

In this hermeneutic phenomenological study, I examined the experience of being an adult literacy education student in Kenya. Ten adult literacy education students in three learning centers were interviewed between June and August,

2002. Participants were asked on broad open-ended question on their experience of being an adult literacy student. Subsequent questions were based on the participants' responses. The interviews were transcribed and translated from Kikuyu to English.

I conducted a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts to uncover the common themes shared by participants. The themes that emerged from the study are: Be able to read, write, and compute; have a second chance to acquire education; acquire knowledge and skills with immediate application; integrate into the community; interact socially; ability to read, write, and compute; acquisition of other useful skills; recognition in their communities; poverty; lack of support; feeling of being too old; lack of motivation; under-qualified teachers; time constraints; gender bias; and knowledge gained not applicable. These themes were grouped into three broad categories: students' reasons for participating in the adult literacy program; effects of literacy in the daily lives of students; and challenges students encountered in their endeavor to become literate.

Participants in this study wanted the adult literacy program to help them to master the basic literacy skills of reading, writing, and computation in addition to other things. They also reported that the adult literacy program helped them acquire several useful skills. However, the path to literacy is not straight and smooth as the study participants came to realize.

Although the findings of this study cannot be generalized, providers and planners of adult education and adult literacy might find experiences of the study participants useful.