

School without a head teacher: one-teacher primary schools in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Although there is no person called head teacher in BRAC's non-formal primary schools, however, the programme organisers (PO), each of whom look after 12–15 schools, play a pivotal role in the operation of BRAC schools. This paper assessed the role of POs in the management of BRAC schools. This is done in the light of the role that the head teachers in formal primary schools do. The POs do not teach in the classrooms but they visit schools twice a week, assess students' and teachers' performance through classroom observation and surprise tests of the students, guide the teachers to better teaching and in preparing monthly lesson plans, conduct monthly refreshers' training of the teachers and attending meetings of the parent-teacher associations. The POs also visit students at their homes. Compared with the role of a school head teacher it can be said that a PO plays a significant role in the management of BRAC schools.

Key words: One-teacher school, non-formal education, head teacher, primary education, Bangladesh.

Introduction

In the overall education system of a country the importance of primary educational institutions is endless. Primary schools are generally established by the community members themselves to fulfil the educational needs of the new members of the community i.e., the children. Today's children are tomorrow's leaders.

Children do not learn only in schools. They learn from their parents, neighbour, relatives and friends. Children learn from their family and also from the society they live in. The lesson children receive from family and society can be treated as informal education. However, from schools they receive both formal and informal education. Thus, education of children is an outcome of a collective contribution of school, family and community.

School is a social institution. It has responsibilities to the community. Similarly the community also has to play its role towards the school. The activities of a school are designed according to the needs of the community where it is established. On the other hand, a school can't be successful without the co-operation of the community. The role of head teacher is to establish such links between school and community.

Through education children are made educated. They learn facts, concepts, manners, skills, attitudes, and competencies (Pring, 1995). They learn how to do things, how to behave appropriately, and how to be someone. Thus, education is not simply a modification of behaviour or conditioning; it imbibes values in the learners, and helps them to understand and to value things appropriately. An appropriate educational environment with a group of

dedicated teachers can only ensure such education. The head teachers play a pivotal role in this respect.

A head teacher, in general, is the leader of a school. Quality education of the students can only be ensured through a strong leadership of head teacher. However, a head teacher can't perform without the help of other teachers, the students, and the community at large.

There are eleven types of schools that offer primary education in Bangladesh. Many of these are formal schools and some are non-formal. The government is the major provider of education at primary level. Other providers include privately managed primary schools (registered and non-registered), Ebtedayee madrassa and other madrassas (Kamil, Fazil, Alim and Dakhil) which provides education with religious bias, experimental schools, satellite schools, community schools, English-medium schools, primary school attached to secondary schools and the non-formal primary schools. Such education is provided mostly by the non-government organisations (NGO). Each of the formal schools has a number of assistant teachers and a head teacher. On the other hand, the non-formal schools don't have any head teacher and in most cases these are one-teacher schools. BRAC operates the largest share of such one-teacher schools.

The aim of this paper is to examine how BRAC's non-formal primary schools are designed without having a person called head teacher. In this respect we will analyse the role and responsibilities of the programme organisers (POs) each of whom looks after 12-15 one-teacher schools. In doing this, firstly, we look at the role of head teacher in the largest sub-

system of Bangladesh primary education, i.e., the formal primary schools. Secondly, we look at the management system of the BRAC education programme. And finally, the role of POs in BRAC schools is assessed in light of the role of head teachers of formal schools.

The head teacher in formal primary school

There are over 37 thousand government primary schools in Bangladesh. Although some were established with government initiative, most of these were established primarily with community initiative. After the independence of the nation the government took over all the primary schools in 1973. Schools were also established privately after the grand take over. Privately established primary schools, which are registered with the education ministry, are known as registered primary schools and others as un-registered primary schools. At present, the numbers of such types of schools are 19,658 and 3,144 respectively. All these schools follow the same curriculum. The responsibilities of the head teachers are determined by the government and so are similar in these three types of schools.

