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FACULTY OF THEOLOGY, ETHICS, RELIGIOUS STUDIES, AND PHILOSOPHY

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN APPLIED CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION STUDIES

**'BUILDING CAPACITY FOR PEACE JOURNALISM: A PARTICIPATORY
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT WITH RJDH IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN
REPUBLIC'**

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DECLARATION

I Alain Yvon Kabeya do hereby declare that this dissertation is a result of my own investigation and research, except to the extent indicated in the acknowledgments, bibliography, references, and comments included in the body of the report, and that it has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree to any other university.

DEDICATION

I heartily acknowledge the grace, inspiration, mercy, wisdom, and strength bestowed upon me by God Almighty throughout this study.

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ABSTRACT

This study, titled “Building Capacity for Peace Journalism: A Participatory Action Research Project with RJDH in the Central African Republic,” explores the challenges journalists face when reporting on conflict-related issues and evaluates the impact of a peace journalism training intervention. Conducted in a fragile post-conflict context, the research used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to co-develop and implement a one-day training programme with journalists from the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l’Homme (RJDH). The objectives of the study were threefold: to identify barriers to peace journalism practice, to collaboratively design and deliver a context-relevant training intervention, and to evaluate the effectiveness of that intervention in transforming journalistic behaviour.

Data were collected through pre- and post-training interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed a significant gap between the journalists' ethical intentions and their actual reporting practices, driven by editorial pressure, safety concerns, and lack of institutional support. However, the training resulted in improved awareness, new professional behaviours, and increased willingness to apply peace journalism principles in the field. Field-based and early-career journalists particularly benefited from the practical and reflective learning approach.

The study concludes that peace journalism can be a transformative tool in conflict-affected societies if supported by participatory training and institutional reform. It recommends sustained mentorship, inclusion of editors in future interventions, and the development of region-specific journalism guidelines to promote ethical and constructive reporting in the Central African Republic.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter introduces the research project by outlining the background and context of the study, which focuses on the challenges and opportunities of promoting peace journalism in the conflict-affected Central African Republic (CAR). It discusses the role of the media, particularly the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH), in either exacerbating or mitigating conflict through reporting practices. The chapter presents the rationale for using a participatory action research (PAR) approach to develop a peace journalism training intervention. It also defines the problem being addressed, states the research aim and objectives, outlines the guiding research questions, and introduces the theoretical framework. Finally, it discusses the significance, scope, limitations, and delimitations of the study, as well as the assumptions and structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background to the Study

The Central African Republic (CAR) has experienced recurrent cycles of conflict and instability since gaining independence from France in 1960. Successive coups, authoritarian rule, and weak state institutions have contributed to a fragile political environment. A major turning point occurred in 2013, when the predominantly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition ousted President François Bozizé, sparking retaliatory violence from predominantly Christian and animist militias known as the Anti-balaka. The resulting sectarian conflict led to widespread atrocities, displacement of over a million people, and the near-collapse of state authority (International Crisis Group, 2014; Lombard, 2016).

In the aftermath, the country has remained in a protracted humanitarian and security crisis, with intermittent peace agreements failing to resolve deep-seated grievances. Trust between communities has been eroded, and national reconciliation remains elusive. Within this volatile environment, the media plays a crucial role. It can either exacerbate divisions through inflammatory or biased reporting or serve as a bridge for peacebuilding by fostering dialogue, promoting mutual understanding, and amplifying marginalized voices (Howard, 2009; Wolfsfeld, 2004).

Amid this complex landscape, the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH) plays a pivotal role in promoting responsible journalism grounded in human rights and ethical reporting. RJDH operates a fact-checking program that verifies and processes information sourced from social media and other online platforms before it is disseminated through their website, social media accounts, and community radio broadcasts. This initiative is a response to the widespread circulation of misinformation and hate speech, which can exacerbate social divisions and trigger violence. By promoting accurate and unbiased reporting, RJDH contributes to building public trust and credibility in the media, which is essential for fostering informed dialogue and social cohesion (Waisbord, 2018).

