister of Education since 1979 (Hong 2018), whether the UEC is given recognition remains uncertain.

Stemming from the British colonial "divide and rule" policy during the Malayan era, ethnic tensions arising from political, economic, educational, religious, and cultural issues are easily triggered in current Malaysian society, commonly between the politically dominant ethnic Malay, who enjoy positive discrimination in the fields of education, business, and the civil service – and other communities, such as the Chinese and Indians (BBC 2020; Ramli et al. 2018). Ethnic tensions occur when unfairness and dissatisfaction are felt among ethnic groups, causing them to defend their rights and demand equality through debates and protests, among other means. The notorious Operation Lalang (1987) is an example of ethnic tensions on education that took place in Malaysia. It was caused by the appointment of teachers without a Chinese qualification to administrative positions in Chinese primary schools – a government decision believed to be potentially harmful to the uniqueness of Chinese schools – resulting in ethno-political tension; three major newspapers (Sin Chew Daily, The Star, Watan) also had their licenses revoked (Yang and Ishak 2012). As for UEC recognition, the Chinese believe that Chinese education is one of the three pillars of their society (the other two being Chinese newspapers and associations) which has an obligation to pass on Chinese culture (Ng and Beng 2018); hence, it should always be defended. However, their sacrifices in seeking UEC recognition were interpreted by the opposition as going against the National Education Policy, with some relating it to devaluing the status of Malay as the national language, posing threats to national sovereignty and reducing the opportunities of Malaysian Higher School Certificate holders to enter local universities (Kua 2018a; Li 2019; Talib and Ishak 2020). To a great extent, recognition is seen as a challenge to Malay Supremacy, a political ideology that emphasizes Malay dominance in Malaysia (Ignatius 2018). Educators and politicians have been fighting over the issue, rendering it no

longer strictly an educational issue but one also linked to ethnic politics (Hong 2018).

Recognition of the UEC became a popular topic in Malaysia in 2018, when *Pakatan Harapan* (PH), a political coalition, used it as a manifesto during the country's 14th General Elections, with the clear intention to win Chinese votes (Kua 2018b). Appealing to ethnicity is a common tactic in Malaysian elections (Wen, Chibundu, and Chua 2020). Parties capable of handling issues deemed important to a particular ethnic group are likely to gain their support. Eventually, PH won the election and formed a Policy Taskforce on the UEC. However, before the report was made public, the coalition already failed to maintain its majority in Parliament, thus, losing power over the Federal Government, just 22 months after it won the election (Chuah 2020; Yaakub 2021). With the end of PH's reign, "UEC recognition" remains a mere political talking point at election time, which occasionally pops up in the media.

3 Malaysian Media and Framing

Malaysian media is twofold: ethnic-based and mostly politically controlled. Major ethnic groups have the news reported in their own language, often from an angle reflective of their concerns, thus, causing the news to appear ethnically biased (Wen, Chibundu, and Chua 2020). At the same time, the country's media companies are mostly owned and controlled by political parties. Many major shareholders of Media Prima, Malaysia's dominant media company that publishes Malay newspapers *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro*, are affiliated with United Malay National Organization (UMNO, a party upholding Malay Supremacy that dominates *Barisan Nasional*, a Malaysian political coalition) (Wok and Mohamed 2017), whereas The Utusan Group (also UMNO-controlled) owned Malay newspapers *Utusan Online* and *Kosmo!* up until 2019. Owing to their political background, Malay newspapers inevitably show ethnocentrism and speak out against views that hamper Malays' advancement, with most of their reporting being politically biased (Ramli 2019; Yang and Ishak 2015). Meanwhile, Chinese newspapers, which lack a political background, are said to be more politically impartial (Koshy 2020). *Sin Chew Daily* (owned by a business tycoon) is a representative of them. As an ethnic daily, it incorporates ethnic perspectives in reporting issues, especially on education, culture, and religious rights pertinent to the Malaysian–Chinese (Ng and Beng 2018).

