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## Bharath Montessori School Travelling an Extra Mile' with Right to Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Bharath Montessori Higher Secondary School in Ilanji exemplifies excellence in educational equity by embracing the Right to Education (RTE) initiative. This study examines the school's approach to implementing RTE through a comprehensive qualitative exploration, including focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents, students, and teachers, as well as an interview with a government official closely involved with RTE. The analysis highlights the school's innovative teaching methods, community engagement, and inclusive strategies that enhance learning for all students, particularly those benefiting from RTE provisions. Findings reveal Bharath Montessori School's strong commitment to RTE, demonstrating that it not only provides opportunities for disadvantaged students but also fosters a supportive environment conducive to holistic development. By examining the school's unique challenges and successes, this study identifies best practices and offers recommendations for other schools aiming to align with RTE policies.*

## 1. Introduction

The Right to Education (RTE) Act in India represents a significant milestone in the journey towards educational equity by guaranteeing free and compulsory education to children between the ages of 6 and 14 years (Mishra & Rani, 2020). In this context, Bharath Montessori Higher Secondary School in Ilanji has emerged as a notable example of successfully implementing RTE in its educational practices. By emphasizing a Montessori approach that values individualized learning and holistic development, the school sets a standard for inclusive education that supports the diverse needs of its students.

The purpose of this article is to explore the strategies and initiatives employed by Bharath Montessori School to promote RTE and achieve equitable access to quality education. Through a qualitative analysis that includes focus group discussions (FGD) with parents, students and teachers, as well as an interview with a government official involved in RTE, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of the school's alignment with RTE objectives and seeks to evolve a comprehensive plan to travel beyond the RTE mandate.

The validity of data was ensured through the engagement of multiple stakeholders in data collection and multiple methods of data collection from the same respondent. The study affirmed that BMS has emerged as a Role Model in RTE implementation as endorsed by parents, students, teachers, and the government representative. The Montessori ethos of BMS aligns with non-discrimination and inclusion focus that is the core need for RTE success.

This article seeks to address the following key questions: How does Bharath Montessori School adapt its Montessori approach to comply with RTE? What challenges does the school encounter in its implementation of RTE, and what solutions does it employ? How

does the school's approach impact students, parents, and the broader community? By investigating these questions, this article provides insights into the practical application of RTE in a Montessori setting and offers recommendations for other educational institutions seeking to align with RTE policies.

## Background Study

The Montessori approach, established by Dr. Maria Montessori in the early 20th century, emphasizes child-centered learning, where students are given the freedom to explore their interests within a structured environment (Lillard, 2013). The method prioritizes the development of the whole child—social, emotional, physical, and

intellectual—through hands-on learning, self-directed activities, and collaborative play (Lillard, 2020). This approach encourages critical thinking, creativity, and independence, which are crucial components for a well-rounded education.

The Right to Education (RTE) Act, enacted in India in 2009, guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years (Joshi, 2021). It seeks to improve educational access and equity, especially for marginalized and underprivileged groups. For schools like Bharath Montessori School, the implementation of RTE has significant implications for how they operate and deliver education. The school must comply with RTE mandates, such as reserving a portion of seats for economically disadvantaged students and providing necessary resources to ensure a quality learning experience for all (Mishra & Rani, 2020).

By integrating the Montessori approach with RTE guidelines, Bharath Montessori School strives to create an inclusive and equitable educational environment that fosters holistic growth and development. This fusion of educational philosophies presents unique opportunities and challenges for the school,

as it balances individualized learning with the requirements of RTE to serve a diverse student population effectively.

### **BMS creating RTE impact**

Bharath Montessori Higher Secondary School in Ilanji stands out for its commitment to RTE Act and its integration of the Montessori approach in its educational practices.

### **Tailored Learning Experiences**

The school employs individualized learning plans, a key element of the Montessori approach, to cater to the unique needs and abilities of each student (Lillard, 2020). Teachers guide students through self-directed activities, allowing them to explore and learn at their own pace, thereby fostering creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

### **Holistic Development and Community Engagement**

BMS focuses on the holistic development of students, emphasizing not only academic achievement but also social, emotional, and physical growth (Kaur, 2023). The school engages with parents and the local community through workshops, seminars, and events that raise awareness about the importance of education and RTE, creating a supportive network around students (Das & Mishra, 2022).

