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**Framing of Educational News during COVID-19:  
A Comparative Analysis of Pakistani News Channels**

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**Abstract:**

The COVID-19 pandemic swept the world, causing a chain of crises that affected every industry and individual. Education was among the areas which were affected most during COVID 19. In Pakistan, schools, colleges and universities were shut and media was the only source to effectively portray the educational issues of young population. This study was designed to examine the news coverage of educational issues during the COVID-19 period in Pakistan by the leading news channels, Geo News and ARY News. Quantitative content analysis was carried out for 133 educational news broadcasted by both of the channels, between March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, to March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 during prime time. The educational news stories were coded by generic and issue-specific frames, tone, slant, and frequency. The analysis discovered substantial variations in the usage of evaluative tones, frames and extent of coverage given to educational issues during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study also found out lack of coverage given to educational issues in the country as both channels gave only 12% coverage altogether.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, education, Geo News, ARY News, COVID-19, slant, frequency, framing theory

**INTRODUCTION**

In the winter of 2020, COVID-19 struck humanity, causing shock and instability throughout the industries. It was not invincible in higher education. In the ivory towers of academia and beyond, COVID-19 brought anxiety, trauma, loneliness, and uncertainty. In times of crisis, news media serve as gatekeepers and frame information for public consumption (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). As a result, news sources define what the public needs to know and create a narrative tone that can serve as a foundation for public perception, support, or condemnation (Ulmer et al., 2019). This study is developed to explore the coverage given by Pakistani News Channels to educational news

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stories during the pandemic of COVID-19 as education was among the most concerned issues. COVID-19 is a once-in-a-century global event. It is an ongoing pandemic around the globe. It is catalyzed by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Gates, 2020). On 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2020, Ministry of Health confirmed the first case from Karachi, Sindh (Abed Alah, Abdeen, & Kehyayan, 2020).

The pandemic jittered the whole globe and has affected each sphere of life may it be food items, medicine, occasions, economy, government, memorial services and religion etc., all fields of life have been stirred up by this irresistible disease. The governments opted for some novel strategies, including social distancing, shutting educational institutions, travel limitations, partial lockdowns, quarantine centers and vaccination spots to minimize the disperse of corona virus. Regardless of these measures, the numbers are steadily increasing every minute. To constrain the spread of corona virus and to keep people updated about government policies, the media has played the most effective role. However, it is found that very little research has been done especially in Pakistan on coverage of educational news by News Channels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Impact of Covid on Education**

A health emergency is at the Centre of the COVID-19 pandemic. School, college, and university closures have been authorized in a number of nations. The situation brings to light the difficult choice that policy makers must make between keeping schools open or closing them in order to save lives (allowing workers to work from home and maintaining the economy). Importantly, institutional lockdown affects more than just internal assessments. For example, in Pakistan, all exams for the main public qualifications have been cancelled for the entire cohort. One potential replacement for the cancelled assessments is to use 'predicted grades,' but Murphy and Wyness (2020) show that these are frequently inaccurate. Many families all over the world are affected by the significant short-term disruption: homeschooling is a huge shock to children's social and academic development as well as to parents' productivity. On an unproven and unrecognized scale, education is transferring online.

### **Digital Transformation in Education**

Due to outburst of COVID-19, educational institutions were forcefully closed, causing unequalled impact on education. Teachers were instructed to adopt online learning method for teaching. Through online lectures, video calls, digital books, online examinations and interactivity in virtual world, COVID-19 has caused a digital revolution in all kinds of education. It was difficult for the universities to plan educational activities in online system. Professors and students also faced administrative, technical, financial and social issues (Chakraborty, Mittal, Gupta, Yadav, & Arora, 2020). Parents and students were concerned about their children's academic prospects as a result of the prolonged lockdown.

Educational sector has remained a neglected area in Pakistan since its inception, both on ground and in media waves (Sattar, Bahauddin, Univesity, Yasin, & Afzal, 2019). Along with the highest number of youth population in the world of about 64% under the age of 29, it stands at a critical stage to invest in its educational system (Ahmad, 2018). COVID-19 and the consequential lockdown further deteriorated the condition. (Rasheed, Rizwan, Javed, Sharif, & Zaidi, 2021) identified students as the most affected segment during the pandemic. Hence, the present study aims to

explore the extent of coverage educational issues received by the leading news channels. The study also analyzed the use of frames and differences in framing of education by Geo News and ARY News.