However, despite these efforts, there remains a significant gap in capacity for peace journalism a form of journalism that actively seeks to reduce conflict and promote reconciliation by offering a more balanced, contextualized, and constructive representation of issues. Peace journalism contrasts sharply with traditional reporting practices that often emphasize sensationalism, dichotomies, and violence-centric narratives. In the context of CAR, where community-level mistrust and intergroup tensions persist, peace journalism offers a pathway toward sustainable peacebuilding by enabling media practitioners to act as agents of dialogue rather than division.

1.3 The Need for Training

It is the researcher's considered view, as a scholar in conflict transformation and peacebuilding, that many journalists working within RJDH and its partner organisations in the Central African Republic (CAR) lack adequate training in conflict-sensitive and peace-oriented reporting. Despite their commitment to informing the public and promoting human rights, many reporters operate in a challenging post-conflict environment where media coverage often unintentionally contributes to polarisation, fear, or misinformation. This gap between intention and impact underscores a critical need for professional capacity-building.

The Central African Republic remains fragile, with recurring outbreaks of violence and deep social divisions. In such contexts, journalism plays a pivotal role in either supporting peacebuilding or fuelling further tensions. However, without proper training, journalists may unknowingly reproduce harmful narratives, adopt inflammatory language, or fail to include the voices of those working towards peace. The absence of peace journalism principles in most media practices, such as balance, inclusivity, and a focus on solutions, can undermine efforts toward national healing and social cohesion.

It is against this background that this research developed and implemented a one-day peace journalism training intervention using a participatory action research (PAR) approach. The goal was to enhance the capacity of RJDH staff and partners to report in a manner that supports dialogue, reconciliation, and nonviolent social transformation. The training was designed not only to build technical skills but also to promote ethical reflection, critical awareness, and institutional commitment to peace journalism as a vital part of CAR's peacebuilding process.

1.4 Context of the Research

Actors

This study was conducted within the context of the Central African Republic (CAR), a country emerging from prolonged cycles of armed conflict, social fragmentation, and political instability. The primary actor in this research is the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH), a media network committed to promoting human rights, peace, and accountability through responsible journalism. RJDH reporters and editors operate across various provinces in CAR, often working under difficult and dangerous conditions to inform the public and promote civic awareness.

Despite RJDH's mission, many of its members lack formal training in peace journalism and conflict-sensitive reporting. Their work frequently intersects with conflict-related narratives, political tensions, and humanitarian crises, yet they must do so without the institutional structures or skills to mitigate harm or promote peaceful discourse. Editors and newsroom managers, who play a gatekeeping role in determining what stories are told and how they are framed, are also key actors in this research, particularly in their capacity to influence whether peace journalism practices are adopted at the organisational level.

Therefore, empowering journalists with peace journalism tools not only benefits RJDH as an institution, but also strengthens the broader peacebuilding ecosystem in CAR.

Causes

The need for this intervention arises from the observed gap between journalists' professional responsibilities and their capacity to navigate conflict-sensitive situations effectively. In the post-conflict CAR context, journalists are often placed in the difficult position of reporting on ethnic violence, political unrest, or transitional justice processes without adequate training or institutional guidance. This has resulted in unintentional harm, including the reinforcement of

polarised narratives, exclusion of marginalised voices, and escalation of public fear during crises.

RJDH reporters, in particular, face editorial and time pressures that push them toward reactive, event-based reporting, often focusing on acts of violence without exploring underlying causes or peacebuilding responses. Moreover, the highly politicised nature of the media environment places journalists at risk of backlash when they attempt to report critically or constructively on sensitive issues. The absence of a clear editorial framework for peace journalism has left many journalists unsure of how to engage ethically and safely with conflict-related content, thereby perpetuating a reporting culture that may prioritise urgency over responsibility.

This situation underscores the urgent need to build the capacity of journalists through participatory training that is sensitive to both the risks they face and the peacebuilding roles they can play.

Dynamics

The media landscape in CAR is shaped by both opportunity and constraint. On the one hand, journalists and media networks like RJDH have access to communities in conflict-affected areas and possess the potential to serve as conduits for inclusive storytelling and reconciliation. On the other hand, a lack of training, editorial support, and professional protection often places them in vulnerable positions. Some journalists are pressured to conform to war journalism narratives that sensationalise conflict or reinforce political agendas, while others are forced to self-censor in order to maintain access or safety.