### **Innovative Teaching Methods**

Teachers at Bharath Montessori School employ innovative methods such as project-based learning, experiential learning, and collaborative group work to enhance student engagement and understanding (Chatterjee, 2022). Technology is integrated into the classroom through digital tools and resources.

### **Inclusive Admissions and Resources**

BMS implements the RTE mandate by reserving 25% of seats for economically disadvantaged students, thereby promoting

diversity and inclusivity in its student population (Verma & Kumar, 2022). The school provides additional resources such as books, scholarships, transportation, and free uniforms for students from underprivileged backgrounds, ensuring access and benefit from Montessori education (Singh & Gupta, 2023).

### **RTE implementation in BMS**

The following table depicts the present strength of Bharat Montessori School under the Right to Education criteria.

**Table 01.** Number of RTE students in BMS class-wise

Class	Number
VIII	3
VII	2
VI	1
V	2
IV	2
III	2
II	2
I	5
UKG	7
LKG	3

(Dated April 2024)

With its first batch of RTE children reaching class VIII awaiting admission in class IX without the government support, BMS Founder-Secretary felt the need to assess the impact of the scheme and the success of the implementation inside the school. A comprehensive qualitative assessment was carried out engaging multiple stakeholders such as the parents, teachers and students. Innovations to guarantee education beyond class VIII

### **Innovations to guarantee Education beyond class VIII**

Future of children after Class VIII was brought to the attention of the Founder-Secretary with the first batch of RTE students

reaching class VIII. A comprehensive study was conducted by the Founder-Secretary on behalf of the school with the RTE children, parents, and schoolteachers. This included open-ended questionnaire, write-up and interviews. The possibility of the children to feel inferior due to the non-availability of decent school bag, lunch box and pencil case was brought to the attention of the Founder Secretary. The tendency of the children to feel inferior due to low spoken English skills was mentioned by the students, parents, and teachers. The bus fees is unaffordable for children.

Their families did not have a mode of travel to bring children to school on time. This came up as a factor causing dropout from the school for a child exceptionally good in academics. In this context, the Founder-Secretary realized the lack of home environment support to sustain the English skills imparted in the school.

### **Comprehensive Solution to Travel an Extra mile**

The School Management came forward to provide 50% fees to support the children beyond Class VIII. The Founder-Secretary proposed a comprehensive solution to create a corpus fund within the trust involving former students, parents of former students and the CBSE School, Philanthropists. In addition to financial resources, the English fluency requested by the RTE parents and students to be ensured through the Cambridge inputs and cross learning ensured through the interface with BVM students and teachers.

### **BMS roadmap to travel an extra-mile**

Emerge as a Model School in Tamil Nadu for RTE implementation. Ongoing dialogue with teachers, children, and parents to strengthen the RTE mandate. Summary of Teachers' perception on RTE in BMS.

### **Summary of Teachers' perception on RTE in BMS**

One of the teachers mentioned that RTE is a wise implementation by the government since the kids who satisfy the norms are privileged to have education in BMS. As government is providing free education for 25% of the students who join in LKG, school provides the seats for the children whose parents have very less income and students who come under the weaker category are qualified to receive education for RTE children. BMS provides quality education for all children belonging to families below poverty line and for those coming from communities who are denied education without discrimination and compromise at the cost determined by the government. As per the government norms, if they are qualified, it is a good opportunity for the children. One of the teachers mentions the challenges in implementation. "There are different criteria given in RTE regarding age, community caste, creed, and family background. Hence it is a difficult task for the educator to satisfy the norms. Scrutiny is required; but indeed, to elevate an RTE child is a great boon." These external challenges need to be addressed by the Government.

### **Parents' perception on RTE in BMS**

**Sharing about school:** Share everything with both parents Share with her brother. Share about teacher and how they teach. Everything good about the school, Sports and homework; Share with the mother and brother. Lunch time happenings, games period. Shares with mother updates about teaching.

