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Research Paper

Beyond the mainland: a comparative study of teacher recruitment practices in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep

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ABSTRACT

Teacher recruitment is problematic in remote and geographically dispersed communities and can be beyond the scope of the "regular" policy. Contextualised administrative and policy arrangements are needed in remote areas, dispersed settlements, recruiting and retaining quality candidates and motivating teachers. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (A&N) and Lakshadweep have been compared in a structured manner based on data gathered from the NCERT national research project on the Recruitment Practices and Deployment of Teachers across the country, UDISE+ database, the rules of recruitment in the Union Territories, administrative circulars, and the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). The study points out that while both Union Territories are based on common standards amongst the country, such as CTET qualification requirement and pay scales of Central Government, the structures of recruitment are varied and different. Membership of the A&N is largely based on merit, and the Transfer and Online Posting System (TOPS), a new online system, increases transparency in the deployment process. As compared to Lakshadweep, it out sourced the recruitment to Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT) till 2024, and thereafter it formed its own Lakshadweep Staff Selection Board (LSSB) which by early 2026 has not conducted even a single examination. The main differences between the two territories are the severity of vacancies, transparency of the transfer system (digital versus manual) and integration of the community. There are major structural deficiencies in both UTs, such as a lack of separate hardship allowance for teachers, a reactive attitude towards workforce planning, and a lack of sufficient steps to regularize contract teachers. The article ends with a comparison of practices and policy suggestions to enhance the management of teachers in India in remote areas, including islands in particular.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Quality of teachers and their availability influences the quality of the education offered in any region. This is a clear principle laid out in the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) [1], but challenging in terms of implementation in geographically spread out areas. Access to teachers in remote areas, such as mountains, deep forests and islands, is often a challenge and continues to be a major issue even though these areas are not particularly remote [2]. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (A&N) and Lakshadweep are placed under the Central Government and have the same rules and eligibility criteria for the appointment of teachers as given in the Central Government. But their teacher recruitment and deployment strategies are quite different and this has resulted in different administrative arrangements within each [3]. Very few studies have attempted to give a comparative picture of teacher recruitment in island territories of India. There has been existing research on remote and rural teacher shortages either in a general way [2] or on individual territories without comparison [4]. In this context, the present article aims at filling this lacuna by making a systematic comparison of recruitment arrangements in A&N and Lakshadweep and discuss the responses of both to the challenge of staffing schools in isolated areas.

The following four research questions are guiding this study:

1. What teacher recruitment practices are there in the A&N Islands and Lakshadweep?
2. What are the special measures that they have taken to overcome the difficulties of teacher recruitment and retention in island areas?
3. In what ways are the recruitment systems similar and different?
4. What implications does this have for other remote areas?

2. RELATED WORK

There is a large body of research on teacher recruitment in distant and difficult-to-reach locations on a worldwide scale. Geographic isolation is considered one of the primary causes of teacher shortages by UNESCO's Teacher Policy Development Guide (2015) [2] which states that policies for urban teachers do not apply to remote areas because of professional isolation, lack of career opportunities, poor infrastructure and living conditions. Teacher absenteeism and teacher shortages are also identified as persistent problems in education systems in remote communities, having an impact on student learning outcomes, and are detailed in the World Development Report 2018 [4].

There are lessons to be learned from research on island education systems. In the Pacific Island countries [5] and the small island states of the Caribbean [6] evidence suggests that it is challenging to sustain a national professional cadre of teachers. These studies indicate that the island regions may need to take specific policy actions, including the creation of local talent, cross-regional teacher mobility and incentives to respond to the specific challenges of an island posting.

While research in the field of teacher recruitment in remote areas of India has primarily been conducted in tribal areas, in Left Wing Extremism affected districts and in the Himalayan states [7] a few other studies have been conducted. In Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand, the role of para teachers and contractual teachers has been studied to resolve the problems of staff shortage in challenging areas [8]. Although such arrangements have assisted the schools to operate in under-resourced settings,

researchers have also expressed concerns related to job security and teacher quality and accountability [9]. However, these problems were acknowledged in NEP 2020 and it emphasizes the need for qualified and regular teachers with flexibility in case of areas of difficulty in geographical areas [1]. The patterns of urban-rural maldistribution in teacher supply, training and management in anglophone Africa was analysed by Mulkeen [10] and is relevant to India's island territories. In India, Iyer and Mani [11] identified that many of the bureaucratic transfers seem to be driven by political agendas and not necessarily based on educational priorities, highlighting the importance of having clear digital systems such as TOPS in place. Although there has been an increasing amount of research on teacher recruitment, there is little comparative research on teacher recruitment in Indian Union Territories (UTs), and even less comparative research across Indian island UTs. This study is an attempt to fill that void.