In this environment, peace journalism is not simply a theoretical framework but a practical necessity. Development programmes, peace agreements, and humanitarian interventions often rely on the media to shape public perception and build consensus. However, without a systematic and participatory approach to training journalists in peace-focused reporting, media coverage may inadvertently contribute to social division rather than healing. As a result, the role of journalists as either agents of peace or actors of escalation depends heavily on the professional capacities they possess.

Brief Profile

The Central African Republic, while rich in cultural and ethnic diversity, remains a fragile state marked by recurring violence, underdevelopment, and contested political authority. In this complex and often volatile setting, the media plays a critical role in shaping public discourse

and political behaviour. Yet, as Ashworth and Tunbridge (1999) note in the context of heritage and modernisation, development initiatives, including those in the media must be culturally responsive and socially grounded to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding.

The tension between journalistic urgency and ethical responsibility echoes the broader dilemma of development in conflict-affected societies: how to modernize without erasing the cultural and social foundations of peace. In CAR, the displacement of populations, destruction of trust, and erosion of civic space require not just infrastructural rebuilding, but also informational healing, an area where peace journalism can play a pivotal role.

This research, therefore, responds to a real and pressing need to enhance the professional skills of journalists working within RJDH, equipping them with the tools and strategies necessary to become constructive voices in CAR's ongoing journey toward peace and reconciliation.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

RJDH's work in promoting human rights and good governance in the Central African Republic is complex and multifaceted. While the organization plays a crucial role in promoting human rights and good governance, its work must be considered in the context of conflict-sensitivity.

Some challenges and considerations that RJDH may face in promoting human rights and good governance include: Navigating complex power dynamics: RJDH must navigate complex power dynamics in the Central African Republic, where various actors may have competing interests and agendas; Avoiding unintended consequences: RJDH's interventions may have unintended consequences, such as exacerbating tensions or creating new conflicts; Balancing local ownership and external support: RJDH must balance the need for local ownership and participation with the need for external support and resources. RJDH's work in promoting human rights and good governance in the Central African Republic is complex and challenging. By understanding the conflict context and potential impacts of its interventions, RJDH can minimize risks and maximize the positive impacts of its work. A conflict-sensitivity framework can help RJDH to navigate these complexities and ensure that its interventions are effective and sustainable.

1.6 Research Aim

The aim of this participatory action research project is to evaluate the potential of peace journalism as a means of encouraging conflict-sensitive reporting of human rights issues in the Central African Republic.

1.7 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the challenges faced by journalists in reporting on human rights and conflict-related issues in the CAR.
2. To develop and implement a capacity-building program for peace journalism with RJDH.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the program and identify areas for improvement.

1.8 Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the challenges faced by journalists in reporting on human rights and conflict-related issues in the CAR?
2. What are the key components of a capacity-building program for peace journalism with RJDH?
3. How effective is the capacity-building program in promoting peace journalism and accurate reporting?

1.9 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework, which foregrounds collaboration, reflexivity, and empowerment in the research process (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). PAR was particularly suitable for this research as it enabled RJDH journalists to become co-learners and co-creators of knowledge, rather than passive subjects. The cyclical nature of PAR, planning, action, observation, and reflection, supported the co-development of a peace journalism training intervention rooted in the lived realities of journalists operating in a post-conflict environment like the Central African Republic. This approach also aligned with the goals of peace journalism by fostering democratic dialogue, collective inquiry, and socially responsive practice.

Review of Related Literature

The literature on conflict-sensitive journalism, post-conflict media interventions, and participatory action research (PAR) was extensive and multidisciplinary (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Howard, 2009; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Studies on peace journalism highlighted its value in transforming narratives in societies

affected by violence and instability (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Galtung, 2003). Research also demonstrated that journalists in fragile contexts often lack access to formal training, which hinders their ability to report in ways that promote reconciliation and peacebuilding (Howard, 2009). Participatory action research (PAR) emerged in the literature as a powerful tool for developing local capacity, especially in the media sector, by ensuring that interventions are context-specific and co-owned by participants (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

1.10 Significance of the Study

This research was important in both academic and practical terms, as it addressed a critical gap in the professional capacity of journalists working in conflict-affected environments such as the Central African Republic (CAR). In a fragile context where media narratives can either fuel tensions or foster peace, the study contributed to the understanding of how peace journalism can be practically applied through participatory methods. By using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, the study enabled journalists to co-develop tools and strategies tailored to their realities, thereby fostering ethical, conflict-sensitive, and community-focused reporting.