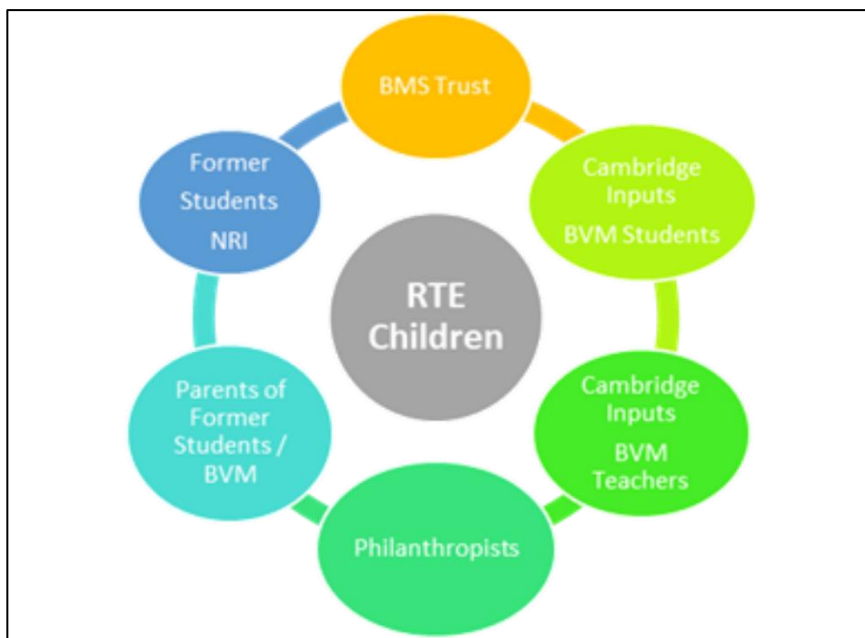
### **As BMS parent, outstanding feature of the school**

"Student outshines." - A parent

**BMS Values:** Many parents mentioned that both Discipline and Education are good in BMS. Discipline, Modesty and Honesty are my

child's virtues. These are the result of teachers' cooperation. Child has both love for the nation and God because of the teaching in the school. Bharat has virtues like "Walk

upright (Nimirntha nannadai - நிமிர்ந்த நன்னடை).



**Figure 01.** Stakeholder Ecosystem of B.M.S. Trust and B.V.M. Students

**Table 02.** Comprehensive Support Framework for RTE Students

Academic Support	Non-Academic Support	Financial Support
a. Assess the academic performance and overall wellbeing of all the RTE students. b. Assign mentors and motivators from among BVM senior students to see progress. c. Enable optimum performance of every RTE students.	a. Periodic online mentorship meetings with former students b. Concessional school bus fees or sponsorships for all RTE children c. Welcome to School Kits for RTE children.	a. Merit scholarships for children beyond class VIII. b. Students' fees 50% Scholarship from corpus fund c. Seed money and livelihood support training to parents.

**Parents' pride and joy:** Very proud that my child is studying in Bharat. As a mom, very happy and proud child is studying here as I am not studying here. Big offer given by the government. Proud parent of BMS - The

Branded school. Happy; Satisfactory compared to other schools.

**Active participation:** Children participate naturally because of the Montessori environment. Teachers render cooperation in

the active participation of children in more than 50 competitions with the help of teachers.

#### **Unique and outstanding attributes of BMS:**

The weekend worksheet is good. Non-discrimination and universal religious acceptance are the topmost features of BMS. Parents feel supported Caring teaching by teacher. Therefore, the child studies well. Tapping the talents of the kids is a special success factor in BMS. Teaching is good and teachers recognise the skills and implementation. RTE Scholarship is helpful. Therefore, both children are admitted here.

The BMS focus on values impacting the personality of children, the natural environment, the name earned by the school were the reasons for parents to feel the pride of their children being in the school.

#### **Students' narratives**

It was interesting how children up to class VIII were able to highlight the need to improve languages and handwriting as suggestions. They valued their presence in BMS. All of them mentioned they felt Happy and proud to study in BMS. One child felt their study was on par with CBSE. Their love for improving fluency in English was very high. All children wanted their spoken English to improve. Every child wanted to continue in the school till the completion of 12th standard. The children in Class VIII requested to get admitted for Class IX. Children felt at home in the school and admired and loved the school atmosphere. "If I continue my studies in this school, I can improve my learning and speaking skills. I am blessed to study in the school. I have a lot of precious moments in this school.". These are some inspiring lines from the children.