In general, a formal primary school has five grades with four teachers, one of whom is the head teacher. There are two shifts in a school, the morning shift is for the students of classes I and II, and the noon shift is for the students of classes III to V. Like any other teacher the head teacher conducts class along with other management responsibilities in both shifts. There is no provision of subject teacher in primary schools, so each teacher has to teach all the subjects. The head teachers of government primary schools are appointed in two ways: (i) through promotion, and (ii) through direct recruitment. Independent management bodies operate the non-government schools, so head teachers are recruited

independently and directly. The minimum qualification of a head teacher is twelve years of education. In many cases, however, candidates with graduation or higher degrees are also recruited as head teacher.

There is no special training for the head teachers but the education officers at district and sub-district levels also meet the head teachers off and on. A training manual for the head teachers was distributed about 15 years ago among the head teachers (DPE, 1985). The role and responsibilities of head teachers in formal primary schools are presented in Box 1.

Box 1. Role and responsibilities of head teachers
in formal primary schools in Bangladesh

- ❑ Co-ordinate all activities in the school and supervise the works of other teachers.
- ❑ Report the school activities regularly to higher management such as thana and district education officers.
- ❑ Take care of all properties of the school.
- ❑ Orient the newly recruited teacher.
- ❑ Play active role in the refreshers' course.
- ❑ Keep good relationship with other government and non-governmental institutions in the community.
- ❑ Regularly communicate with general people and the guardians of the students.

Source: DPE (1985): *Training manual for primary school head teacher*. Compulsory primary education project, Directorate of Primary Education, Ministry of Education., Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The BRAC school programme

BRAC is a non-governmental development organisation aims to alleviate poverty and empower the poor. Micro-finance, health, and education are three major fields of BRAC

development activities. Women are the most disadvantaged section of the community in Bangladesh. BRAC programmes are targeted to uplift the poor women and girls (BRAC, 1997).

BRAC considers education as a key to upward social mobility. A non-formal way of primary education has been adopted in this regard that fits well with the situation in the ground. The national terminal competencies adopted by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) are also well covered in the curriculum of the programme (Ghosh, 1999). The BRAC Education Programme was started in 1985 aiming enrolment of the children who never enrolled in schools or dropped out from the formal education system. There are two types of BRAC schools. The Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) is for the children aged 8-10 years, and the Basic Education for Older Children (BEOC) is for the children aged 11-14 years. The former is a four-year programme and the later is a three-year course. However, both cater to a five academic years from grade I to grade V. During the first three academic years the schools use the books prepared by BRAC, which broadly are based on government curriculum. NCTB prepared books are used during the fourth and fifth academic years.

A BRAC school does not look like a formal school. It is a one-room school with a floor space of approximately 336 square feet. There are only 33 students and a teacher in a school. Of the students two-thirds are girls. The teacher, generally a female with at least nine years of education, is chosen from the community where the school is located. The same teacher teaches a group of students throughout the course of five academic year cycle. Annual

examination has been introduced recently in BRAC education system but continuous assessment of students' performance is its feature.

At present there are 31,356 BRAC schools operated all over the country, largest share of which is established in the rural areas.

Management and supervision

Proper management and regular academic supervision of schools are two vital issues for the effectiveness of any education provision. A decentralised management model has been developed for BRAC education programme (Ahmed, Chabbott, Joshi, Pande and Prather, 1993). Although the overall responsibility lies with the Executive Director and a Deputy Executive Director, the Director of Education of BRAC and her staff directly manage the programme.

There are three main units of the BRAC education programme. These are monitoring unit, field operation unit and education development unit. Figure 1 presents the management and supervision structure of the programme.

Figure 1 is about here

Monitoring unit: Regular monitoring of the programme on different issues is the main task of the monitoring unit. The unit consists of 20 members. This unit monitors the subject-wise progress of the students, teaching performance, school management issues, activities of field operations etc. The unit place written report to the Director and the relevant field level

managers and necessary directives are drawn to enhance the quality of the programme. Apart from this, an independent monitoring department of BRAC also monitors on different issues of the programme, which also helps the management to get a real picture at field level. Research findings generated by the Research and Evaluation Division (RED) also help similarly. The RED also organises seminars and conferences to disseminate research findings to the staff at head office and field level. Findings of the research/monitoring and the recommendations made by the researchers/monitors are well taken and used by other two units.