This paper aims: to measure the extent of coverage given by Geo News and ARY News regarding educational issues; to highlight which of the frames established in this study were dominant in Geo News and ARY News coverage respectively, and; to explore the use of positive and negative tones in coverage of educational issues by Geo News and ARY News.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The studied literature gives background information and a knowledge of the COVID-19 crisis repercussions on education, and the media's involvement during the Corona era in framing and reporting on educational issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which was identified by the World Health Organization as a lethal threat to humanity, caused profound changes in every element of human everyday life, including significant reforms to education institutions at all levels. Due to the restriction measures established and implemented by national governments in many areas of the world, learning and teaching environments for all stakeholders (such as students, teachers, educational leaders, and educationalists) quickly began to shift dramatically during the COVID19 epidemic (Karakose, 2021). During the pandemic, e-learning platforms performed a vital role in helping schools and universities in promoting learning during lockdown (Subedi, Nayaju, Subedi, Shah, & Shah, 2020). Preparations must be evaluated while adapting to new environment. Students with specific perspective struggled to adjust and modify, whereas those with broad mindset readily adjusted. Different techniques to online learning were necessary for various subjects and age groups (Doucet, Netolicky, Timmers, & Tuscano, 2020). Students who challenged themselves also benefited from online learning because it allowed them to undergo learning in digital environment (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020).

Education critics in many countries discovered that news frequently depicts schools in state of crisis and failure trend that can be traced back to publication of 1983 in a Nation at Risk report, which instilled fears that failing educational system was jeopardizing US rivalry (O'Neil, 2012). Mostly the press coverage was driven by mocking tone that painted institutions in a poor way and blamed them for consequences of larger social and structural inequity (Parker, 2011). Teachers and their unions were singled out for mockery, with teachers portrayed as caring but ineffectual, and unions portrayed as delaying needed reforms (Ulmer, 2016).

Nelson (2022) examined educational frameworks in 169 articles (n=169) from the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today that were published between March 5, 2020, till June 3, 2020. The majority of the articles lacked morals and human interest 36.68percent (n=62) and 33.77percent (n=57) of the pieces, respectively. Conflict was found in 88.12percent (n=149) of the articles, economic consequences frame was found in 81.06percent (n=137) of the articles, attribution of responsibility was found in 52.07percent (n=88) of the articles. Human interest and morality were absent from the majority of the articles. Whereas Coe and Kuttner examined 35 years of television news coverage of school themes and discovered that education has received remarkably little attention. Over the last 35 years, educational news has been essentially "invisible,"

according to previous studies that looked at a shorter time frame (Coe & Kuttner, 2018). While comparing Daily News and Daily Dawn newspapers (Hashim Ali, 2017) discovered that Daily Dawn covered education issues to a greater level as compared to Daily News. On contrary (Roshan & Parvez, 2016) carried out a study and explored how different news categories are covered by Pakistan Television. She employed content analysis method and used Agenda Setting Theory as a basis for theoretical framework. While evaluating different news categories like social, educational, political, crime, sports and weather news; she discussed that PTV gave ample amount of coverage to national news in comparison to international news.

Campanella discovered that in 2014, coverage of education took 6.82 percent of overall coverage, as compared to previous year, after using key words to identify news related to education in 5000 local, regional and state news during 25 years. Results identified education received significantly less coverage in national news (2.3 percent). Furthermore, his results were similar to those of West (2009), in that sports, events, and school money dominated coverage rather than pedagogical problems of teaching and learning (West et al., 2009).

### **Research Questions**

How much amount of coverage is given by Geo News and ARY News to educational issues during COVID-19 pandemic? Which of the frames established in this study were dominant in Geo News and ARY News coverage respectively? Does Geo News and ARY News use positive tone or negative tone in the coverage of educational issues during COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Hypothesis**

H1: It is likely that there is no significant difference in the amount of coverage given to education by Geo News and ARY News during COVID-19 pandemic.

H2: It is likely that the coverage of education by Geo News and ARY News will differ by the use of their frames.

H3: It is likely that ARY News will use more positive tone in coverage of educational issues than Geo News.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Over the last few decades, the concept of framing got substantive attention by the scholars, however, there is still less viscosity in definitions (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016).