#### **Government representative RTE implementation in charge**

The government representative in charge of RTE implementation in BMS opines that it is a

good, popular scheme supportive to students and parents and made them very happy. His role is to ascertain if facilities are provided without discrimination on par with other students. Dropout due to community feel, transfer due to parents' job affected RTE implementation. BMS is the best and number-1 Tenkasi for RTE implementation. Good education, individual care, and holistic development are mentioned as the strengths and opportunities for BMS for RTE implementation, He feels good witnessing enjoyment in studies. At the government level, he feels the fee delay is a challenge and he mentioned that it is better to remit the fee by the end of the year by the government.

#### **Learnings in the RTE implementation process**

- **Social change through RTE:** "By providing access to education, RTE helps break the cycle of poverty. It encourages equitable social conditions for the fullest attainment of individual potentials". "If the education access to marginalised students is denied, social change is not possible". These lines by a teacher succinctly explain RTE's social impact.
- **Role Model:** "Every child has the right to study. Our school will become a role model in implementing RTE very effectively because the management is student friendly. I feel it is a great initiative for both the school and parents. It is a golden opportunity given by government to low-income students.". "BMS is one of the best in RTE implementation. They give peaceful environment for learning and other activities like sports, extracurricular activities besides best communication and scope learn beyond textbooks."
- **Focusing on the whole child:** The educator learns the social background of the families; the physical and mental makeup of the child, and challenges to be faced. Thus, the educator prepares to

make the child develop in her or his studies.

- **Active partnership:** Making the children to be active partner with the students in the learning process; to improve the communication skill among students. To learn all subjects actively and wisely. To make the students independent and thought-provoking
- **The learning environment:** Conducive for fulfilling the needs of the students are created without discrimination, we can teach all the children. I have come to know the criteria and the possibilities of the education in a private school is possible also for the people who are financially weak and to improve their basic levels.
- **RTE impact:** The students are getting benefits in the RTE implementation. They are growing day-by-day. They are improving their skills in studies. Fulfil the needs of marginalised children and improve learning environment. Poor students also get quality education only through RTE. Conventional education is more focus on quantity that means a greater number of students only approach. But recent implementation, RTE act makes learning more inclusive and quality education to the students.

Success stories in RTE implementation A few humble yet powerful stories indicate that BMS is on the right track in RTE implementation.

- a. There are many RTE students who have shown considerable achievement in academics. A KG child excels in communication within a span of 3 months though her parents are uneducated.
- b. A student joined RTE in the year 2014 who represents the school Zonally in Taekwondo. Though her parents are

uneducated and have low income, she has successfully completed her VIII std.

- c. With my experience handling classes from KG to V std, I am aware of the family problems of RTE students. They excel in studies. RTE has given life to many children.
- d. A girl who studied in Bharat Montessori school through RTE is coming out of poverty and makes contribution through her knowledge. Her parents are very vulnerable, and poverty ridden.
- e. I have given many references. I guided a woman to study typewriting and made her complete the course and asked her to join in BMS as office staff and helped child to join as RTE student because they are helpless.
- f. There is no difference between regular and RTE children in my teaching. Students receive education easily to improve their knowledge. RTE implementation to expand to provide happy free education.

Before and after RTE launch, Teachers' job-satisfaction The question seeks to understand teachers' job satisfaction level before and after RTE implementation. The below quote from one of the teachers summarises neatly.

"I feel proud to teach RTE students. They are enjoying the school. By looking at their smiling faces a once poor person can understand the emotions of a poor child who is longing for education. RTE helps increase strength. Quality education given to all students by RTE. As a teacher, I felt RTE implementation in our classroom is good. RTE students also on par with every child. There is no discrimination inside the classroom."

**BMS-RTE, SWOT-Framework**


Elements of SWOT framework were used to compile teachers' perceptions pertaining to BMS RTE implementation presented below.

Inferences from study Sharing with family about the school day: There is regular sharing about the school happenings by the children

with their families and this indicates the vibrant school experiences of children.

**Students' active participation:** The parents have taken note of the fact that Montessori environment facilitates active participation of children and there have been as many as 50 competitions children could take part in with teachers' support.