Chinese newspapers exhibit their relevance within the "Malayness" and ethnic tensions in Malaysia through measures, such as in-depth reporting of their community's survival in Malaysia, introducing a bilingual edition of

newspapers so that their voices can be heard by the government, and encouraging their own community's reflection in the Malaysian political, economic, educational, and safety aspects. In Malaysia's ethno-political setting, Chinese newspapers are said to play the role of a mediator and "promoter of moderation" (proposed by Najib Abdul Razak, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia) (Yang and Ishak 2016). In general, through lessons learned (e.g., Operation Lalang) and with existing acts (e.g., Printing Presses and Publication Act, Communications and Multimedia Act, Sedition Act), Malaysian newspapers are used to performing self-censorship in their reporting on sensitive issues to prevent offending the government (Wong 2004).

To further understand the interplay between the UEC issue and the media, investigating the way media presents the issue is necessary. Given their respective stand, the media may choose to report on a specific part of the issue; hence, "framing" the reality presented to readers. Given that certain aspects of the issue are upraised as the subject, they become salient to readers (Entman 1993) and shape public perceptions toward it.

For the media, issue-framing is divided into thematic and episodic. Iyengar (1991) suggested that thematic framing covers an issue in a general context, whereas episodic framing frames an issue as a specific event or the narrative of an individual. Previous studies showed that a thematically-framed issue creates an impression to readers that the issue is collective in nature; hence, its locus and solution at the governmental level is determined (Harrison, Macmillan, and Rudd 2020; Zoller and Casteel 2021). By contrast, an episodic frame tunes down an issue's complexity by diverting the responsibility to individuals, as in Smith and Pegoraro (2020) and Zhang and Jin (2017). To study framing in more detail, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) suggested five generic framing dimensions: "attribution of responsibility", "conflict", "human interest", "economic consequence" and "morality." These framing dimensions exist in media coverage (Gronemeyer and Porath 2017; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000) with different weightage by the nature of the issue reported. For instance, the conflict frame may be more prevalent in political and interracial-related news, whereas reports dealing with social problems and crises are inseparable from the "attribution of responsibility" frame (An and Gower 2009; Gronemeyer and Porath 2017; Kee, Hassan, and Ahmad 2012; Yang and Rycker 2017).

An issue can also be made salient by portraying it positively, neutrally, or negatively. It makes up the continuum of valence, namely, a qualitative value of the issue, which influences readers. De Vresse and Boomgaarden (2003) found that the European Union (EU) receives relatively negative enlargement evaluation and low support when news about the EU is framed in disadvantageous valence in European countries. Hurtíková (2017) revealed that a high

frequency of positive reports increases the support of a political party, and vice versa. Becktel et al. (2021) reported the perceptions of the Marine Corps on female military combat were affected by the use of tone in a news article. In this regard, the function of valence in news articles corresponds to Entman (1993) who classified frames as defining problems; diagnosing causes; *making moral judgments*; and suggesting remedies.

This study examines the framing of UEC by Malay and Chinese newspapers after the change of Malaysian government in 2018. It attempts to determine the frequency of episodic and thematic frames found in the news articles on UEC, what framing dimensions are used to portray UEC, and how UEC news are portrayed in terms of the valence used.

4 Methodology

Leveraging the frameworks by Iyengar (1991), Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), and Boydston et al. (2013), this qualitative study analyzed news articles published online by five Malaysian newspapers (Table 1). Malay and Chinese newspapers were selected because the UEC issue often triggers conflicts between the two communities. All five newspapers have high circulations, with KM ranking the highest (182,022/day) among the four Malay newspapers and likewise for SCD representing Chinese newspapers (338,568/day) (adQrate, n.d.). A pre-study screening reveals that Malay newspapers published a relatively limited number of UEC-related news stories compared with their Chinese counterparts; altogether four Malay newspapers were selected to obtain balanced data for the study.

UEC-related news articles dated from May 10 to December 31, 2018 were collected, considering the latest General Election was held on May 9, 2018, and the

TABLE 1 Descriptions for newspapers selected.