Education development unit: The education development unit has two main tasks, one is development of curriculum and materials, and the other is ensuring quality of education. A group of trained and experienced persons, stationed at head office, develop and field-test new curriculum and materials. On the other hand, the field-based quality managers (QM) are mainly responsible for maintaining quality of education. The master trainers and the batch trainers help the quality managers. The quality managers communicate between head office and the field in respect to quality assurance. They participate in the weekly meetings held at team level. In each meeting one textbook is chosen for discussion and the quality managers facilitate the discussion. The master trainers and the batch trainers are facilitators in the monthly refreshers' training of the teachers.

Field operation unit

The field operation unit is responsible for proper implementation of the programme at the school level. This unit works from school opening to the graduation of the students. They

work through region and team level offices. A regional manager (RM) heads a regional office and a team office is headed by a team-in-charge. In each team there are programme organisers (PO)/ resource teachers (RT) who are the first line supervisors of teachers and the schools. Each regional manager is responsible for 500 schools, one team-in-charge looks after 70-80 schools, a PO/RT supervises 12-15 schools and a teacher manages one school.

Regional office: There are 32 regional managers each of whom supervises around 15 team offices. The major responsibilities of the RMs are to supervise the team offices, evaluate the performance and improve the quality of staff, approve annual budget of the teams, inspect schools, communicate with quality managers, and arrange logistics for the team offices.

Team office: The team office plays the most important role in the smooth running of the programme at grassroots level. There are 463 team offices and each has about 70 schools. The team-in-charge takes care of a team office. There are 4/5 POs and RTs in a team office who work under the guidance of the team-in-charge. The major responsibilities of a team-in-charge are to supervise and co-ordinate the activities of the POs and the RTs, evaluate their performances, visit each school once a month, facilitate the monthly refresher course for the teachers, participate in parents meeting, communicate with quality manager and regional manager, and ensure supply of materials to schools.

Programme organiser and resource teacher

Programme organisers (PO) and the resource teachers (RT) are the first line supervisors of school activities. Under each PO/RT there are about 12-15 schools. As BRAC schools are

one-teacher schools, this means that each PO/RT supervises the work of 12-15 teachers. At this stage the role of head teachers in the formal government schools can be remembered. The head teachers are the first line managers in formal schools, but here in BRAC it is the PO/RTs. The main difference is that in a formal school the head teacher is part of the teaching staff but in BRAC schools a PO/RT is not. At present, there are 2,325 such staff in BRAC of which 2,139 are POs and 186 are RTs. On average, 24.4% of the staff are female: 19.1% among the POs and 86% among the RTs (Table I).

Table I is about here

A recent survey of 29 teams collected some selected information on the PO/RTs. Table II shows that the average age of the PO/RTs are 28.6 years: 29.2 years for males and 26.6 years for females. Age of over a half of the PO/RTs is ranges from 25 to 29 years. The average length of service of these staff is 4.4 years. On average, the women are less experienced than their male counterpart (3.3 years vs. 4.8 years). Length of service of 48.3% of the PO/RTs is 5 years or more (Table III).

Tables II & III are about here

Recruitment policy

The programme organisers and the resource teachers are recruited in two different ways. The Human Resource Division of BRAC directly recruits the programme organisers through public advertisement. The minimum qualification for a PO is twelve years of education but graduates or even master degree holders also apply for the post. Selection is done through a written examination and a viva voce. On the other hand, the resource teachers are recruited

from among the teachers. Teachers who completed at least two cycle of BRAC schools and have demonstrated understanding and management skills in teaching life. They have at least ten years of education.