**Table 03.** SWOT Analysis of BMS Trust for RTE Student Support

<p><b>Strengths</b>                  "Nature-friendly is the major strength. Student-friendly is the extraordinary power. Montessori curriculum ensures love and altruism as part of education. BMS demonstrates good community bond.</p> <p><b>Threats</b>                  Low awareness about RTE. Larger class size may cause scarcity of qualified teachers causing compromised quality. Less BMS LKG admission implies proportionate LKG RTE strength decline</p>		<p><b>Weakness</b>                  "A few parents fail to fulfil the child's desire for pencil box and lunch bag. Some RTE students are in a shell "I can't speak in English". Bus fees is high.</p> <p><b>Opportunities</b>                  Adequate resources available to provide Quality Education for underprivileged children                  Wholesome development of students, family receives good knowledge and elevation.</p>
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**Students vouching for school quality:** The due recognition to the overall quality of the school from the children was evident in their writings. They felt hope for their future therefore they wanted to continue in the school.

BMS RTE Performance assessed by the Government: The Block Education Officer shared about the challenges such as dropout, job satisfaction through RTE implementation and the wish to avoid delay in fund transfer from the government. He appreciated BMS as number 1 in RTE implementation.

**Teachers' commitment to RTE:** Teachers covered the full spectrum of benefits of RTE

whole-heartedly. This stands as a proof for their commitment to the cause of educating the poorest of poor children. This is a real power for BMS to travel an extra mile with RTE implementation.

**The success stories:** The stories reveal the compassionate engagement of teachers in reaching the benefits of RTE and nurturing children and appreciating them in their pursuit for quality education. The thought-provoking lines testify how teachers working in a Private English Medium School empathetically recognise the struggles of children from underprivileged backgrounds recalling their childhood. They find their

greater purpose in their mission as educators by supporting RTE children.

**SWOT framework:** Strengths and opportunities outweigh threats and weaknesses. Nature-friendly ambience and Montessori Education that assures love and care and the school demonstrates community bond. The inability of the parents to support their children through school essentials and the tendency among a few RTE children to feel inferior for lacking English skills are understandable since it is a heterogenous campus. However, through right exposure, inputs, and concerted efforts, they can such inhibitions and limiting thoughts overcome easily. One teacher perceived increased strength and inadequate number of qualified teachers as future threat. BMS has the history of quality assurance and reinvestment in school. BMS will enhance the teacher strength in proportion to the student strength.

### **Suggestions to BMS to improve RTE implementation**

**Increase strength:** To improve RTE implementation, the strength must be increased in Kindergarten in BMS. Hence the educators must take steps towards the strength of the school. By increasing the count of the students, RTE students' strength, hence we can implement and improve RTE.

**Enhance awareness:** Every parent should know about RTE. The criteria must be known to everyone so that everyone can get the benefits of RTE. Much awareness should be taken to the nearby areas; we can improve the process or decrease the criteria, by doing this, even more students will benefit. To give awareness about RTE Explain about how to apply RTE Need more awareness about RTE implementation. Create more programmes an advertisement to reach the most villages and remote places also.

**Teachers' Training on RTE:** Teachers are given training to enhance their teaching skills, classroom management techniques and

provided elaborate training to understand RTE guidelines and professional development opportunities are provided. Enrich resources and facilities to welcome more children: Improve classrooms, library, play equipment and learning as well. Do away with Bus fees: Kindly reduce the bus fees and kindly provide some necessary accessories like lunchbox, water bottle etc to the RTE children, making them comfortable to enter the classroom.

**No competition during exams:** While there is a lot of appreciation for the school's extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, both parents and children mentioned as a suggestion was not to have competition during exam times as it was difficult to focus on the study.

### **Conclusion**

This study is timely with the first batch of RTE students are moving to Class IX. The three children will henceforth receive support from and through BMS. By traveling an extra mile in the best interest of children, BMS sets an example. For the resource constraints, creative solutions like community partnerships and fundraising are proposed by BMS. The leadership has enabled swift action to retain the children moving to Class IX.

Through the evidence from this qualitative study on RTE implementation, BMS is now the pressure group to the government to remind about the first batch of RTE children. BMS's dedication to RTE, combined with its innovative teaching methods, proves how a school can go beyond the compliance mandate and travel an extra mile to create real impact in the lives of students and communities. BMS has ensured quality learning, classroom, and campus experience to RTE children and their parents.

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