Newspaper	Abbreviation	Website	Language
Berita Harian	BH	https://www.bharian.com.my/	Malay
Harian Metro	HM	https://www.hmetro.com.my/	
Utusan Online	UO	http://www.utusan.com.my/	
Kosmo!	KM	http://www.kosmo.com.my/	
Sin Chew Daily	SCD	https://www.sinchew.com.my/	Chinese

announcement of government change on the following day. Keyword searches on “UEC” and “Tǒngkǎo 统考” (Chinese equivalent for “UEC”) in news headlines were performed on the respective newspaper’s website. A total of 100 news articles (50 for each language) were collected for the analysis. This number is in accordance with the allowance of 10% sampling error by Wennermark (2013).

The unit of analysis for RQ1 is the content of news articles, whereas that for RQs 2 and 3 are the news headlines. Qualitative coding was performed by a single coder, initially by going through random printed samples of the news articles collected by checking the respective unit of analysis against the attributes of framing by Iyengar (1991), framing dimensions by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), and valences by Boydstun et al. (2013). The relevant words or phrases in the unit of analysis matching the attributes were circled as proof. The attributes were contextualized and improved along the way until the following working definition applicable to the study was formed:

- Episodic frame: frames the UEC issue as an individual, a party or specific event, including any interview or speech that is triggered by a particular event related to the issue.
- Thematic frame: frames the UEC issue by providing its background and information about the issue holistically.

The actual analysis was conducted two weeks later, at which time news articles were reprinted in clean slate and analyzed against the working definitions according to each RQ.

5 Findings and Discussion

This section consists of three subsections, reporting on the findings on the (1) frequency of episodic and thematic frames, (2) framing dimensions used, and (3) valence of news headlines.

5.1 *Frequency of Episodic and Thematic Frames*

The analysis reveals that episodic frame is the only frame used when reporting on the UEC issue in Malay and Chinese newspapers (Table 4). Episodic frame tends to bring about finger-pointing (Zhang and Jin 2017). It is also commonly used to divert public attention. In this study, most episodically-framed news articles were on the “claims/finger-pointing” made by influential figures (e.g., politicians) (36% or 18/50 Chinese news articles and 32% or 16/50 Malay

TABLE 2 Framing dimensions and attributes.

Framing dimension	Attribute
Attribution of responsibility	Attribute the responsibility for the cause of the UEC issue, its progress or outcome to government or specific individual(s). The article may contain a blaming tone or elements of fault-finding.
Conflict	Emphasize the conflict(s) between Chinese and Malay individual(s) or community, resulting from the UEC issue.
Human interest	Focus on individual(s) or community’s emotional point of view toward the UEC issue, regardless of whether the party(s) supports the recognition of UEC or not.
Morality	Highlight the UEC issue in the context of religious principles or moral requirements.
Economic consequence	Point to the UEC issue by looking into the economic consequences on an individual, a group or a country.

(adapted from Semetko and Valkenburg 2000)

news articles), followed by “urges” (28% or 14 counts in Chinese news articles and 26% or 13 counts in Malay news articles). While both newspapers demonstrated the same weightage on the “event-reporting” type of news (20% or 10 counts in each newspaper), a difference was shown in “expressing one’s stand” (16% or 8 counts in Malay news articles, none in Chinese news articles) and “giving promises” (16% or 8 counts in Chinese news articles, 6% or 3 counts in Malay news articles). The Malay newspapers demonstrated worries and concerns, whereas the Chinese newspaper tended to focus on progress that gave hopes to readers. The contradictory orientation shown by both newspapers is an externalization of their ideology – the Malay newspapers under the influence of their political ownership needed to speak out to maintain the ethno-political bond of the readers, whereas the Chinese newspaper needed to shed light on the issue to please its community (Ng and Beng 2018). The lack of intersection between both newspapers may sow the seeds of division among readers, which further obstructs the effort to find a win-win solution for the issue.

TABLE 3 Valences and attributes.

Valence	Attribute
Positive	The UEC issue is portrayed in a positive light or from a generally sympathetic point of view, which supporters of the UEC will be happy to read.
Neutral	Either the UEC issue is portrayed using positive and negative tones that balance out each other or both tones are absent.
Negative	The UEC issue is portrayed in a negative light or in a non-sympathetic manner; supporters of the UEC will be upset to read the same.

