difficulties and political unrest was ultimately unsuccessful, especially in the peripheral regions. The Welfare State New Educational Plan of 1953 attempted to bring the school system under central control, but the private schools – including the mission schools – remained independent. In 1958 Mandalay Intermediate College was promoted to university status.

Following the coup d'état by General Ne Win in 1962, the education system was nationalised, the missionary schools closed, and English banned as a language of instruction. ‘The Burmese Way to Socialism’, which had ultimately arisen from an anti-colonial stance, resulted in the state taking control of the education system. In 1964 numerous departments – including economics and medicine – were split off from the universities and became separate institutions. In 1970 some private schools, catering mainly for the well-off, were permitted to re-open (Gärtner 2011b: 5).

Nationwide resistance against the government and the mismanagement and under-provision for which it was responsible, its disregard of election results and its crushing of the protest movement (which had been strongly supported by students) led between 1988 and the early years of the 21st century to a temporary closure or in some cases ‘resting’ of the universities and relocation of the institutions to the urban peripheries. During this period teaching was often limited to short courses. The students were subsequently taught on new, predominantly smaller campuses outside the cities until they obtained their degree. The universities of Yangon and Mandalay took only post-graduate students. Between 1993 and 2004 the Universities of Culture in Yangon and Mandalay, the Theravada Buddhist Missionary University in Yangon, the Myanmar Maritime University in Thilawa and the Myanmar Aerospace Engineering University in Meiktila were newly established. From 1994 onwards the universities of Yangon and Mandalay were allowed to train PhD students; this authorization to hold examinations was later extended to a small number of other institutions, including the Yangon Institute of Economics and the Maritime University.

THE CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM

Today there is a system of national mandatory education under the 30-Year Long-Term Education Development Plan, which was implemented in 2001/02. The system requires pupils aged between six and sixteen to complete eleven years of schooling, consisting of five years of primary schooling (one year of kindergarten followed by four years of elementary school), four years of middle school and two years of high school leading to a school-leaving examination to qualify for university attendance from age 16 upward. In 2014/15, 187,327 primary, 69,212 middle and 28,817 high school teachers were teaching in 36,410 primary, 4,860 middle and 3,134 high schools. 5,166,317 pupils were being taught in primary, 2,542,830 in middle and 730,866 in high schools (MNPED 2015: 104).

To this day, monastic education plays a major role in providing schooling, mainly for children from underprivileged social groups and in remote and sparsely populated regions (Cheesman 2003, Lorch 2007 and 2008, Pyi Phyo Kyaw 2015, Lall 2016). Officially 12,111 novices and 5,571 nuns together with 115,658 boys and 85,767 girls were being taught at primary school level in the country’s monastic schools; the number of primary schools was put at 972, of which 208 – the majority – were in the Mandalay Region, 134 in the Yangon Region and 121 in the Ayeyarwady Region. Middle schools – a total of 557 nationwide – were attended by 10,458 novices, 5,844 nuns, 29,879 boys and 23,454 girls. Myanmar also has two monastic high schools, both in the Mandalay Region, attended by 3,455 boys and 2,025 girls (all figures: 2014/15; MNPED 2015: 113/114).

Monastic education is needed because although attending a public school is free of charge in principle, school uniforms, books and other materials still have to be purchased. This poses a problem for many parents in rural regions specifically. The values of education, knowledge and reason are highly prized in Buddhism, and consequently, the population in general – often not just parents and grandparents but also the extended family and the village community – will concentrate all disci-
NUMBER OF PERSONS WITH EDUCATION

Proportion of persons with primary or higher education in the population aged 25 years and older 2014 by township (in %)

- >90 - 98.8
- >75 - 90
- >50 - 75
- >25 - 50
- 9.5 - 25

Region/State boundary
Township boundary

According to the 2014 census data:
* primary education: Primary School, Middle School, High School
* higher education: Institute, University/College, Polytechnics, Vocational Training, others

** Persons >25 years in Yangon are the sum of the 31 townships of YCDC area, persons >25 years in Mandalay city, the municipality townships and Patharayin, Nay Pyi Taw persons >25 years are the sum of the eight townships of the largest territory.

Source: MoL 2015; MNSU in use 2014 (estimates)

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plenary efforts and economic resources in support of schooling. But despite private donations the monastic schools are ultimately underfunded (Lorch 2008), and as soon as they receive some support from the state, private donations fall (Pyi Phyo Kyaw 2015).

Similarly, education outside the governmental school system plays a key role in the predominantly Christian communities in the minority and mountainous regions (Lorch 2008: 164-167): many churches and church communities support and finance primary and secondary education. In rural regions, children – mainly in the 9th and 10th years of schooling – are sent to special tuition schools in the nearest large town or more distant cities so that they can be specifically prepared for the matriculation examinations. The high costs of this represent an enormous burden for many families in rural areas, since only a few children obtain scholarships.

The realities of school life in Myanmar have therefore to be understood against the background of the traditional system coexisting with a public system that has been reoriented after each change of political regime: Buddhism attaches great value to recitation, the verbatim repetition and retention of religious texts. Both under colonial rule and during the socialist period and martial law, a prime concern was the deliberate instrumentalisation of education for the purpose of instilling each system’s values. Societal hierarchies, obedience, discipline and knowledge priorities were bolstered through the ministerial administration, teachers, curricula, norms and practices. A complex web of interdependencies became established and hierarchies were reinforced. Education and schooling were already being instrumentalised in pre-colonial times and this intensified during the colonial era (Cheesman 2003). Sometimes this instrumentalisation occurs in the context of religious missionary work, for example via the ‘NaTaLa’ (National Races Youth Development Training Schools) schools in border regions and the Christian mission schools.

Provision of education and healthcare is inadequate in many rural areas; some places are without infrastructure of any sort (Lorch 2008: 155). Where there is no government education, community-based schools step in; the teachers often have no formal education (Lorch 2008: 162-163). Class size varies between up to 40 pupils in the cities and up to 60 in rural areas. Although the official statistics quote 28 (primary school), 37 (middle school) and 25 (high school) pupils per teacher (2014/15; MNPED 2015: 108), the reality is often quite different: in rural areas and in primary education, classes of up to 100 pupils are by no means uncommon. Many pupils leave school after a few years because their parents can no longer finance their education. Although the literacy rate is officially stated to be 94%, functional literacy is therefore estimated in some sources to be 53% (Taylor/Pederson 2005, cited in Gärtner 2011b: 1).

Lessons are teacher-centred, with teachers asking questions to which the textbooks contain the answers (Lall 2016). The relevant correct passages are read aloud by the pupils, copied out again at home, and most importantly, learned by heart (‘rote learning’) so that correct answers can be given in the written examinations. In urban (not many rural) areas, the extensive learning material is covered quickly and without much discussion, with the result that pupils often require extra tuition in the afternoons and/or evenings. This is offered by the same teachers – in return for payment (Lall 2008 and 2016, Lorch 2008). Pressure on the pupils intensifies from the tenth grade onwards because the decisive ‘matriculation’ exam takes place at the end of the eleventh grade, and the pass grade in this examination is the basis for decisions about admission to university and the subject options that can be chosen. For revision purposes, from the ninth grade onwards pupils are assigned ‘guides’, i.e. pupils from higher grades, who mainly teach the memorisation techniques and strategies for efficient exam preparation; again, they require payment. The high schools with the best reputations select their pupils according to their scores at the end of the ninth grade; parents are expected to make substantial donations to the school and these are used to improve the equipment.