The survey of 29 teams shows that the education qualification of over half of the PO/RTs is graduation, 38.1% have completed higher secondary course, 6.8% have masters degree and the rests have completed only secondary level of education (Table IV). There is no male with less than 12 years of education and only a few females have masters degree. On average, the PO/RTs have 13.2 years of education: 13.5 years for male and 12.8 years for female.

Table IV is about here

Training

Proper training of the teachers, the programme organisers and other staff play major role in the better implementation of the BRAC education programme. The programme staff are not offered a long course. More emphasis is given on regularly arranged short training courses. It is believed that such arrangement help teachers and the POs prepare better for the educational development of the students. Thus, in-service training courses are very important for BRAC education programme. However, the pre service training is necessary as a foundation.

Pre-service training: The pre-service training is arranged for the newly recruited staff. The professional trainers of BRAC conduct this training for the POs. It is a residential course for

about three weeks (18 days). Discussion on BRAC and its history; educational development in the country; BRAC's vision, values and culture; different development programmes; and service rules take the first three days of the training course. For the next 15 days the trainees are attached with an experienced PO for practical learning. During this period the trainee observes BRAC schools and its teaching-learning activities, way of supervision of schools, refresher's course and other activities at team office level. The trainee also read different guidebooks, manuals, and short versions of various research reports during this period.

As the resource teachers are promoted from the teachers, no pre-service training is arranged for them. However, the team-in-charge offers an orientation to the RTs on school supervision and other office activities. It should be mentioned, however, that the RTs get teachers' training which includes an intensive basic teacher training during her/his teaching life.

In-service training: The programme organisers are given different types of in service training which are:

- a) Basic teacher training
- b) Operation management course
- c) Master trainer training

Basic teacher training: It is a 15-day comprehensive teacher training course conducted by experienced trainers of BRAC. The course include education and its need, BRAC education programme, teaching techniques, child psychology, techniques of continuous and terminal

evaluation, classroom discipline, classroom management (class routine, time management, etc.), student-teacher relationship, relationship between school and parents, office management, co-curricular activities and role of school management committee. An orientation about the contents of different subjects of grade one also takes place in the basic teacher training.

Operation management course: It is a 12-day long training course for the POs. The objectives of the course are to orient the trainees in better school management and community based survey. In line of better school management the content includes academic and administrative supervision techniques, continuous assessment of students and teachers, and management in development programme. On the other hand, in line of community survey the trainees are taught different survey techniques to carry out surveys in the community.

Master trainer training: This course is offered to those POs who have prospects to be subject trainer in different subjects. The main objective of the course is to prepare the POs as master trainers of different subjects. Thus, it is a subject specific course for different subjects viz., Bangla, mathematics, English, environmental science, and general science. The course has two phases. During the first phase the trainees receive a 6-day training on a specific subject. The second phase for five days is spent for the POs receiving training on training module development, techniques of conducting training, communication skills, etc. The quality managers conduct the training course. This is not a one time training course for the master trainers; refreshers' courses are also arranged on a regular basis.

Role of programme organisers/resource teachers

It is already mentioned that the programme organisers and the resource teachers are the immediate supervisors of the teachers and the schools. Actually they do not play the role of traditional supervisor, but their role is much of facilitators. The PO/RTs play their role in academic supervision, personnel management, curriculum management, financial management and management of material resources. S/he is also a linking person between the school and community (Figure 2).

Figure 2 is about here

Academic supervision: Each day the programme organiser/resource teacher visits two schools. The main objective of this visit is to provide academic supervision. During school visit the PO/RT performs three different roles. Firstly, s/he observes the classroom atmosphere mainly the teaching-learning process. Sometimes s/he helps the teacher in teaching by taking a class. Secondly, the PO/RT assesses the performance of the students in a random fashion and discusses her/his findings with the teacher. Thirdly, the PO/RT assesses the teaching performance of the teacher. All these are discussed in the monthly refreshers' course to raise consciousness among other teachers for mutual learning and interactions.