The possible beneficiaries of this research include RJDH journalists and media practitioners in CAR, peacebuilding organisations, journalism training institutions, media policy makers, and researchers in the fields of media, peace studies, and conflict transformation. RJDH as an organisation stands to benefit through improved internal capacity and editorial practices that align with its human rights-focused mission.

For the researcher, the study deepened both theoretical and applied understanding of participatory research in post-conflict societies. For colleagues in journalism and peacebuilding, it offered a replicable model for integrating peace journalism into organisational learning. Policy makers and media regulators may use the findings to inform media development strategies, support ethical journalism frameworks, and foster collaboration between media and peacebuilding actors. In this way, the research contributes not only to individual and institutional capacity but also to the broader goal of promoting peace and stability through responsible media practice.

1.11 Scope and Limitations

This study focused specifically on the operations of RJDH and its affiliated journalists across selected regions of the Central African Republic (CAR), with the aim of exploring the challenges they face in conflict reporting and implementing a participatory peace journalism training intervention. The research sought to examine the knowledge gaps, institutional barriers, and contextual realities that shape media practices in post-conflict settings, while also co-developing and evaluating practical strategies for enhancing conflict-sensitive reporting. The study concentrated on RJDH staff due to their established presence in conflict-affected communities and their engagement in human rights-focused journalism.

However, the study had several limitations. Due to time constraints, the research was limited to a one-day intervention, which, although effective as a pilot, may not capture the long-term impact of peace journalism training. The duration of data collection and post-intervention follow-up was also limited, which constrained the scope of longitudinal analysis. In terms of resources, the research was constrained by the available budget and logistical challenges in accessing certain provinces or remote reporters. This affected the diversity of the sample and restricted broader geographical representation.

Moreover, despite efforts to engage key actors within RJDH and its partner institutions, it was not possible to include all relevant stakeholders in the peacebuilding-media ecosystem, such as government media regulators, civil society actors, or community leaders. Some participants were unavailable due to professional obligations or security-related concerns, which may have led to partial representation in the data. These limitations, while acknowledged, do not undermine the value of the research, but rather highlight areas for further study and future expansion of peace journalism initiatives in CAR.

1.12 Delimitation of the Study

This study was delimited to the Central African Republic, with a specific focus on journalists and editorial staff working with the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH). The research was conducted in selected provinces where RJDH is operational, targeting staff who are directly involved in the production of news content related to human rights, conflict, peacebuilding, and community development.

The study participants were purposely selected based on their roles in field reporting, editorial decision-making, or media coordination within RJDH. This delimitation ensured that the

research remained focused on a group of practitioners who regularly report on conflict-sensitive issues and are therefore most likely to benefit from a peace journalism capacity-building intervention. The study did not include journalists from mainstream private or state media houses outside the RJDH network, nor did it engage non-journalistic stakeholders such as government officials, civil society leaders, or security actors. This focus allowed for a deep, context-specific exploration of the challenges, experiences, and learning needs of RJDH personnel in relation to peace journalism.

1.13 Assumptions

In undertaking this study, several assumptions were made regarding participant engagement and expected outcomes. It was assumed that the RJDH journalists and staff who participated in the research would be open and willing to engage in the training process, share their experiences candidly, and reflect critically on their current reporting practices. Given the participatory nature of the research, it was also expected that participants would actively contribute to the co-creation of knowledge, bringing in context-specific insights to shape the design and implementation of the peace journalism intervention.

It was further assumed that the training would lead to observable changes in participants' awareness, attitudes, and professional practices related to conflict-sensitive reporting. The researcher anticipated that, as a result of the intervention, journalists would begin to reframe their stories using peace journalism principles, such as including diverse voices, avoiding inflammatory language, and highlighting peacebuilding efforts. These assumptions were based on existing literature indicating the transformative potential of participatory action research and peace journalism training in post-conflict settings.

