Review of: "Empowering Minds: The Evolution of Higher Education in Tamil Nadu towards Innovation and Excellence"

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This is an interesting article which, as its 'review' format justifies, presents a rather *descriptive* report about the historical background of- and the changes that Higher Education in Tamil Nadu went through, completed with a description of most recent reforms and changes. The title was however promising more than this description to me: for instance, I was hoping that the article would explore in more depth both the process of 'empowering minds' and that of improving 'innovation and excellence' in Higher Education, presumably towards precisely 'empowering minds'. Coming from an ecological economics background and having worked on the necessary reforms on education for sustainability, having also been very admirative of Tamil Nadu's initiatives in terms of education but also environmental governance and innovative thinking, I was hoping that the article would, instead, explore how such a unique place with people with such an inventive state of mind would suggest to reform a higher education system to not only fulfil the objectives presented here but also to ensure that the universally sought for 'economic development' would finally better align with the sustainable development goals and alternative measures of 'economic success'. Both the abstract and the introduction don't really describe well the objective of the article.

The introduction, in my view, should also present how the article is going to be structured - in other words, which narrative it will work on to articulate a way of approaching a potential research gap and come up with a way of filling this gap.

As it currently stands, the article is organised in no less than 12 small parts. Even though it is well written, I think that grouping some of these parts would make sense and that the article would gain in clarity from this 'grouping'. Also, some issues and discussions would gain from being explained much earlier (e.g. the sentence "The meaning of 'excellence' in higher education has become a topic of debates" only comes in Part 4 of the article although it is to a large extent 'excellence' which drives the reforms being discussed). Maybe the 'state of affairs' of HE in Tamil Nadu could also come earlier and then be contextualised in the History of HE in India - currently, where Tamil Nadu's HE stands is described in Part 5. If 'technical Education' is presented as 'pivotal' in the reform being discussed, it is not clear to the reader whether 'technical education' is more important, or strategic than 'self-sustainability' (Part 8) (in addition, I am not sure this is the correct term to use), or than dealing with the mental well-being of the students. Some of the elements describing the key factors driving transformation (Part 10) can in fact help the reader understand which *research gaps* currently exist and need to be addressed - but it would be more useful to read about those earlier in the article). All in all, restructuring the article and grouping the current small parts into a few main parts would illustrate better the narrative and reasoning of the authors, in my view.

I was intrigued by the *lack of referencing in the text* (it might be the format requested by Qeios?); the first time the reader sees a reference is in Part 9. I also thought that other articles could also be quoted in order to show that the existing literature is being covered (in view of bringing something new with this article) and acknowledged (recognised, discussed and worked on and from). Here is an example of a recent article that could be acknolwedged: Vasanthankumar, V. (2023) *Modern challenges to the Dravidian movement: the question of access and quality in higher education in Tamil Nadu* Engage, Vol 58(29).

Parts 10 (key factors driving transformation) and 11 (initiatives undertaken) are presented as bullet points. I think it would be preferable to at least insert these points into introductory and conclusive texts.

Part 12 is very short and slightly confusing: it makes it look like all that was potentially needed has already been done… So is there still room for further reforms? Or were you trying to analyse the outputs of the reforms?

In conclusion, so much is happening in Tamil Nadu (and so many success stories), not only in the context of higher education but also in terms of governance and in the context of generating alternative societal models that seem, at least from outside, just and egalitarian, that it would be particularly relevant and innovative to read about HE reforms that come from Tamil Nadu, and aim at meeting Tamil Nadu's needs *but from which other institutions and parts of the world could learn and be inspired*. The objective of the article would then be to describe the mechanisms behind the emergence of an innovative type of educational ecosystem that would be empowering - not only for HE institutions taking initiatives but also to students in their contribution to transforming their societies into more sustainable models. The focus would therefore be to critically discuss the *type of excellence and innovation* in Higher Education that could be defined by people themselves so that they feel empowered to improve their society and economy and so that students are appropriately prepared to face the challenges that will surround them in their jobs and lives.

I hope these suggestions are of interest and useful to your work and wish you all the best.