plinary 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; MNPE 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.
Compulsory subjects taught in public high school are Myanmar, English (reintroduced from 1981) and mathematics. In addition, pupils choose between a science track (including chemistry, physics and biology) or the humanities (including geography, history and economics). The grade point average achieved in the university entrance examination (the ‘matriculation’) determines which subjects can be studied at university (once the entrance examination has been passed).

In the minority areas, the problems of their peripheral location and hence of financing and ensuring comprehensive educational provision are exacerbated by additional ethnic and linguistic issues. While the importance of the Myanmar language as a national unity language is regarded from a national perspective as crucial for national integration, many minority group leaders see it as paternalistic and an obstacle to the strengthening of cultural and linguistic identity. Alongside the importance of Myanmar as a lingua franca, a good command of it is virtually essential for professional advancement in higher positions. Critics point out that learning Myanmar has disadvantages for the minorities, since it means that they must learn an additional language and leaves insufficient time for thorough learning of their mother tongues and dialects. The minorities’ Culture and Literature Committees usually assume responsibility for basic language teaching, often on the basis of informal volunteer-led weekend or summer school education (Lorch 2008: 168/169, Thein Lwin 2007 and 2011). The teachers – who as a result of the usual transfer and promotion system are regularly transferred to other parts of the country, but who often do not want to be transferred to the minority areas and are therefore undermotivated – are often neither adequately qualified nor pedagogically prepared for the particular requirements of teaching in minority areas.

Alongside the predominantly public schools that are governed by the Ministry of Education, there are numerous private schools, especially in the cities; the number is estimated at about 100 (Gärtner 2011b: 13); many concentrate on the primary school sector, while some even rely on volunteer work (Lall 2008: 137/138). A normal teaching day in private schools begins between 8 and 9 a.m. and is a full day, continuing until 3 or 4 p.m. While school fees are charged for teaching and meals, more time is devoted to covering the material to be taught, which avoids additional ‘tuition’ costs. Furthermore, in peripheral regions there