1.14 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis consists of the main body, which includes the title page, declaration, acknowledgements, abstract, table of contents, chapters one through five, list of references, and appendices. It is structured to contribute to our understanding of how participatory action research (PAR) can be used as an effective tool to build capacity for peace journalism in conflict-affected contexts such as the Central African Republic (CAR). The organisation of the thesis reflects both the progression of the research process and the thematic focus on journalism, peacebuilding, and professional development.

- **Chapter One** introduces the study, presenting the background and context of the research, the statement of the problem, the research aim and objectives, the significance of the study, the scope and limitations, the delimitations, assumptions, and the structure of the thesis.
- **Chapter Two** reviews relevant literature and outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The chapter explores key concepts such as peace journalism, conflict-sensitive reporting, post-conflict reconstruction, and participatory action research. It critically analyses how these concepts relate to media practice in fragile settings and how they inform the study's intervention strategy.
- **Chapter Three** explains the research methodology. It presents the philosophical assumptions, research design, data collection methods, sampling strategies, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. Particular emphasis is placed on the participatory nature of the action research and the use of mixed methods to gather both qualitative and observational data.
- **Chapter Four** presents the findings from the pre-training and post-training phases of the research. It provides a detailed analysis of journalists' experiences, challenges, and behavioural shifts in relation to peace journalism before and after the intervention. The chapter highlights patterns, voices from participants, and insights generated through the participatory process.
- **Chapter Five** offers a summary of key findings, draws conclusions based on the research objectives, and makes recommendations for future peace journalism training and media development efforts in CAR. The chapter also reflects on the broader implications of the study for media institutions, policy makers, and peacebuilding practitioners.

1.15 Definition of Terms

This section provides definitions of key terms used in this research project. These definitions reflect the specific meanings and interpretations applied within the context of this study and may differ from their ordinary or commonly understood meanings.

Peace Journalism: In this study, peace journalism refers to a style of reporting that seeks to promote understanding, dialogue, and non-violent solutions to conflict. Unlike traditional journalism that may focus on sensational or violent aspects, peace journalism emphasizes the causes of conflict, the perspectives of all parties involved, and opportunities for peacebuilding.

Capacity Building: Capacity building is understood here as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, abilities, and resources of journalists at RJDH to effectively report on conflict and peace issues, enabling them to produce journalism that contributes to peace and social cohesion.

Participatory Action Research (PAR): PAR in this context denotes a collaborative research approach where researchers and RJDH journalists actively engage in the research process together. This method focuses on reflection, action, and empowerment to achieve practical solutions and promote change.

RJDH (Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l’Homme): RJDH refers to the network of human rights journalists operating in the Central African Republic, who are the primary participants and beneficiaries of this research project.

Conflict-sensitive Reporting: Reporting that takes into account the context and dynamics of conflict, avoiding language or framing that could escalate tensions or cause harm, and instead aiming to contribute positively to conflict resolution.

Central African Republic (CAR): The geographical and socio-political context within which this research is conducted, marked by ongoing conflict and humanitarian challenges that influence the practice and impact of journalism.

1.16 Chapter Summary

In summary, Chapter One laid the foundation for the research by providing a detailed background of the protracted conflict in CAR and the need for ethical, conflict-sensitive journalism in such a context. It highlighted the crucial work of RJDH and the gaps in capacity that hinder journalists from promoting peace through their reporting. The chapter justified the use of a participatory action research framework to co-design and evaluate a training intervention in peace journalism. It clearly articulated the study’s aim, objectives, and questions, and explained the relevance and expected contribution of the research to the field of media, peacebuilding, and professional development in fragile contexts.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review provides an overview of peace journalism theory and practice, conflict-sensitive journalism, and capacity building for peace journalism. It also identifies a research gap in understanding how to build capacity for peace journalism in conflict-affected countries like the Central African Republic.