(adapted from Boydston et al. 2013)

None of the news articles framed the issue thematically. Although this finding enhances the claim by Iyengar (1991) that an episodic frame is more frequently used in issue-reporting, it shows that no effort was made to improve the public’s understanding of the issue. Instead, the topic was kept salient by continually sensationalizing it with details of the recognition process (e.g., when and how the UEC will be recognized). Although the rationale for downplaying the complexity and historical aspects of the issue by the Malay newspapers can be politically driven, the understanding of readers of both newspapers on the issue will be fragmented over time. Passive readers are dependent on and easily influenced by the first-hand content they receive. Little do they realize that they are reading framed news content, which only highlights certain aspects of the perceived reality, leaving out as much or more than what they include (Carter 2013; Entman 1993). The exclusive use of episodic framing resulted in readers from the Malay and Chinese community forming an incomplete – if not distorted – perception on the basis of the specific incidents of the UEC and “selective views” reported (Steppat, Herrero, and Esser 2021). Therefore, when this framing trend persists, readers lacking exposure to the UEC issue in the bigger picture may underestimate its significance as a nationwide issue; hence, causing it to gradually fade away from the public’s and the media’s attention. When the media pays less attention to the issue, readers have less exposure to it. A vicious cycle will form until the issue is no longer deemed important. To a great extent, the UEC issue may be treated as less relevant in view of the national agenda and eventually left out, impacting the inclusiveness of the country’s education policy. This situation resonates with the notion of Entman

TABLE 4 Episodically-framed news articles (examples).

Label	Headline	Framing	Rationale
UO 1	<i>UEC: Beri masalah kepada universiti, sektor kerajaan</i> (UEC: Giving problems to universities and the government)	Episodic	The news article reported on the disagreement of Prof. Datuk Dr. Wan Ramli Wan Daud, a local scholar, on the recognition of the UEC. He claimed that if the students who sat for the UEC were weak in Malay, then they would face difficulties in the university. The entire news article was about the opinion of a person on the UEC issue.
KM 3	<i>200 mahasiswa berhimpun bantah iktiraf UEC</i> (200 university students gathered to oppose the recognition of UEC)		The news article reported only on a particular event (a rally).
SCD 2	<i>Zhāng Jiàn Rén: chéng-rèn Tǒngkǎo bùnéng zài tuō</i> (Chong Chieng Jen: UEC recognition cannot be delayed further)		The news article only focused on claims made by Chong Chieng Jen, a political figure, who said that he trusted the Prime Minister, and that many arguments arose on UEC recognition, especially from the <i>Bumiputras</i> (the Malays and the indigenous people of the country).

(1993), who argued that framed news can lead to a treatment recommendation for the issue described or influence public policy in the case of the UEC.

5.2 *Framing dimensions used*

Both newspapers used the “attribution of responsibility” and “human interest” dimensions to present headlines on the UEC issue. The “conflict” dimension

was only found in Malay headlines. The economic consequences and morality dimensions were absent, which makes sense because the issue has no direct connection with economic and moral concerns. Among the three framing dimensions used, the “attribution of responsibility” dimension was the most prevalent. It obtained the highest usage by Malay (88% or 44/50 headlines) and Chinese (more than 100% or 66/50 headlines) newspapers. A headline may contain more than one framing dimension (Table 5); thus, contributing to the over-100% percentage of Chinese headlines.

Further categorization reveals that the “responsibilities” can be attributed to the government, organization, influential individuals, and the general public. In Malay headlines, the government was held responsible the most (42% or 21/50 headlines), followed by organizations (22% or 11 counts), influential individuals (20% or 10 counts), and the general public (4% or 2 counts). The responsibility of the government was primarily highlighted because UEC recognition was one of the manifestoes of the 14th General Election. The promise gave hopes to supporters but caused unrest among non-supporters. Each update from the government and its actions were the main concern of Malay newspapers and had been put under the spotlight by both parties, which continuously made the issue salient. By contrast, the Chinese headlines focused on responsibility at the level of influential individuals (64% or 32/50 headlines), followed by government (40% or 20 counts), organizations (24% or 12 counts), and the general public (4% or 2 counts). More efforts were shown to report on recognition progress. Moreover, both newspapers exhibited similar weightage on headlines that attributed responsibility to the government, organizations, and the general public.