Entman's (1993) definition of framing has been adopted for this study: *"To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."* Framing can be conceptualized as media affects theory. The researchers have separated framing into 2 connected groups: "Media frames" and "Public frames" (Scheufele, 2006).

The present study is related to media frames which include display of news stories. The way media frames the information can influence the viewpoints of the public regarding the issue or event.

Total of 6 frames are developed for this study which are as follow:

### **Closure of Institutions**

To hold spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments around the globe closed schools for several months in the first half of 2020. On March 13, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that all educational institutions in Pakistan will be closed till 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2020 at a meeting of National Security Council. Faculty and staff, on the other hand, went about their business as usual, while several schools delivered lectures and classes online (Desk, 2020).

### **Re-Opening of Institutions**

The Department of Education announced provisions for students returning to campus, according to a report by Bolton and Hubble. From January 4, 2021, the document outlined plans for a five-week staggered return for pupils (Bolton P, 2021).

### **Exam Issues**

In his research paper, Seife Dendir examined some of the test problems that students face, the most serious of which is academic dishonesty in online courses. Cheating was shown to be more common during online exams, according to the findings (Dendir & Maxwell, 2020).

### **E-Learning**

Qualitative survey was done by Petrides to find out how students felt about online learning (Petrides, 2002). The research was carried out in mix university online class, which was one-semester normal planned class aided with digital technologies. In interview, some participants stated that they thought more deeply about the topic in writing rather than verbally.

Many researches cited communication delays as a flaw in online learning (Howland & Moore, 2002; Petrides, 2002; Vonderwell, 2003).

### **Psychological Issues**

The COVID-19 pandemic, according to Changwon Son's research, has resulted in heightened tension and anxiety among students. The higher degree of stress, anxiety, and depression in students were attributed to a number of stressors. Fear of own and family's health, difficulties concentrating, sleep disturbances, fewer social connections owing to physical separation, and heightened concerns about academic achievement were among them (Son, Hegde, Smith, Wang, & Sasangohar, 2020).

### **Financial Issues**

According to a 2020 article, undergraduate students were more concerned about their future education; however, those who were unable to pay their entire study expenditures prior to the COVID-19 epidemic were more concerned about a variety of personal issues. Students who lost part-time jobs owing to the pandemic were more concerned about their future professional careers, personal finances, and schooling, according to the authors. According to the results (Aristovnik, Keržič, Ravšelj, Tomažević, & Umek, 2020) found that part-time students were more concerned about personal finances, while full-time students were more concerned about academic concerns.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study has been carried to determine which frames were dominant in Geo News and ARY News coverage of educational news, as well as to investigate the use of positive and negative tones in

educational news coverage. A quantitative content analysis was employed as research design. News items from 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 to 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021 were selected for Geo News and ARY News respectively with interval of every 4 days. Data is taken from Official YouTube Channel and Facebook Page of Geo News and ARY News and the time slot reviewed is 9:00 pm to 10:00 pm. The researcher has used Systematic Random Sampling technique for the selection of news items based on the purpose of the study so that each unit has an equal chance of being selected without bias. 94 days were selected for each news channel to explore the news coverage. Chi Square and T-test were applied for statistical analysis. P value under 0.05 was considered to be significant.

A detailed description of how the variables have been conceptualized in this study are given in Table-1.

**Table 1. Content Categorization Scheme:**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Content Categorization</b>	<b>Rule</b>
<b>Frames</b>	<i>Exam Issues</i>	News stories about online vs. on-campus conduction of exams and student strikes.
	<i>Re-opening of Institutions</i>	News stories about reopening of institutions and adherence to SOP's.
	<i>Closure of Institutions</i>	News stories about closure of institutions, students, teachers and staff being affected from COVID-19 and stories related to closure of institutions in highly affected areas.
	<i>E-Learning</i>	News stories about internet, gadgets accessibility, understanding of learning management system (LMS) and communication hindrance using applications like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Memrise etc.
	<i>Financial Issues</i>	News stories about students fees, staff and faculty salaries and financial concerns of institutional owners.
	<i>Psychological Issues</i>	News stories about anxiety, depression and other psychological problem among students, teachers and staff.
<b>Television Channels</b>	<i>Geo News</i>	News stories about educational issues broadcasted on Geo News in news bulletin of 9:00 pm-10:00 pm.
	<i>ARY News</i>	News stories about educational issues broadcasted on ARY News in news bulletin of 9:00 pm-10:00 pm.
<b>Visibility</b>	<i>Amount of coverage/Duration of coverage</i>	Amount of coverage given to educational issues in prime time of 9:00 pm-10:00 pm on Geo News and ARY News in 1 year.
<b>Slant</b>	<i>Positive</i>	News stories about educational issues using words like compliance, efficiency and progress.
	<i>Negative</i>	News stories about educational issues using words like negligence, incompetency, and worse.
	<i>Neutral</i>	News stories are considered neutral if balance positive and negative tones are used.



## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In the year March 2020 to March 2021, Geo News and ARY News combined to average 133 stories related to educational issues, which amounted to 1448 minutes of broadcast time in a year. The shortest story was 19 seconds and the longest was nearly 3 minutes 7 seconds, with an average story lasting about 2 minutes.

Table II covers first research question about how much amount of coverage was given to different frames established in this study by Geo News and ARY News respectively. Broadcast time given by Geo News to these educational issues was 50413 seconds in a year which accounts for 840.21 minutes/year. The time coverage was greater as compared to ARY news whose broadcast time for educational issues during the whole year was 39940 seconds accounting 665.6 minutes/year.

**Table-2. Comparison between Amount of Coverage given to Educational Issues by Geo News and ARY News – Hypothesis One:**

Frames	Geo News		ARY News	
	Time (seconds)	%	Time (seconds)	%
<b>Exam Issues</b>	8103	16.0	7993	20.0
<b>Re-opening of Institutions</b>	9358	18.5	9270	23.2
<b>Closure of Institutions</b>	11814	23.4	7532	18.8
<b>E-Learning</b>	11339	22.5	6096	15.2
<b>Financial Issues</b>	6330	12.5	6032	15.1
<b>Psychological Issues</b>	3469	6.8	3017	7.5
<b>Total</b>	50413	100	39940	100

Independent sample T-test was applied to check if any statistical significance existed between amount of coverage of these frames by Geo news and ARY News. It is found that there is a significant statistical difference (P-Value less than 0.05) in the coverage of amount of exam issues (p-value=0.003), re-opening of institutions (p-value=0.034), e-learning (p-value=0.000) and psychological issues (p-value=0.002) between Geo News and ARY news. There is no significant statistical difference among the amount of coverage of other frames.

Table-III answers our second research question and draws comparison about which frame is given extensive coverage by the News Channels. Overall, 891 stories related to educational issues are covered by Geo News during COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020- March 2021 compared to 706 stories covered by ARY news.

For better understanding of trends underlying the aggregate movement observed thus far, researcher turn their focus to the six frames developed in this study. Table III presents each of these frames from the most covered (in terms of frequency) to the least. It depicts that Geo News broadcasted 208 stories about Closure of institutions in a year.

**Table-3. Comparison of frames related to educational issues covered by Geo News and ARY News – Hypothesis Two:**

Frames	Geo News		ARY News	
	(n)	%	(n)	%
Exam Issues	159	17.8	143	20.2
Re-opening of Institutions	163	18.2	165	23.3
Closure of Institutions	208	23.3	136	19.2
E-Learning	197	22.1	111	15.7
Financial Issues	108	12.1	103	14.5
Psychological Issues	56	6.2	48	6.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>100</b>

ARY News covered most of the stories related to re-opening of institutions as 165 stories about re-opening of institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic are broadcasted by ARY news.

Looking more closely at the specific topics of coverage brings the nature of this educational news into sharper focus.

