



“More languages lead to more knowledge and more skills”

Hello! My name is **Clementine Gafiligi Uwamahoro** and I live in Rwanda. I have 20 years of experience in the education sector, mainly in curriculum development, education planning, school leadership, teacher training and quality assurance. I am currently an education advisor for VVOB in Rwanda. I speak three languages: Kinyarwanda, French and English. I have taught myself English in three months. Read my story to find out why and how I did it.

In 2009, the government of Rwanda decided to shift from French to English as the official language and the language of instruction in education. At that time, I was a curriculum developer. I was francophone like about 80% of the Rwandan population. My knowledge of English was very limited. My task was to support the curriculum developers to change teaching resources, tools and materials into English.

For me, this shift was a nightmare. How to support others while you need support too?! In the beginning, I was terrified and disappointed. I hoped that the government would revoke the decision. After one month, I realised that I needed to stop dreaming and accept the changes with its consequences. So, I started a programme to learn how to speak English in 90 days. I bought a book and a CD-ROM and started learning. In three months, I was able to facilitate sessions in simple English. I continued to do self-study and practiced whenever it was possible. Some years later, in 2012, I joined an American organisation which was working in English only. I was responsible for the activities related to the development of mathematics material for primary schools. I worked there for three years and six months, struggling to learn English in my day-to-day work. Honestly, sometimes I felt really discouraged.

But I was motivated to continue to learn English. I was convinced that I was able to learn another language. And ... I was not alone. More than 80% of the teachers and educationalists were in the same situation. On other hand, I didn't have a choice. My colleagues, employers and friends supported me and were convinced that I was able to learn another language. With their support, I rebuilt my self-confidence gradually.

This situation had a negative as well as a positive effect on my career. In the beginning, it reduced my self-confidence. For a long time, I was not able to express myself and that made me feel very frustrated. On the other hand, I took this opportunity to learn another language. This increased my competences and my chances for employability. I can work in both French and English. Currently, I can write academic papers, training manuals and books in both languages. I finished my master's degree programme and other courses successfully in English. Learning a new language taught me new ways of thinking. Although that was not easy. I had to be positive, accept failure and learn by making mistakes. If you are in such a situation, you need support from your environment, good learning resources (books, video, writing sheets, etc.) and learning corners (schools, groups, language seminar) to practice what you learn and someone to coach you!

To conclude, I believe that more languages lead to more knowledge and more skills! Please don't give up, if you are in the same situation. You can learn or teach a new language. My story is just one example out of a million stories around the world, in these multilingual societies.