



Piloting and Scaling Interactive SMS for Teacher Development



Your Discussants

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Overview

- Today we're going to get into the “nitty gritty” of using SMS for professional development!
 - How does the tech work – and how can you make it scalable?
 - How can you make learning via text message effective and engaging for participants?
 - Case study: Senegal

Introduction

Poll

- Who here has used SMS as part of your programming?

Some Context for Today's Discussion

- We'll be talking about using SMS for building teachers' professional capacity, and how to work with local partners to pilot and scale that type of activity...
 - But these lessons can be used to develop SMS-based training programs more generally too.
- We'll also look at a particular case study in Senegal, and how the Lecture Pour Tous program has developed an innovative model to support teachers there.

Part 1:

The Basics of Using SIMS

SMS: An Overview

- SMS messages are what we normally think of as text messages. SMS stands for “**S**hort **M**essage **S**ervice.”
 - These are different from messages with audio, video, or images. Those are MMS – **M**ultimedia **S**ervice.
- Why use SMS for large-scale outreach?
 - Works the same on simple phones (featurephones) and smartphones
 - Inexpensive to send and receive messages



But to use SMS, you'll need to figure out if it's practical for your end users – and for you.

For end users



If yes...

For you



- Do they have phones?
- Do they have regular access to a mobile network?
- Can they afford to send and receive messages?
- Do they have time to read and understand your texts? Will they?

- Can you accomplish your goal with SMS?
- What's your budget?
- How much time do you have?
- Do you need a custom solution?
- How tech-savvy are you?

Let's talk about how to design an SMS-based activity that works for you...

and can be scaled up.

First things first: Your platform

To send SMS in bulk, you'll need a platform – you can't just send them from your phone.

- How does it work?
 - You log in, connect a phone (or connect to the local telecom network), add phone numbers, and send messages from your computer.
 - Some platforms are web-based, and others are standalone applications.



Build it or buy it?

- There are good reasons to buy an off-the-shelf platform – and good reasons to build one yourself. It depends on what you need.

1. Buy it

- Easy to set up
- Low-commitment
- Costs are subscription-based
- May be harder to customize

2. Build it

- Takes more effort/time to build and set up
- Higher commitment
- Very customizable
- Most costs come at the forefront (during development)

How to Choose

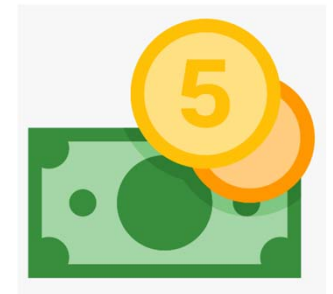
- In selecting an SMS platform, there are four key considerations:

Goals

Timeline

Skills

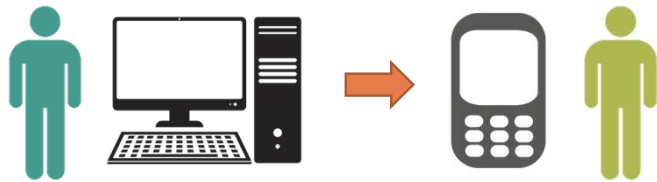
Budget



Consideration #1: Goals

- Do you simply need to blast out information, or do you want to create an activity that's interactive?

One-way platforms ("push" SMS)



The most basic platforms will allow you to send messages, but not to receive them.

Two-way platforms



More advanced applications will allow you to both send and receive messages, so your recipients can text you back.

Consideration #2: Timeline

- When do you need to **start** this activity? Do you have a few months, or are you already running late?
 - Building and setting up a custom application can take a few months, even if you're using pre-existing building blocks. If you need something quickly, buying an off-the-shelf version may be faster.
 - If a ready-to-use tool doesn't meet all your needs, but you need to get started quickly, you can always start with a partial version or pilot of your activity with an off-the-shelf application while you build the custom version.