Personnel management: The teachers are reportable to the PO/RTs. They put their leave application before PO/RT and s/he takes the decision. The PO/RT write ACR of the

teachers. They help the team-in-charge in recruiting new teachers and assess the need of special training for teachers.

Curriculum management: The PO/RTs also play an important role in curriculum management. They prepare training module for the monthly teacher refreshers' course and conduct the course. They help the teachers in preparing class routine (especially time distribution). They also help the Education Development Unit (based in head office) by providing feedback on different issues of the curriculum and suggesting any change. They also contribute in developing educational materials and work for the implementation of revised curriculum.

Financial management: The PO/RTs do not have much responsibility with regard to financial management. They help the team-in-charge in preparing the annual budget of the team. They collect money from the students that they pay for the materials and put it to the accountant. The teachers take their salary from the POs.

Management of material resources: The PO/RTs are assigned some management responsibilities in relation to material resources. They estimate the amount of materials needed for each school, collect the materials from the regional office, and distribute those among the students through teachers. They assess the re-usability of the materials at the end of each academic year.

Linking with the community: Two committees play vital roles in maintaining the relationship between BRAC schools and the community. One is school management committee and the other is parent teacher association. The leadership of PO/RTs is very important in this connection. The school management committee is formed with seven persons including parents and local elite. The school is run by the management committee. Parent teacher association is formed with all parents and the teacher. The meeting of the association is held each month and in most cases the mothers take part. The meeting discusses specific issues such as progress of their kids, attendance, cleanliness and hygiene, the responsibility of parents towards their children's education, and any school problem requiring parental attention. The respective PO/RT facilitates the meeting. These meetings help PO/RT understand parental/community views about the school activities. S/he shares her/his experience with higher management such as team-in-charge. The PO/RTs visit the students at their homes, especially those who do not attend classes regularly.

After the closure of a school (i.e., a group of 33 children completing five academic years) the respective PO/RT takes the list of the graduates to the nearest secondary school to enrol them at higher class. In this connection the PO/RTs are also responsible to link BRAC schools with other schools in the locality.

Support mechanism

The BRAC education programme has support mechanisms that help the PO/RTs to play their role effectively. Weekly management meetings are arranged at team level to discuss the operation of teams and the schools. The PO/RTs receive help from the team-in-charge as

and when necessary. The quality managers also participate in meetings and facilitate discussion on different textbooks; this helps PO/RTs to refresh about the respective subject. Besides, study circle is arranged at team level and again PO/RTs can get help from different training manuals and guidebooks.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the job of the PO/RTs of BRAC education programme for their role in managing BRAC schools. In any schooling system the head teachers are considered as the key persons whose leadership quality affects the performance of the students. To supplement government initiative to universal primary education BRAC has been operating non-formal schools for the poor community of Bangladesh. The quality of education provided in BRAC schools are reported to be a satisfactory compared to other subsystems in the country. At present, over 31 thousand one-teacher schools are operated all over the country. There is no 'head teacher' in these schools The PO/RTs are responsible for smooth running of schools.

The head teachers in formal schools are members of teaching staff of the schools. They take classes, and supervise and co-ordinate activities of their colleagues. In BRAC schools the PO/RTs regularly visit schools and provide academic supervision. Although they are not responsible to take any class, they often do it to facilitate the teachers. They take surprise test of the students and do classroom observation to understand the teaching-learning process. By testing the learners, the PO/RTs assess students' achievements. On the other hand, observation of teaching-learning process gives more in-depth idea of the classroom

situation. Again during monthly refreshers' training the PO/RTs discuss the things he/she observed the previous month. All these activities are done to keep the quality of education at a certain level. Thus, it can be said that the roles of PO/RTs are very much supportive to the quality education of the learners. On the other hand, the formal school head teachers do not have to play such role. An important difference between the roles of head teacher in formal school and that of the PO/RT in BRAC school is that the head teacher supervises 3/4 teachers, but a PO/RT supervises 12-15 teachers. A head teacher oversees all teachers daily, but a PO/RT do it only once a week.