Human interest is the second most commonly used framing dimension by both newspapers, with the Malay newspapers recording 12% (6/50 headlines) and the Chinese newspaper recording 6% (3/50 headlines) (Table 6). Undoubtedly, readers easily focus on headlines that deal with human interest (Graber 2001), especially those relevant to them. When recognition of the UEC became one of PH’s election manifestoes, political parties started weaponizing propaganda to promote their central agendas and attempted to sway public opinion in their favor, as “the battle for public opinion is as important during a war as the engagement of soldiers on the front” (Hiebert 2003, 243). Politicians attacked PH via the propaganda that brought closer the fine difference of the UEC issue being an education issue and an ethno-political one. As the propaganda deliberately spread a certain degree of disinformation and is likely to systematically sow ignorance, division, doubt, and fear (Hodges 2018) – with perceptions and behavioral changes as its ultimate goals, reporting incidents covering such political discourse in the newspapers directly corresponded

TABLE 5 Headlines with more than one framing dimension (examples).

Label	Headline	Framing dimension	Rationale
UO27	<i>Pengiktirafan UEC perlu pertimbangkan perasaan orang Melayu–Dr. Mahathir</i> (UEC recognition must consider the feeling of Malays–Dr. Mahathir)	Attribution of responsibility - government - influential individual	As an influential individual, Tun Dr. Mahathir is responsible for his personal urging of the government. Concurrently, the government is urged to take up the responsibility for ensuring that the Malays are not offended when any decision is made.
SCD6	Chénggrèn Tǒngkǎo huò fàng huǎn Dǒng Jiào Zǒng cù wù zhèngzhìhuà (UEC recognition may slow down. Dong Zong urges to not politicize the issue.)	Attribution of responsibility - organization - the general public	Dong Zong holds responsibility as an organization for its claim. In view of the possible slowing-down of the recognition, the public is responsible for acting rationally and waiting for the formal announcement instead of politicizing it.

with the effects of media framing. Media companies were predisposed to promote their owners’ political vested interests (Yang and Ishak 2016) and tended to report on those that were supportive of their stand. Following these reports, the public was made to see how the issue could affect them (e.g., the Malay readers were alerted that UEC recognition might challenge their privilege), they formed perceptions and eventually chose sides. That is, successful propaganda ultimately benefits one side while hindering the other (Entman 2003). Headlines framed using the “human interest” dimension thus can help convey and instill the ethno-political stand of the political parties owning the respective newspapers to readers.

TABLE 6 Headlines framed using the “human interest” dimension (examples).

Label	Headline	Framing dimension	Rationale
BH 7	<i>Pengiktirafan UEC akan dibuat tanpa jejas bahasa Melayu</i> (UEC will be recognized without affecting bahasa Melayu)	Human interest	Some Malaysians are worried that UEC recognition will affect the status of Malay being the country’s national language. Considering that this corner may bring direct harm to the National Education Policy and challenge the privilege of the <i>Bumiputras</i> , it is connected with the collective interest and concerns of a large group of people.
HM 10	UEC akan “rosakkan” Dasar Pendidikan Kebangsaan (UEC will “damage” the National Education Policy)		
SCD10	Lín Zhèn Huī: chénggrèn Tǒngkǎo 2 kǎoliáng “Mǎ Zhì Lǐ shuōcí shāng-hài dúzhōng” (Lim Chin Fui: Two considerations in UEC recognition. “Maszlee’s speech hurts CISS”)		Hurting CISS is hurting its supporters whose interest is to hear positive news about recognition.

The framing dimensions of “attribution of responsibility” and “human interest” tended to coexist in the headlines. Observable in Malay (6% or 3/50 headlines) and Chinese (10% or 5/50 headlines) newspapers (Table 7), this trend is essentially owing to the specialty of the UEC issue that it seeks actions from some individual(s) or party(s), and the actions taken will trigger readers’ emotional concerns. Entman (1993) proposed that the subject of how news comes to represent the interests of political elites is framed by the imprint of power, that is, those who are politically influential get more chances to have their perspectives and opinions appear in the news. In the Malaysian media setting, the shareholders of Media Prima and the Utusan Group have the privilege to