Consideration #3: Skills and Abilities

- How tech-savvy are you? What about the people who may eventually take this over from you?
 - Generally (though not always), pre-built platforms are easier to use and manage, because the companies from which you buy them will manage issues like data security and server space.
 - But if you have some basic coding skills, building and managing your own platform allows for more flexibility.



Consideration #4: Budget

- How much money do you have? What about other stakeholders who may need to manage this later?
- Both options cost money – the difference is what you pay for and when.
 - Custom platforms: primarily labor costs, largely upfront (though later maintenance will always be required)
 - Off-the-shelf: ongoing subscription costs, very low labor costs



Making Your Activity Scalable

There are two things you can't forget!

1. **Pilot, pilot, pilot.** You don't want to invest in an activity that won't work. Whether that means starting with a simple off-the-shelf tool and investing in a custom system later, or building a very lightweight application that can have new features added in the future, start small.
2. **Design not just for you, but for the people who will manage this after you.** Maybe you're a tech guru with piles of money. If so, congratulations! But don't forget that this activity may eventually need to be implemented by people who may not have your skills or budget.

Part 2: Using SMS To Test

Context

- SMS for teaching adults – not children
 - Specifically for professional development
- Question: how can strong pedagogical methods be adapted for tech-based teaching, and SMS in particular?

Adults as Active Learners

- Adult learners \neq younger students
 - More pre-existing history and knowledge to build on
 - Generally there to advance and become better at their professions
 - Need to be actively involved so they don't get bored
- This is an asset!
 - These students have lived experience that they can contribute
 - Interactive, collaborative learning leads to a richer and more engaging experience for all involved



Technology: Creating Interactive Learning

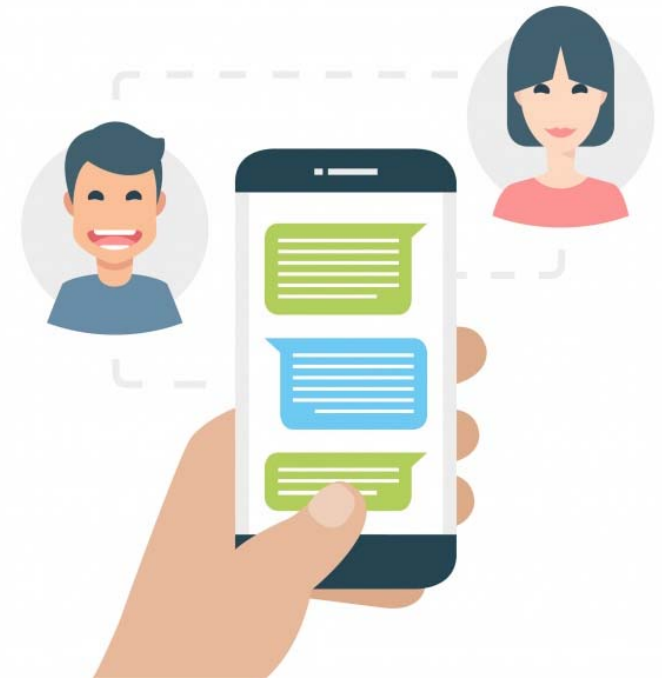
- The wonderful thing about using technology to teach is that it provides new opportunities for dynamic, collaborative learning – especially for adults who grew up with more passive schooling.
 - Audio and video
 - Gamification
 - New ways to measure and show progress
 - Built-in opportunities for reflection



The Role of SMS in Distance Learning

- Share **information** (lessons, updates)
- Keep people **motivated**
- Make participants feel **connected** – to you and to each other
- Facilitate **collaboration** and **information exchange**

****NB:** This should be a safe space, so you may need to moderate messages (for example, for inappropriate content).



Why Use Interactive (Two-Way) SMS?