**Figure-1. Number of Stories Related to Educational Issues Per Month Broadcasted by Geo News**

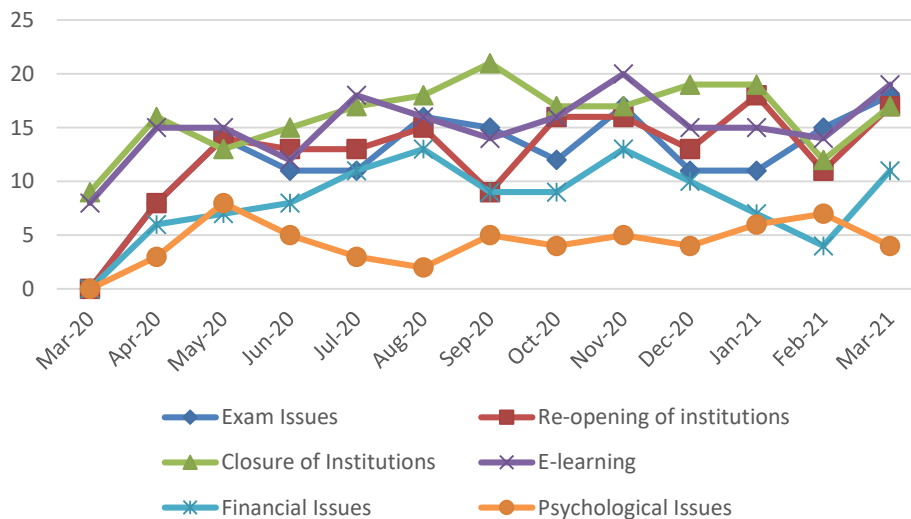


Figure-1, shows the change over time in these six frames of coverage to facilitate interpretation. Several points can be gleaned from the figure. Two frames; closure of institutions and e-learning have particularly severe peaks in coverage by Geo News.

Figure-2, indicates just how substantial the changes in various forms of education coverage have been over time for ARY news. The least covered frame among six and the one that exhibited the greatest stability across the year examined here was psychological issues.



**Figure II: Number of Stories Related to Educational Issues Per Month Broadcasted by ARY News**

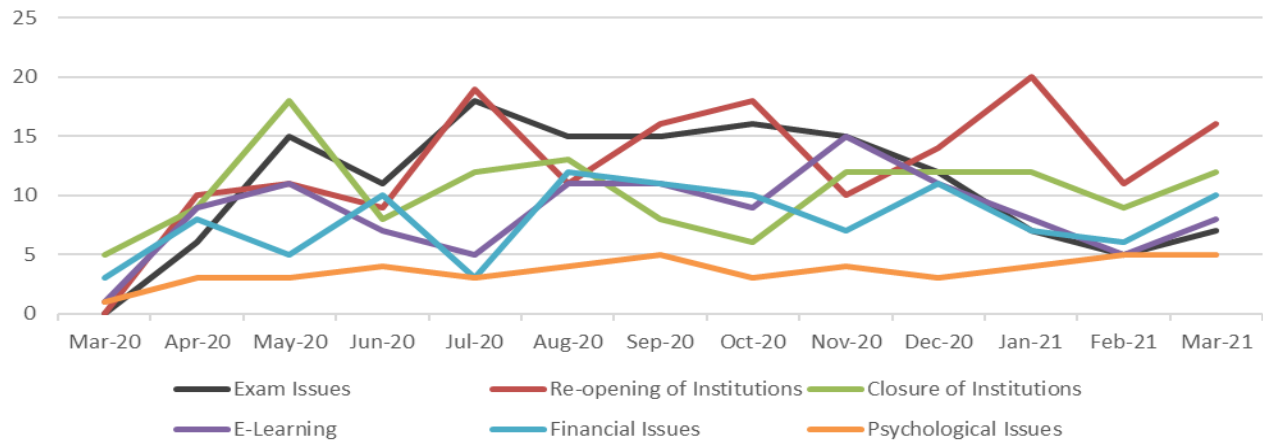


Table-4 answers third research question and depicts how the two News Channels used the positive or negative tones. It is found that ARY used 45.7percent positive tone compared to 27.7 percent of Geo News. Moreover, Geo News is neutral in 33percent of its news stories whereas ARY News is neutral in 28.7percent of its news stories.

**Table-4. Slants for Geo News and ARY News – Hypothesis Three:**

Slants	Geo News		ARY News	
	F	%	F	%
<b>Positive</b>	26	27.7%	43	45.7%
<b>Negative</b>	37	39.4%	24	25.5%
<b>Neutral</b>	31	33%	26	28.7%

**DISCUSSION**

In the year March 2020 to March 2021, Geo News and ARY News combined to average 133 stories related to educational issues, which accumulated to roughly 24 hours of total time broadcasted by the channels in a year. The shortest story is 19 seconds and longest is nearly 3 minutes 7 seconds, with an average story lasting about 2 minutes. In comparison, (Coe & Kuttner, 2018) in the years between 1980 and 2014 concluded that three combined networks to an average of 66 stories, amounted to nearly 194 minutes of broadcast time per month. In his study, the shortest story was 30 seconds and the longest was nearly 14 minutes, with an average story lasting a little less than 3 minutes of broadcast time.