have their preferred messages presented in news coverage by the newspapers under their control. The Chinese newspaper, despite lacking a political background, also pays attention to influential individuals having political support in its news articles. This finding suggests that the newspapers allowed the country's political parties to serve as bellwethers in orientating readers' perceptions toward the UEC issue. Meanwhile, the "human interest" dimension is found to be supportive of the "attribution of responsibility" dimension when reporting on political and societal problems (Boukes et al. 2015). In this study, readers can easily associate the problems on UEC recognition reported with the dilemma they face; hence, attributing responsibility to the government or politicians that they can turn to. This supports the claim that framed headlines containing "attribution of responsibility" and "human interest" dimensions play a crucial part in the way readers perceive the UEC issue and consequently form opinions about it. News is therefore not only information gathering and presentation but also a result of accumulated decisions and media framing.

The use of the "conflict" dimension marks another obvious difference between Malay and Chinese news headlines. It was only prevalent in the former (10% or 5/50 headlines, Table 8) but absent in the latter. In Malay newspapers, such headlines are found to regularly employ the word "*bantah*" (protest or oppose) in showing the disagreement of non-supporters. Being in disagreement means clashes of opinions occur, thus, the "conflict" dimension is observable. This finding implies that Malay newspapers, in pursuing their owners' political interests, were consistent in expressing disapproval of changes to the current situation that were thought, if not accused, to challenge Malay Supremacy. Sensationalizing the issue via the "conflict" dimension, even at the expense of inciting ethnic tensions (Kua 2002), is telling readers that their ethnic dignity is well safeguarded, and their continuous political support is needed. As for the Chinese newspaper, it realized the complexity of Malaysia's ethnic politics and attempted to avoid crossing the red line; hence, insignificant coverage framed using the "conflict" dimension was not highlighted. This explains why headlines framed in the "conflict" dimension in Malay newspapers outnumbered its Chinese counterpart.

5.3 *Valence of News Headlines*

Looking at how the Malay and Chinese news headlines portrayed the news on the UEC issue revealed further the way the issue was framed. The result showed that Malay headlines used negative valence the most (42% or 21/50 headlines), followed by neutral (36% or 18 counts), and positive valence (22%

TABLE 7 Headlines with two framing dimensions (examples).

Label	Headline	Framing dimension	Rationale
BH 23	<i>UEC tidak gugat Perkara 152–Aziz Bari</i> (UEC does not threaten Article 152–Aziz Bari)	Human interest Attribution of responsibility	Supporters of the UEC will be happy to hear that recognition is harmless to the country, yet non-supporters will be offended if it challenges the Malaysian Constitution. The emotion of both parties will be triggered by this headline. By quoting his name, it is implied that Abdul Aziz Bari, a politician, is held responsible for his claim. Claiming that UEC recognition will endanger unity brings uncertainty among readers, threatening them emotionally.
UO 13	<i>UEC rungkai asas perpaduan kaum–Harussani</i> (UEC endangers the base of unity among races–Harussani)		By quoting his name, it is implied that Tan Sri Harassing Zakaria, an Islamic jurist, is held responsible for his claim.
SCD 22	Sēn dàchén: dúzhōng yě yǒu wū yì shēng fǒudìng Tǒngkǎo wū yì chīkuī (<i>Menteri Besar</i> of Negeri Sembilan: Malay students also study in CISS. Refusing UEC will cause them to lose out.)		Being responsible for his personal claim, the <i>Menteri Besar</i> (Chief Minister) of Negeri Sembilan brought up the general concerns of Malay parents who sent their children to study in CISS. He mentioned that recognizing the UEC will benefit students and bring about a more open country, which is a common interest topic affecting all Malaysians.

TABLE 8 Malay news headlines framed using the “conflict” dimension (examples)

Label	Headline	Framing dimension
UO 2	<i>Peradaban bantah UEC</i> (Peradaban objects to UEC)	Conflict
BH 22	<i>GAMIS bantah UEC</i> (GAMIS objects to UEC)	
UO 22	<i>ASAS bantah cadangan iktiraf UEC</i> (ASAS objects to the suggestion to recognize the UEC)	

or 11 counts). Comparatively, being neutral was the predominant valence in Chinese headlines (56% or 28/50 news articles), followed by positive (30% or 15 counts) and negative valence (14% or 7 counts).