- More likely to keep people actively engaged
- Encourages more communication between students, other students, and teachers
- Creates channel for teachers to get feedback
- More possibilities for student learning assessments (tests and quizzes)
 - Particularly self-assessments



SMS for Self-Evaluations: Benefits

- Easy for students to complete
- Robust data analysis possibilities for teachers
- Ability to create dynamic assessments
 - E.g. “Did you find this topic easy or difficult to understand?”
 - If “Difficult”, send follow-up question: “What part of the lesson was hardest for you?”

SMS for Self-Evaluations: Challenges

- Limited number of characters per message (160)
- Sometimes limited in # of consecutive messages you can send
- Language-based issues
 - Some languages with non-standard Roman characters do not render well on feature phones
- Ability to pair with other tools (such as interactive voice response) is difficult in some countries



Scalability of SMS-based Professional Development

- Compatibility with feature phones makes it naturally more scalable
 - No need for a fancy device or a high-speed data network
- Often possible to pre-load and schedule messages for later sending, which makes it easier to expand activity to more learners
- Enables learning at a distance – one teacher can easily reach many learners, no matter where they are



Scaling SMS-Based Professional Development: Case Study from Senegal



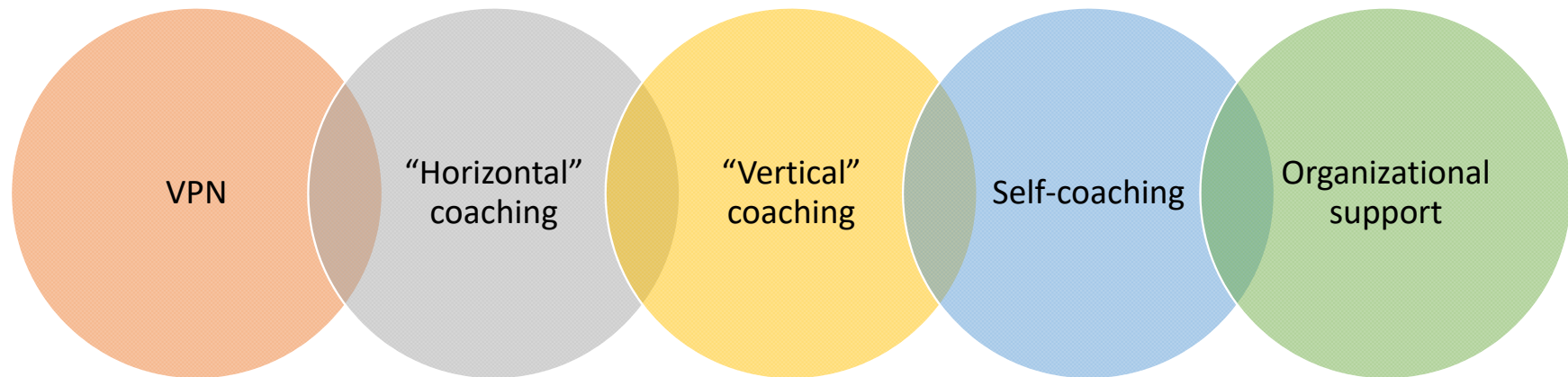
Background

- USAID Senegal's **Lecture Pour Tous program** (All Children Read Program) – overall improvement of reading education
- Key component: supporting teacher development
 - Goal: make learning opportunities for teachers more scalable and accessible for participants across the country