3. METHODOLOGY

The method of this study is Policy Analysis Approach in qualitative manner with a comparative approach and data sources used are primary and secondary data sources. The sources of primary data are Recruitment Rules, government notifications by both UTs, UDISE+ data, Data on teacher vacancies and staffing from the respective DoE, Government of India and the NEP 2020 and the NCERT national research report on Teacher Recruitment and Deployment of Teachers across the Country [3] funded by the Ministry of Education, Government of India.

UNESCO reports [2] and World Bank reports [4] and research studies on teacher recruitment and management in remote and geographically difficult areas [5], [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12] are examples of secondary sources. The thematic comparative framework was used to analyse the data. The study focuses on the procedure of recruitment, teacher vacancies, deployment and policy provisions in A&N Islands and Lakshadweep. This comparison can assist in highlighting shared issues, key distinctions and potential policy implications to enhance teacher workforce management in remote and island areas.

Below are the contextual data and UDISE+ (2022-23) data corresponding to each territory. The A&N Islands are spread out across approximately 8,249 km2 and comprise 572 islands, with only 38 of which they are inhabited. The UT is split into three districts with a population of around 380,581 (Census 2011).

There are 403 schools in the territory, 83 per cent of which are rural schools (see Figure 1). The administration has broken up islands into six zones for teacher postings and transfers (see Figure 2 [13]). Lakshadweep is the smallest UT in terms of population in India. Made up of 10 inhabited islands, 100 square kilometres of land and a population of 64,473 (Census 2011). There are around 44 schools in the territory as indicated in Figure 3. The main administrative and educational centre is Kavaratti. Figure 4 shows the Pupil Teacher ratio of Government Schools in Lakshadweep. The distribution of teachers in school education is presented in Figure 5 and a comparison between the two UTs is given in Figure 6 [14].