The head teachers in the formal primary schools are not responsible for teacher training, but this is not the case in BRAC schools. The PO/RTs are responsible for the monthly refreshers' training of the teachers. To do the job satisfactorily they equip themselves about the textbooks and to be capable of preparing training materials. Although the PO/RTs conduct refreshers' training courses, other resource persons such as the master trainers and the batch trainers also remain present in the session. The PO/RTs get help from the quality managers while they facilitate subject wise discussion in the weekly team meeting. Here, the PO/RTs do a very good job in refreshing their teachers. They also get update about the content of the textbooks.

Like the head teachers in formal schools, the PO/RTs in BRAC schools are responsible for linking the school activities with the community. Community participation in BRAC schools is ensured through two different forums, the school management committee and the parent teacher association. The PO/RTs facilitate the meetings of these bodies. In these meetings,

the PO/RTs discuss school matters with the parents, update them about the school and request help from the parents as necessary. Parents' meetings are very helpful in ensuring regular attendance of the students. The PO/RTs also keep link with other schools in the community.

Like the head teachers in formal schools the PO/RTs send their status report to their higher authorities on a regular basis. Although the higher authorities visit schools and there are regular meetings, this reporting system is an add-on. The PO/RTs also do personnel management, curriculum management, financial management and management of material resources, which are more or less similar to the head teachers in formal schools. Such activities keep the PO/RTs much attached with overall programme activities.

The management and quality improvement process of BRAC's one-teacher schools couldn't be understood fully if we fail to recognise the contribution of the teachers. These teachers are responsible in the management of classrooms, day to day pedagogical progress of the students and the emotional development of the young children in school. These teachers are so devoted in their work that they run the schools without the presence of a supervisor, for instance, head teacher in any other formal school in the country. However, it is also true that the PO/RTs directly contribute in such development of the teachers.

Thus, it can be said that the PO/RTs play very important role in the BRAC school programme. There is no head teacher in the system, the teachers operate the schools under the leadership of the PO/RTs. The performance of schools varies with varying the quality

of leadership of the PO/RTs. As already seen the roles of PO/RTs are very similar to that of the roles of the head teachers in formal schools. Sometimes the PO/RTs play more responsibilities than the head teachers do. Finally, it can be concluded that PO/RTs in BRAC schools play a significant role towards quality education.

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Figure 1. Management and supervision structure of BRAC education programme