The prominent use of negative valence by Malay headlines indicated that the UEC issue is badly received and perceived by the Malay community (Table 9). In addition, the use of negative valence is a technique to maintain news value and continuously attract readers’ attention (Altheide 1997) because it looks more sensationalized to readers who buy it. By contrast, Chinese headlines primarily used neutral valence, especially before any formal announcement was made. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, the Chinese newspaper may want to stay safe and avoid being accused as stirring up any intense situation, especially for SCD which had the unpleasant record of being suspended in Operation Lalang 1987. This finding is also in line with SCD’s relatively independent stand compared with newspapers in other languages (Yang and Ishak 2015). Nevertheless, as news publishing is a business, readers’ taste was still catered to, within which headlines in positive valence outnumbered the ones in negative valence. The same trend was also observed in Malay newspapers, with headlines in positive valence reported the least. The relatively limited number of UEC news articles reported by Malay newspapers is already an indication of how the newspapers perceived the importance of the issue. A biased perception among their respective readers on the recognition is eventually influenced and constructed.

TABLE 9 Headlines presented in different valances (examples)

Label	Headline	Valence	Rationale
BH3	<i>Kenyataan sokong UEC tidak perlu dilayan–PENA</i> (Ignore statements on UEC recognition–PENA)	Negative	These headlines upset UEC supporters and hence carry negative valence.
SCD 9	<i>Wū Qīng tuánzhǎng Āsīlāfū: Tǒngkǎo jù zhǒngzú zhǔyì bùnéng chéngrèn</i> (Asyraf, the Youth Chief of UMNO: UEC is racist in nature, cannot be recognized)		
KM 4	<i>Prejudis terhadap UEC perlu diselesaikan terlebih dahulu–Maszlee</i> (Prejudice toward UEC needs to be solved first–Maszlee)	Neutral	The headlines are only suggestive in nature and do not show any inclination, hence carrying neutral valence.
SCD4	<i>Lái Shì: kǎoliáng Mǎláirén quán yì chéngrèn Tǒngkǎo xū shēnrù yánjiū</i> (Rais: consider the Malay’s rights. UEC recognition requires in-depth research.)		
HM 1	<i>Tak buat pusingan U berhubung isu UEC–Maszlee</i> (Not making U-turns on the UEC issue–Maszlee)	Positive	The headlines show promising progress or bring hopes to the supporters of UEC, hence carrying positive valence.
SCD27	<i>Ní Kě Mǐn: děng le 60 nián wúfáng zài děng bànnián</i> <i>“chéngrèn Tǒngkǎo zhīrìkèdài”</i> (Nga Kor Ming: Waiting for another half year is okay, as we have waited for 60 years. “The recognition of UEC is targetable.”)		

6 Conclusion

News presented by media is a product of framing. In Malaysia's media setting, news framing is often attributed to the interplay between political and ethical considerations. This study reported on the exclusive use of episodic framing in UEC news articles in Malay and Chinese newspapers. In addition, these ethnic newspapers demonstrated two different orientations in portraying the issue in terms of the framing dimensions and valence constructed. Significantly, no Chinese news headlines framed the UEC issue by using the "conflict" dimension, whereas Malay headlines did. Malay headlines also used negative valence the most, whereas Chinese headlines predominantly used neutral valence. The findings indicated that the interests of media company owners, including the need to hold the interest of the community served by the ethnic newspapers, are two important contributing factors in the framing process. While the Malay newspapers have a political background as support to frame the UEC news in a way befitting their ethno-political agenda, the Chinese newspaper continued to safeguard its ethnic culture and identity with reports presenting the relatively positive aspect of the issue. This observation echoes the claims by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) that different media with specific types of businesses and audiences tend to project different frames on the same topic. Under this context, the UEC issue has become a politicized educational issue, and readers' understanding of it is continuously molded by framed news. This study helps fill a research vacuum in existing literature by focusing on the framing of Malaysian ethnic newspapers on the UEC issue. However, this study was conducted on news articles collected over about half a year, following the change of government, hence marking its limitation. Future research can extend the study period and focus on newspapers using the same language and investigate the framing of the UEC issue in mainstream and alternative media.

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