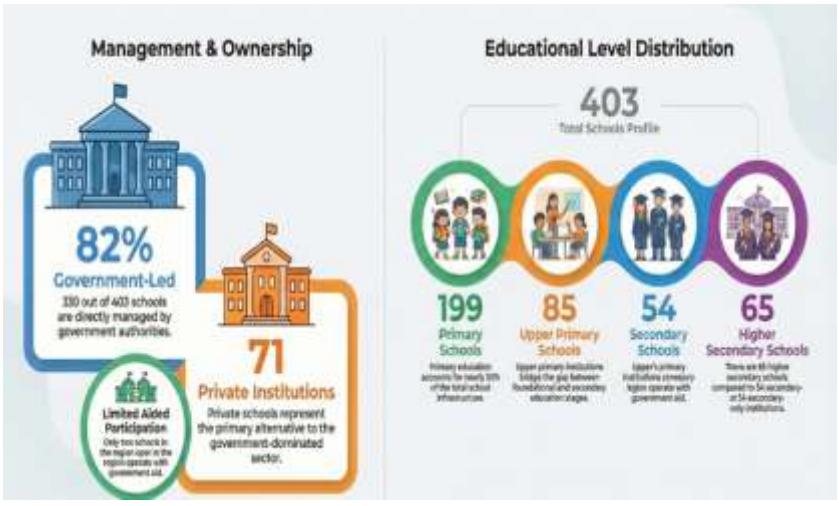

Figure 1. Education Structure of A&N Islands

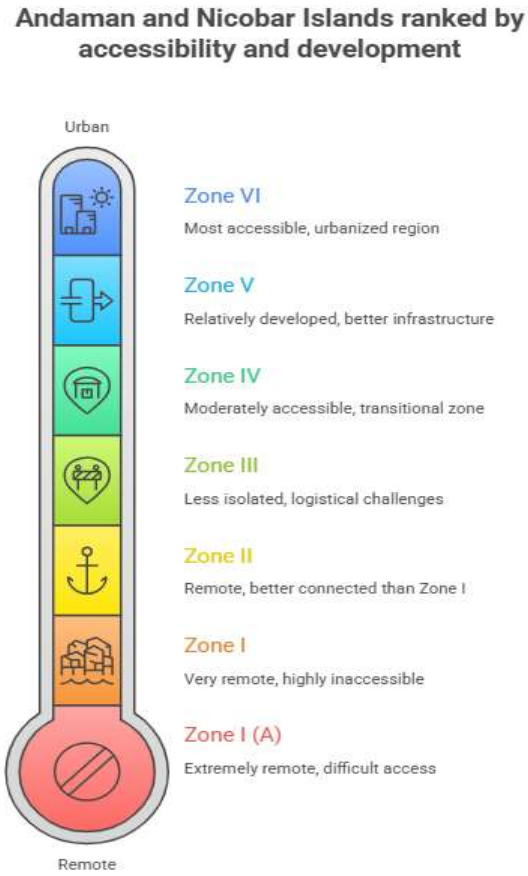

Figure 2. Zone-Wise Distribution for Teacher Posting and Transfer in A&N

Figure 3. Education Structure of Lakshadweep

Figure 4. Pupil Teacher Ratio in Lakshadweep

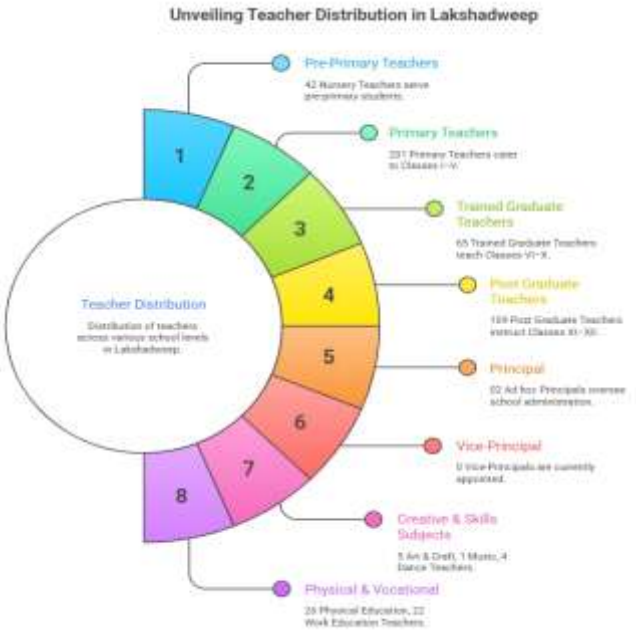

Figure 5. Teacher Distribution in School Education in Lakshadweep

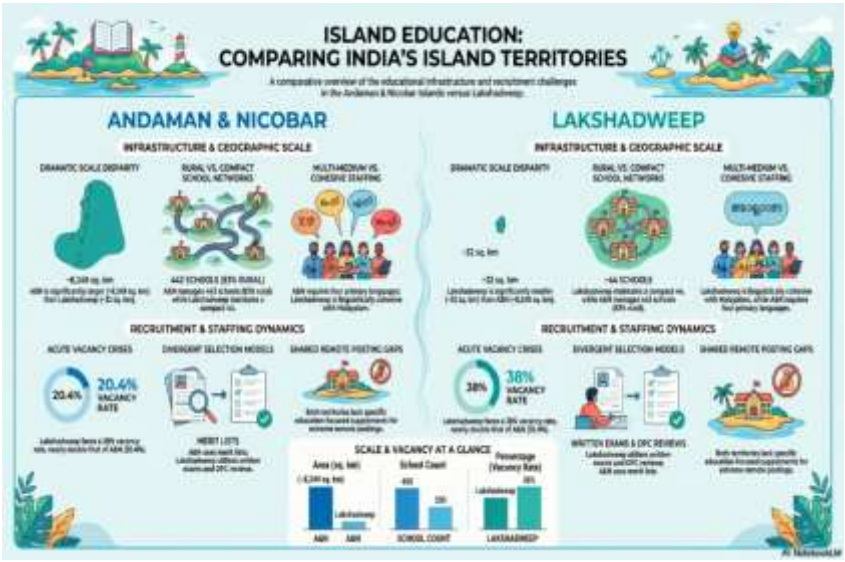

Figure 6. Comparative picture of A&N and Lakshadweep

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Recruitment Governance and Institutional Arrangements