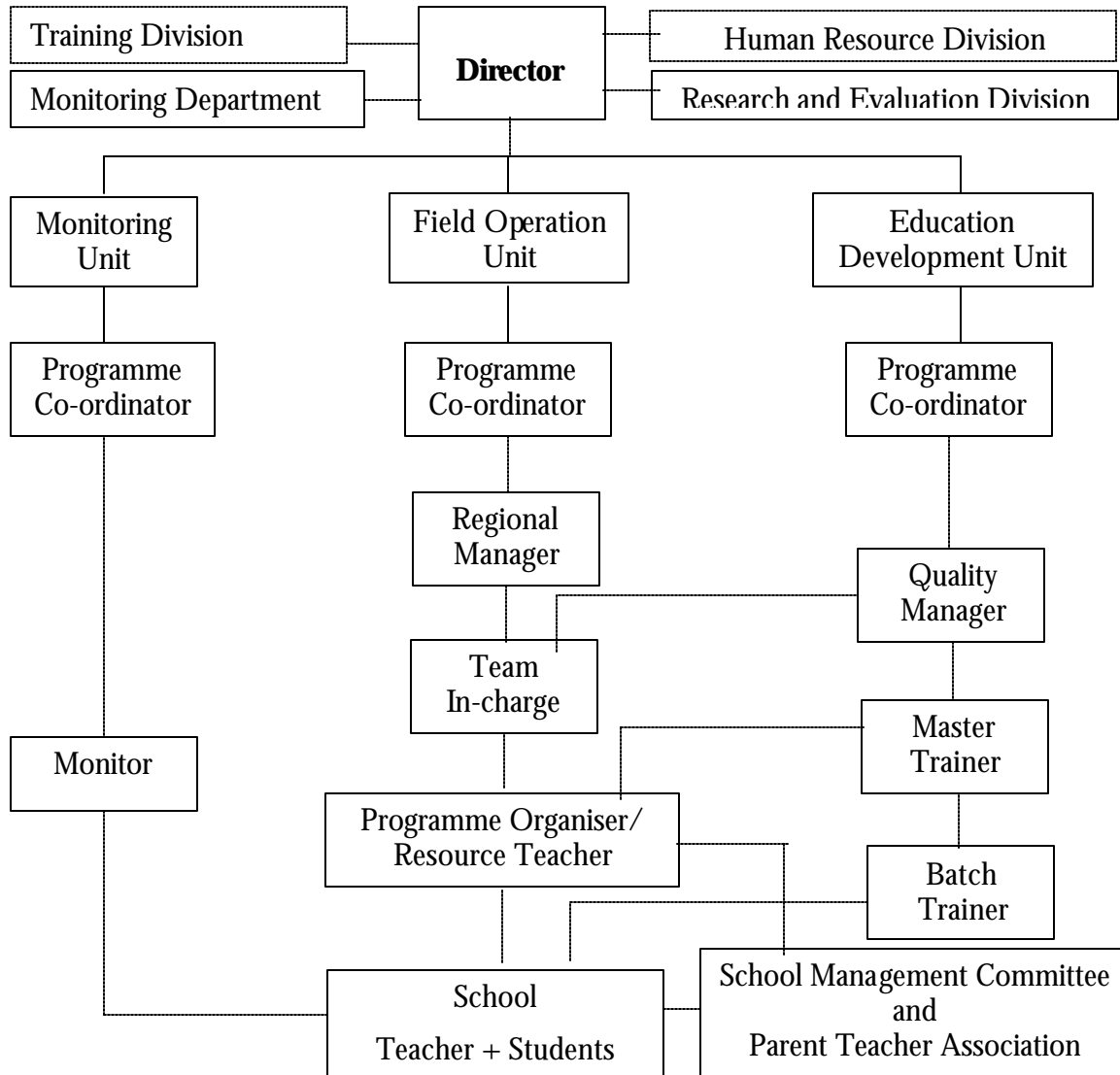


Table I. Distribution of PO/RTs by designation and sex

Designation	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Programme organiser	1,731 (80.9)	408 (19.1)	2,139 (100.0)
Resource teacher	26 (14.0)	160 (86.0)	186 (100.0)
Total	1,757 (75.6)	568 (24.4)	2,325 (100.0)

Source: Monitoring unit, BEP.

Table II. Percentage distribution of PO/RTs by age and sex

Age (in year)	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
20 – 24	6.4	34.2	13.6
25 – 29	52.3	47.4	51.0
30 – 34	35.8	15.8	30.6
35 – 39	3.7	--	2.7
40+	1.8	2.6	2.0
Mean	29.2	26.6	28.6

Source: Survey of 29 teams by the authors, August 2000

Table III. Percentage distribution of PO/RTs by length of service and sex

Length of service (in year)	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
< 1	7.3	5.3	6.8
1 – 2	16.6	42.1	23.1
3 – 4	16.5	36.8	21.8
5 – 6	50.5	15.8	41.5
7 – 8	9.2	--	6.8
Mean	4.8	3.3	4.4

Source: Survey of 29 teams by the authors, August 2000

Table IV. Percentage distribution of PO/RTs by level of education and sex

Level of Education	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Secondary	--	15.8	4.1
Higher secondary	40.4	31.6	38.1
Graduation	51.4	50.0	51.0
Master degree	8.3	2.6	6.8
Mean (in years)	13.5	12.8	13.2

Source: Survey of 29 teams by the authors, August 2000

Figure 2. Responsibilities of programme organisers/resource teachers