Approach – SMS for Professional Development





Component 1: VPN

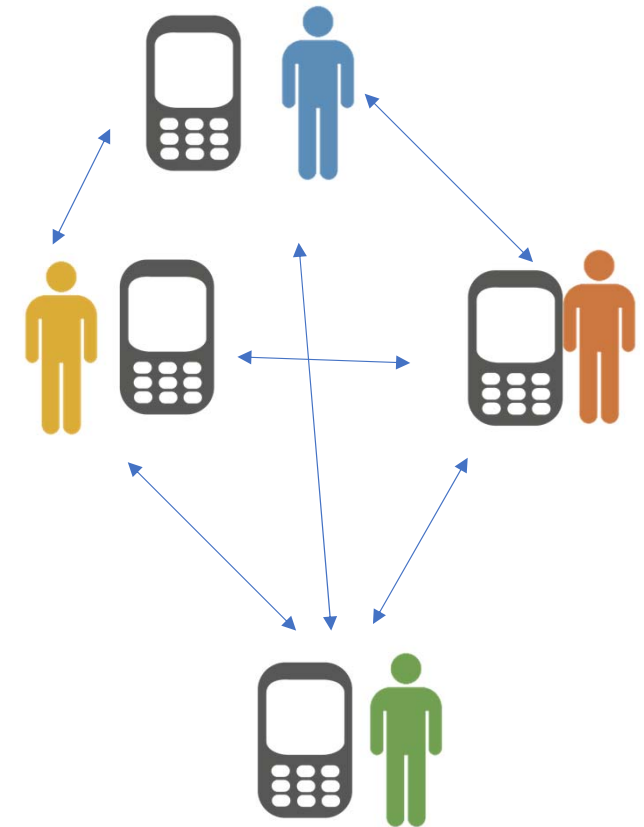
- Through PPP with Orange/Sonatel (local telecom company) and the Ministry of Education, created a subsidized private network for teachers
 - Unlimited free teacher-to-teacher **calls**
 - 200 free teacher-to-teacher **messages** per month
 - 4 GB free **data** per month
 - ~10000 FCFA in **credit** for contacting other Orange/Sonatel users (approx. \$16 USD)
 - ~10000 FCFA in **credit** for contacting users on other networks (approx. \$16 USD)





Component 2: “Horizontal” coaching

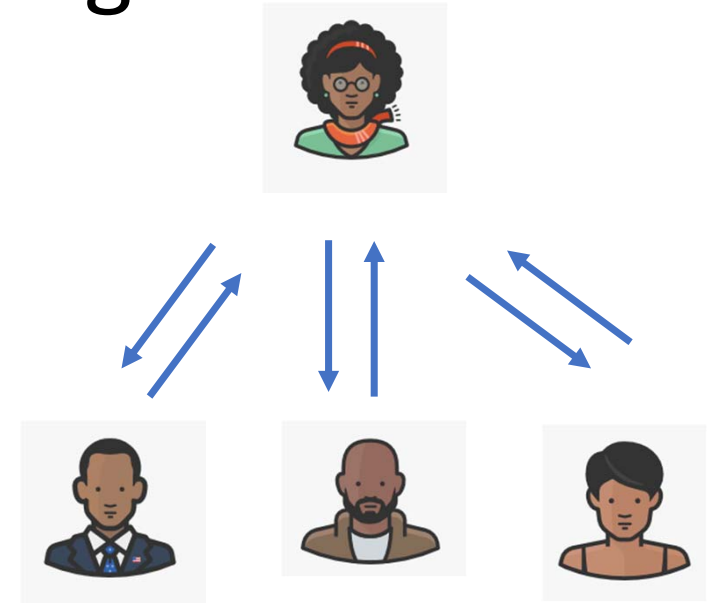
- Facilitated, teacher-to-teacher learning
- After in-person trainings, support creation of texting groups so participants can continue asking questions of, collaborating with, and learning from each other
- **Tools/platform:** Phone-based messaging tools, WhatsApp (no tool for central management)





Component 3: “Vertical” coaching

- Interactive, SMS-based exchanges between teacher coaches (“inspectors”) and teachers
- Includes suggestions, quizzes, and feedback collection, and surveys about teacher needs
- **Tools/platform:** Web-based bulk SMS messaging application





Component 3: “Vertical” coaching

Example messages

Teaching advice

For better student progress, make sure to allow for at least 1 hour a day of reading instruction!

From letters to syllables, from syllables to words, from words to phrases, from phrases to sentences, all students can read!

Surveys

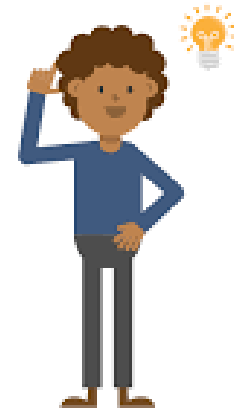
How helpful did you find the June teacher training?