The difference between the two UTs is due to different administrative history and local needs, which have led to difference in teacher recruitment systems. Under the existing Recruitment Rules [13] the recruitment of Primary School Teachers (PSTs), Graduate Trained Teachers (GTTs), and Post Graduate Teachers (PGTs) is the responsibility of the Directorate of Education in A&N. There is no separate Teacher Recruitment Board for the territory. This system makes the hiring process easier, but also involves one department making most of the decisions, providing a reduced ability for independent oversight. Lakshadweep took another route. CUSAT used to prepare the recruitment examinations and merit lists in Kerala for many years. To implement an independent and merit-based recruitment institutions as recommended in NEP 2020, the Lakshadweep Administration has formed the LSSB in 2024 in the internal recruitment system in the Lakshadweep Islands [1]. By early 2026, however, the Board had not yet held

any teacher recruitment examination, and key information on the process for conducting teacher examinations, on cadre management and on the timetable for conducting teacher examinations had not been made publicly available [14]. The A&N recruitment process is as depicted in Figure 7 passing through the Directorate of Education.

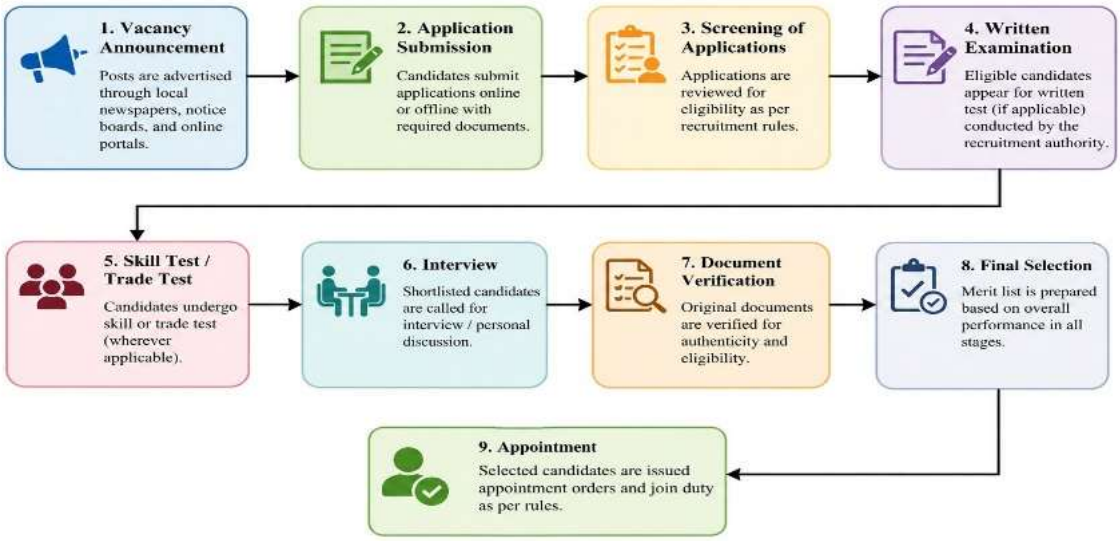

Figure 7. Recruitment Process in A&N Islands

The two territories have experienced opposing problems. A&N has an active recruitment process, and no institutional measures to prevent partiality. Lakshadweep has established a body to recruit teachers, but it has failed to start its activity on time, leading to the worsening of the teacher shortage. The examples in these cases show that lack of institutional protection and slow implementation may get in the way of fostering effective teacher workforce management.

4.2. Selection Processes, Eligibility, and Language Policy

In A&N Islands, selection of candidates is done on the basis of academic qualification and CTET. No separate assessment of teaching skills, written examination or interview. In the case of Lakshadweep, the candidates go through a more detailed process and appear for a written test, followed by a verification process by a Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC). On the same lines, like A&N, in Lakshadweep, both the primary and the upper primary teachers are required to have a CTET qualification as per the guidelines of NCTE [15].

The language requirements are also different for the two territories. A&N is a multi-lingual population and has teachers teaching Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi medium schools depending on the languages required in the area. Largely the people of Lakshadweep speak Malayalam, making the matching of teachers and schools easier. In order to promote the participation of local candidates, Lakshadweep offers an alternate test centre for conducting CTET exams as UT-TET [14].

4.3. Vacancy Profiles and Workforce Planning

The teacher shortage is not only quantifiable in terms of the number of vacancies, but also in terms of the nature of the shortage. As shown in Figure 8 A&N were left with 942 unfilled positions with 4,609 sanctioned posts, with approximately 20.4 per cent vacuum. The shortage is especially pronounced in leadership roles, with more than half of the leadership roles in Group A (Principals and Vice Principals) being unfilled, mainly as a result of the delay in making promotion decisions. Such a lack of it can impact the school administration and implement changes in NEP 2020 [1].

