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 under-motivated – 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
are private boarding schools for the surrounding region. These provide ninth and tenth grade pupils with full-day intensive training over a period of several months so that they attain good matriculation scores. The private schools – some of them now in foreign ownership – charge high fees, are not subject to any accreditation or quality control, devise their own curricula and are not licensed for the matriculation. Some private schools officially registered in the nearest related government high school so their students can sit for the government matriculation exam and their scores are recognized by the government. Other private schools are not registered in government high schools. Their main purpose is often to prepare pupils for study at a foreign university.

REGIONAL DIFFERENTIATION

The results of the 2014 Census reveal a very high rate of school education: nationally the proportion of the population who have received primary or more advanced education is usually more than 75%. In major parts of Shan State, however, the proportion is less than 25%, and in the peripheral parts of Kachin State and Nagaland it is less than 50%. Similar deficiencies in the completion of education (with percentages between 50 and 75%) occur in the remaining areas of Shan State, in southern Chin State and in parts of Rakhine State, Kayah State and Kachin State (MoIP 2015). A similar picture of geographical distribution emerges in relation to the absolute number of school leavers with primary and more advanced education: at township level there is a clear concentration in urban areas – especially in Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw. However, if one considers the regional distribution of the percentages of the population with primary and more advanced education categorised into four qualification levels – i.e. primary, middle and high school and other (including in particular diploma, university/college, postgraduate and vocational qualifications) – a more nuanced picture emerges. In the central lowlands, especially in Yangon and Mandalay and their wider environs, the high percentages of the population with primary school qualifications combined with the low percentages with high school and other higher (including university) qualifications indicate that there is a not insignificant bipolarity of qualification levels: the proportions of the population with on the one hand basic and on the other hand higher educational qualifications are high. By contrast, it is interesting to observe that in the minority and mountainous areas (clearly noticeable in Shan State and Chin State), alongside a comparatively high proportion of the population with primary school qualifications there is also