- 1 – Very helpful
- 2 – Somewhat helpful
- 3 – A little helpful
- 4 – Not at all helpful



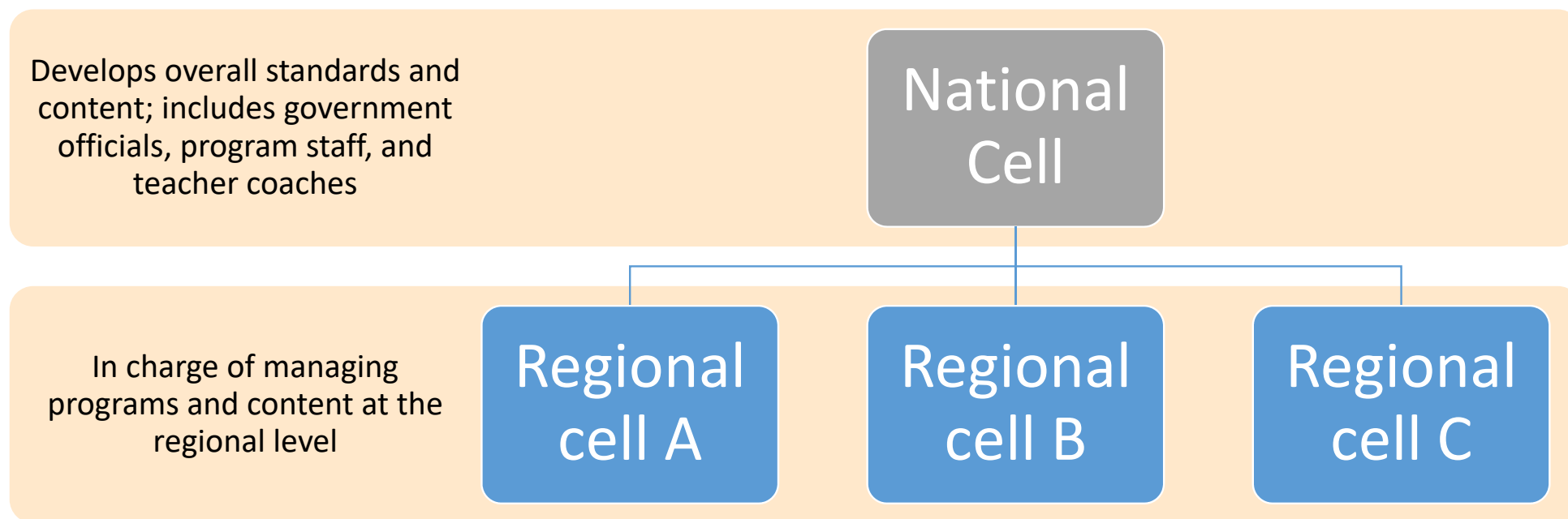
Component 4: Self-coaching

- A key theme of both horizontal and vertical coaching approaches is building in teacher autonomy
- Activities are designed to allow teachers to identify what they would like to learn and provide feedback on what's working for them and what isn't





Component 5: Organizational Structures To Support Scaling





Component 5: Organizational Structures To Support Scaling

- Key Principles
 - **Diversity**
 - Each committee includes stakeholders from different groups, including the Ministry, the Academy (focuses on policy), and the Directorate for Education and Training (focuses on implementation)
 - Creates wider investment in/engagement with overall program
 - **Decentralization**
 - Sharing work across regions allows for more customization and makes it more likely that the activity can continue if one person or team has to drop out

Designing Scalable SMS-Based PD For Teachers: Key Takeaways

What's Needed For Scaling?

- Software tools that are practical and work for you – but also for other stakeholders
- A learning approach that encourages active participation
- An activity design that's multi-dimensional and strategically involves different actors