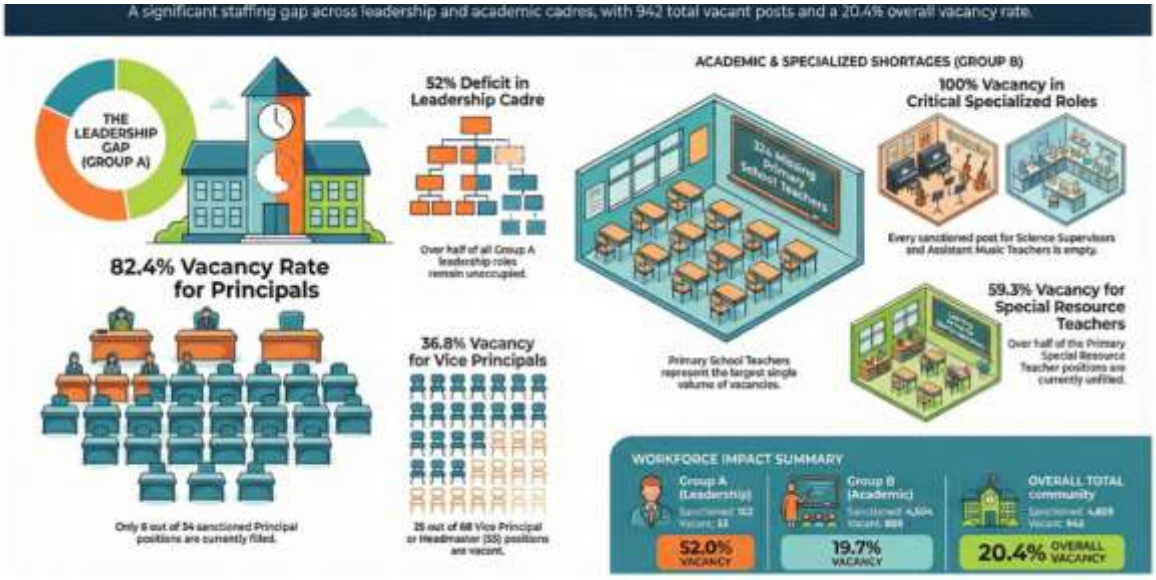

Figure 8. A&N Islands: Vacancy Status

Things are worse in Lakshadweep. In 2026, 928 direct recruitment posts were sanctioned, with around 37 per cent of these posts being unfilled. This was especially acute for Primary Resource Teachers (PRTs) with 136 (out of a total of 241) vacancies and highly prevalent for Trained Graduate Teachers (TGTs) with 154 (out of 396) vacancies [14]. In contrast to A&N, the system of Lakshadweep was such that there was no vacancy in any post of promotion and it relies on regular direct recruitment drives. Staffing shortages have been worsened by the length of time these drives are underway and how long they last for. There is no set recruitment schedule for either territory. Reactively recruit: After vacancies build up. The significant campaign on the subject of delays in A&N for 2023, some 380 GTT posts away, showed how delays compound problems in an island environment. Schools are the areas for identifying vacancies in Lakshadweep and if not monitored and planned regularly, the risk of under staffing in the system is high. A thorough comparative analysis of recruitment practices based on the following key dimensions as presented in Table 1 suggests some structural differences between the two territories.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Recruitment Practices

Dimension	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	Lakshadweep
Recruitment Body	Directorate of Education (no separate board)	LSSB (est. 2024); CUSAT (historical)
Selection Method	Qualification merit list + CTET; no written exam	Written exam + DPC verification; CTET mandatory
Vacancy Notification	Reactive; no fixed calendar	Requisition-based; last cycle 2021
Contractual Arrangements	SSCTs under SSA; 241+ engaged; BRC-mediated	10-month contracts via Samagra Shiksha; no regularisation pathway
Promotional Vacancies	DPC delays; 52% Group A posts vacant	No promotional vacancies; entirely DR-dependent
Transfer System	TOPS (digital); 6-zone compulsory tenure	Manual orders; tenure-based rotation (1–3 yrs by location)
Language Policy	Multi-medium (Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi)	Malayalam-medium; CTET Paper II covers Hindi
CPD Infrastructure	DIET, SIE; 50-hr CPD not formally tracked	DIET Kavaratti; KITE-Kerala AI; NISHTHA/DIKSHA
Technology in Governance	TOPS, SSIS, online portal, UDISE+	UDISE+, DIKSHA; no integrated HRMIS