A total of six frames are identified across 1 year period. Education news over past 1 year has indeed been largely “invisible” (West D.M., 2009) which is consistent with past research that has focused on relatively shorter period of time. In these patterns, past researches discussed just how “event-driven” (Livingston & Bennett, 2003) every news relating to education has been throughout past decades. Violent acts of punishment, new unimaginable test scores, minimal funds for a huge education project, strikes against the system, ballot proposition—all (if not more) could turn eyes

of the evening news bulleting towards an education segment not lasting long enough to make a difference.

A thorough analysis of the topic proportion distributed throughout the past years allowed the researcher to identify topics exhibiting high frequency and answer the first research question which was about the amount of coverage given by Geo News and ARY News to educational issues during covid-19 pandemic. Broadcast time given by Geo News to these educational issues was 50413 seconds in a year which accounts for 840.21 minutes/year. The time coverage was greater as compared to ARY news whose broadcast time for educational issues during the whole year was 39940 seconds accounting 665.6 minutes/year. Study conducted (Coe & Kuttner, 2018) 194 minutes per month were allotted for coverage of educational issues which is greater as compared to the current study.

The second and third research questions discussed what heights certain dimensions of the issue take control over coverage at different points of time and whether the news channels portrayed positive or negative stance. Indications perceived from the findings hint towards evolution of the matter over a period of time along with certain elements. Our study indicated that re-opening and closure of institutions were the topics given most coverage whereas another study showed that violent news gathered extensive coverage (Coe & Kuttner, 2018; Wachen, 2018b). The current study's hypothesis one stated that there is no significant difference in amount of coverage given by Geo News and ARY News which is rejected as significant difference is found in amount of coverage of exam issues, re-opening of institutions, e-learning and psychological issues between Geo News and ARY News.

While the second hypothesis stated that coverage of educational issues by Geo news and ARY News will differ by the use of their frames. This hypothesis has been accepted as Geo News and ARY News differ in the coverage of frames. Geo News gave extensive coverage to closure of institutions however ARY News gave extensive coverage to re-opening of institutions.

ARY News covered educational issues in a more positive perspective whereas Geo News gave more negative perspective of the educational issues, although this difference is not statistically significant. Thus, third hypothesis has been rejected as Geo News and ARY News did not differ significantly ( $p$ -value=0.471) in the positive and negative coverage regarding educational issues.

### **Recommendations**

All education topics that have been offered are analyzed and their preliminary analysis can prove to be useful foundation for future research programs. Quantitative analyses of education content that a researcher wants to study in detail over a particular time span, should be facilitated by this (Feuerstein, 2014). Any future research using this study as a foundation would provide additional insights related to the findings in this study. Future researchers can also use different news channels other than Geo News and ARY News. Researchers can also do comparison between Private News channels and PTV for coverage of educational issues. Moreover, researchers can use different platforms like Face book, Twitter and Instagram as these are the new go-to media outlets which are increasingly influential in both public and elite opinions and perceptions. Future researchers can also review educational stories from bulletin of 12:00pm, 3:00pm and 6:00pm. Future researchers can also increase the sample size. Also, researchers can develop new frames.

## Limitations

Due to time constraint, data from March 2020 to March 2021 was gathered with 4 days of interval in between. Only Geo News and ARY News were selected for data collection making it harder to generalize the findings to coverage of this issue as a whole to the public, including other multimedia platforms that have discussed this issue on a much wider perspective. Similarly, only 9:00pm-10:00pm news bulletin was reviewed.

## CONCLUSION

The media yields a lot of influence on general public. The main finding is that media lacked in covering educational issues specifically in covid-19 pandemic. Between the two news channels, Geo News provides more coverage to educational issues compared to ARY news. The dominant frame covered by Geo News was closure of institutions in contrast to Re-opening of institutions by ARY news. However, ARY news broadcasted more positive stories in comparison to Geo News whereas Geo News provide adequate coverage of events and information primarily in the negative context, with very little attention paid to good practices and more positive messages.

The study highlighted the need of an increase in coverage of issues related to human development, primarily educational issues coverage. Moreover, framing theory has been dominantly applied on political issues, its application on educational issues have highlighted the role of framing in shaping issues of public interest.

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