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COVID-19 is bringing about a whole set of new challenges in every possible realm, higher education being just one. Given the rapidly evolving situation around the pandemic, has this forced shift from offline to online mode of teaching/learning given us a peek into the reality ahead? How will COVID-19 transform the future of teaching-learning?

Technology-enabled teaching is definitely the future we are looking towards, but will it be easy to make this transition? How should different stakeholders contribute to ensure a smooth transition? It is important to identify key challenges for students and teachers in the current scenario. Once identified, academic leadership and the government can address these through innovations in focus areas. Here is a list:

1 Semester completion
Challenge: Since neither students nor teachers were prepared for this sudden lockdown, it has become difficult for them to continue as per the original plan.

Focus area: Emphasis should be given to develop a robust plan in order to complete semesters and ensure degree completion of final year students. The academic plan needs to be modified in order to suit the current situation, changing both teaching and assessment methods. Shift from offline to online methods should be encouraged – building technology infrastructure to deliver content, strengthening the existing Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) content platforms like Swayam, along with promoting innovative personalised teaching-learning platforms, teacher training and student awareness will be key. As a short-term solution,

2 Jobs and internship opportunities
Challenge: Some com-



With the pandemic set to transform higher education as we know it, there are huge challenges before us, as well as room for innovation

allowing course completion via Swayam as a substitute for course requirements within universities can address this crisis. In the long run, these investments will help ensure personalised teaching-learning in the classroom, along with reducing the workload on the teacher. However, ed-tech models pose a huge scalability challenge given the limited Internet penetration. Hence, a blend of traditional and online methods of teaching-learning could emerge as the more feasible and scalable model.

3 Psychological disturbance
Challenge: It is normal for faculty and students to undergo stress because of the uncertainty they are facing. Not being able to carry on with a set routine will further add to their anxiety and affect their mental health.

Focus area: A proper psychological support system needs to be established through courses/curriculum and training. Focus should be on maintaining mental

well-being in these difficult times.

4 Innovation through research (COVID-19-related research)
Challenge: Even though many students and faculty are coming together to find a solution to COVID-19, the lack of financial support in the form of a dedicated COVID-19 research grant might hold them back.

Focus area: Faculty and students should be encouraged to undertake research, and proper funding for it should be ensured by the university, industry and government institutions.

5 Spending on tech infrastructure
Challenge: Universities will suddenly need to invest huge amounts to establish a tech-enabled teaching-learning network. This will be a problem with most private universities who are already asset heavy and hence may hesitate to spend more money during times of recession.

6 Reduced paying capacity of parents
Challenge: This will be a time of global recession, with many people experiencing financial difficulties. The gap between private and public mode of education will further increase because of the sudden requirement of a digital facility – creating even more problems for students from middle and lower classes.

Focus area: New schemes for scholarships and loans should be opened, enabling students to complete their higher education, get placed, and repay the loan.

7 Push collaboration for interdisciplinary research
Challenge: For example, motivating research across engineering, medical and management, which may bring innovative outcomes.

8 Set up Disaster Management Research Centres
Challenge: All universities must have a mandatory course on Disaster Management to ensure that everyone is prepared for a sudden crisis like this one and can ensure least damage.

9 Build a robust infrastructure for tech-enabled teaching-learning
Challenge: Ensuring both students and teachers are fully equipped for the digital transformation in higher education.

10 Create a three-way communication channel between students, teachers and the government
Challenge: Which operates offline and online and bridges the teaching-learning gaps in areas without an Internet/4G access.

11 Relax criteria/policies for universities to offer online and hybrid degrees
Challenge: This will enable universities to cater

to a much wider audience in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, making degree certifications much more economical and logistically easier.

12 Boost counsellor/teacher capacity to provide psychological support within institutions
Challenge: Catering to the growing mental health issues. Teachers should be trained to understand their students' mental health needs.

13 Build, maintain, and fund entrepreneurial ecosystems in universities
Challenge: Leading to job creation in the short run and boosting the economy in future.

14 Increase upper cap over financial support for biotech research projects
Challenge: To ensure there is no constraint for student/faculty doing COVID-19 related research.

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Challenge: For example, motivating research across engineering, medical and management, which may bring innovative outcomes.

16 Set up Disaster Management Research Centres
Challenge: All universities must have a mandatory course on Disaster Management to ensure that everyone is prepared for a sudden crisis like this one and can ensure least damage.

17 We must remember that this is only a phase and this too shall pass
Challenge: However, we must make sure that it does not create a long-term impact, which is difficult to mend. It will take a huge amount of public and private sector investment, in terms of time and money, to tackle this impending educational crisis.

Disclaimer: Views are personal and do not represent the views of work organisations of the authors.

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