Gender Provisions	67% female workforce; no maternity/posting provisions	No disaggregated data; no gender-sensitive deployment provisions

4.4. Deployment, Transfer Policy, and Geographic Challenges

The A&N Islands have created a structured system of 6 zones for teachers to be deployed. The teachers are required to start their service in remote area like Great nicobar, Nancowry and Car nicobar (Zones I and I (A)) and they will be able to transfer to Port Blair (Zone VI) after having served for at least 5 years in the remote area. This will ensure that remote schools have teachers to support their students and avoid urban concentration of teachers. The TOPS processes transfers electronically, and also publicizes transfer orders as is in accordance with the NEP 2020 vision of governance transparency [1], [16].

The structure of the tenure based transfer to Lakshadweep is followed. In most islands like Kavaratti and Agatti, the teachers serve for three years and in the most remote island "Bitra" they serve for one year. All transfers are made in March–April, coinciding with the beginning of the academic session. Staffing imbalances however, continue to exist as there are no special incentives for remote island postings. There are no transfer policies that are gender responsive in either territory [17].

There are no provisions concerning maternity, childcare or flexibility for single parents in A&N, where 67 per cent of the teaching staff are women [18]. There is no disaggregation of data on the posting of teachers by gender and no special provision for women in the remote islands in Lakshadweep. These provisions need to be strengthened to be consistent with the objectives of NEP 2020 for Inclusive workplaces [19], [20].

4.5. Service Conditions, Allowances, and Incentive Structures

The salaries and service benefits of teachers in both territories are on par with Central Government teachers. A&N has followed the 7th Central Pay Commission Pay Matrix whereas Lakshadweep has adopted the Central Government Pay. They both offer advantages such as the National Pension System (NPS) or the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS), medical benefits and leave benefits. These advantages increase the competitiveness of teaching positions on islands as compared to many private sector teaching positions.

There is no targeted support for teachers in remote island areas in either of the two territories. Lakshadweep gives an Island Development Allowance (IDA) of 10 per cent of the salary on Kavaratti and Agatti island and 16 per cent on other islands. This is not a teaching employee benefit, however. Studies have validated that salary is not enough to address staffing issues in remote locations and that other factors such as housing, health care, career advancement and family interests also can have a greater influence [21]. In the farthest areas, like Bitra and A&N zones I and I(A), current allowances will probably not be enough to attract teachers to stay on for a longer time.

4.6. Similarities and Differences: A Comparative Discussion

There are a number of similarities between both territories in terms of structure. They must have CTET qualification to join the posts, get salaries as per the Central Government pay scale, recruit based on the reactive scheduling and do not get any separate hardship allowance for posting in remote areas. As previously cited, although important for quality assurance, national eligibility requirements do not evaluate the special skill areas of remote island teaching such as multi-grade teaching, community integration and cultural adaptability [22], [23].

The highest difference is in the case of severity of vacancy. The rate of vacancy for A&N is 20 per cent, which is a bit high but is relatively low compared to the rate of vacancy in Lakshadweep, which is 38 per cent. This difference is mostly due to the lack of regular recruitment in Lakshadweep after the transfer from CUSAT to LSSB which resulted in a gap of several years in recruitment [14]. This is also a big difference between digital and manual transfer managements; TOPS, in A&N, offers transparency and systematic monitoring that the manual system in Lakshadweep cannot offer. In addition, there are social and linguistic differences and thus different approaches to teacher placement and community support.

4.7. Best Practices and Innovations

A few good practices have been established in both territories for teaching in remote island areas. The use of digital governance in A&N as an example demonstrates how it can help enhance the transparency of the transfer and equity in teacher distribution. Another transferable system for ensuring teaching in remote schools is the six zone compulsory tenure system [13]. Lakshadweep's professional development through the KITE-Kerala AI training partnership has an innovative model of professional development overcoming geographical distance through online delivery, which resonates with the thrust of NEP 2020 on technology in teacher development [1].

The lessons learnt from both territories are found to be applicable spread across remote areas of India as indicated in Figure 9. Table 2 offers a comparative matrix of best practices, and an evaluation of how transferable they are to other remote contexts.

Figure 9. Lessons from A&N Islands and Lakshadweep

Table 2. Comparative Matrix of Best Practices

Best Practice	A&N Islands	Lakshadweep	Transferability
Transfer transparency	TOPS: fully digital, publicly verifiable	Manual system; no equivalent	High — replicable across remote UTs
Compulsory remote posting	6-zone mandatory tenure	Tenure rotation; Bitra 1-yr cap	High — enforceable equity mechanism
Independent recruitment body	Not constituted; DoE handles directly	LSSB constituted 2024 (non-operational)	Medium — architecture in place
Cross-state CPD partnerships	SIE collaborations; NISHTHA	KITE-Kerala AI; SCERT Uttarakhand	High — innovative for isolated UTs
National quality filter	CTET mandatory (Classes I–VIII)	CTET mandatory; UT-TET provision	High — both share this standard
Student data integration	SSIS for student analytics	UDISE+ only; no dedicated SSIS	Medium — A&N model adaptable
Biennial vacancy forecasting	Not institutionalised; reactive	Not institutionalised; requisition-based	High — shared gap requiring action

4.8. Policy Recommendations

The regular teacher recruitment schedule (preferably bi-annual) based on vacancies identified from UDISE+ data in keeping with the National Annual Work Plan (Samagra Shiksha) should be encouraged

at the national level by the Ministry of Education for all UTs. The NCTE should come up with guidelines for the UT-specific TET framework if the CTET is not accessible at geographical locations [15].

The UT level hardship allowances for teachers assigned to extreme-remote postings should be expanded on the existing allowances for an IDA or zone. Teachers in Zones I and I(A) should be offered extra financial incentives and be given priority in future postings in A&N. The allowances in Lakshadweep are justified in the case of the three islands of Bitra, Chetlat and Kiltan. The two adminstrative units should create transfer policies that respond to gender issues such as maternity policies and flexible tenure policies for single parents as caregivers [1]. Integrated Human Resource Management Information Systems (HRMIS), which would connect recruitment, vacancies, transfers and UDISE+ data would help in pro-active planning and reduce delays in decision making [16].

SMCs should be given greater autonomy and authority at school to assist newly recruited mainland teachers at school. Structured community orientation, housing support, and a structured guidance of teachers through SMCs and Island Panchayats can help improve teacher adaptation and retention in remote island communities, which is one of the aims of the Right to Education Act [17] and NEP 2020 [1].

5. CONCLUSION

The comparison of the teacher recruitment systems in A&N Islands and Lakshadweep shows that the territories having similar geographical problems can have significantly different strategies to manage the teaching workforce. They are both island UTs with scattered populations and challenging access, but have developed their recruitment and deployment differently.

A&N has established a robust digital transfer system with TOPS, which has helped in a better distribution of teachers and increased transparency. Lakshadweep has also implemented innovative professional development programmes with the help of the Kerala Institute of Technology (KITE), and has set up the Lakshadweep Seeds Selection Board (LSSB) to enhance the recruitment process governance which is yet to get fully operational.

Concurrently, there are shared issues in both territories where staff vacancies are high, recruitment is timely (reactive) rather than anticipatory, there is a lack of teacher-specific hardship incentives, little community engagement in teacher support, and policies that are not gender responsive. The results of these studies suggest that recruitment efforts in isolated regions are not easily solved by merely finding a solution in each region. Extending policy support to recognise the challenges faced by island and geographically isolated areas is necessary.

Teacher recruitment and deployment in other remote UTs like Ladakh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu should be explored in the future. Research with the teachers, school leaders and community members would contribute to the understanding of the practice of recruitment policies. The current study would also be strengthened with long-term studies and research on teacher vacancies, teacher retention, and educational outcomes that would provide further evidence of how to enhance teacher workforce management in distant parts of India.

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Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Sharad Sinha	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Dr. Sunita Joshi Kathuria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

C : **C**onceptualization	I : **I**nvestigation	Vi : **Vi**sualization
M : **M**ethodology	R : **R**esources	Su : **Su**pervision
So : **So**ftware	D : **D**ata Curation	P : **P**roject administration
Va : **Va**lidation	O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft	Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis	E : Writing - Review & **E**diting	

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Informed Consent

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their voluntary consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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