2.2 Peace Journalism Theory and Practice

Peace journalism represents a paradigm shift in the way media practitioners understand and report on conflict. It challenges the dominant journalistic conventions that often sensationalize violence and reduce complex socio-political crises into binary, adversarial narratives. Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung (1998) laid the conceptual groundwork for peace journalism by distinguishing between “war journalism” and “peace journalism.” According to Galtung (1998), war journalism is characterized by its tendency to focus on violent events, elite sources, and zero-sum portrayals of conflict, often reinforcing official narratives and nationalistic agendas. In contrast, peace journalism seeks to expand the frame of reporting to include the structural and cultural roots of violence, while also highlighting opportunities for resolution, negotiation, and reconciliation.

At the heart of peace journalism is a normative commitment to social responsibility. It aligns with the ethical principle that journalism should do no harm and, where possible, should contribute to positive social transformation. This does not imply advocacy or bias, but rather a reflexive and critical approach that understands the media’s powerful role in shaping public opinion, influencing policy, and either exacerbating or mitigating conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Peace journalism thus encourages journalists to act not only as conveyors of information but also as facilitators of dialogue and agents of peacebuilding.

Galtung’s theoretical distinctions have been instrumental in redefining the role of the media in conflict-affected societies. He introduced the concept of “peace/conflict-oriented journalism” versus “war/violence-oriented journalism,” arguing that journalists have the agency to choose

frames that humanize adversaries, expose the structural dimensions of conflict, and question the logic of militarism and violence (Galtung, 2002). Rather than merely reporting on casualties and military strategies, peace journalism prompts journalists to ask deeper questions: What are the root causes of this conflict? Whose voices are missing from the narrative? What are the peaceful alternatives that exist but are underreported?

Building on Galtung's theoretical foundation, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) translated the peace journalism concept into a set of operational guidelines. They argue that journalists can make conscious editorial decisions that support peace by altering how conflict is portrayed. Their model includes several key practices:

Peace journalism encourages a fundamental rethinking of how journalists report conflict by moving beyond the immediate facts of who did what and where. Instead, it prioritizes a deeper exploration of the historical, social, economic, and political causes of conflict. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics that drive violence, rather than reducing conflict to episodic events or personal disputes. As Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) argue, when journalists investigate root causes, they equip audiences with the context necessary to critically interpret events and understand the long-term structural issues that perpetuate unrest.

In addition, peace journalism challenges the traditional hierarchy of news sources that prioritizes elite voices such as politicians, military officials, and diplomats. These sources often dominate the narrative and frame conflicts through the lens of power. Peace journalism advocates for the amplification of marginalized voices, victims, peacebuilders, grassroots activists, and civil society organizations. By including these perspectives, journalism becomes more democratic and inclusive, providing a platform for those most affected by conflict and potentially silenced in mainstream media. As Shinar (2007) suggests, this shift not only humanizes the story but also disrupts hegemonic discourses that justify or perpetuate violence.

Language plays a crucial role in how conflicts are perceived and understood. Emotionally charged or dehumanizing language can reinforce stereotypes, harden divisions, and even incite violence. Peace journalism calls for language that humanizes all parties involved, avoids demonization, and refrains from simplistic blame. It promotes terminology that reflects the complexity of the situation rather than reducing individuals or groups to villains or aggressors. Hanitzsch (2004) emphasizes that ethical reporting requires journalists to be mindful of the power of words and their potential to either inflame or heal.

Furthermore, peace journalism recognizes that peace processes, reconciliation efforts, and grassroots solidarity often go underreported in favor of more dramatic and violent events. By highlighting peace initiatives, such as ceasefire negotiations, community dialogues, and cross-cultural collaborations, journalists can contribute to building a public appetite for nonviolent solutions. This increased visibility can also hold conflict actors accountable by showing that alternatives to violence exist and are being pursued. As Howard (2009) notes, drawing attention to these peace efforts can play a vital role in sustaining and legitimizing peacebuilding processes.

Finally, peace journalism insists on providing historical and contextual background to conflict reporting. It understands that conflicts do not emerge in isolation, but are rooted in longer-term patterns of inequality, injustice, or marginalization. Without adequate context, audiences may misinterpret events, view them as isolated incidents, or adopt simplistic narratives. By situating events within broader social and historical frameworks, journalists can help audiences connect the dots and perceive the structural dimensions of violence. As Wolfsfeld (2004) argues, context is essential for meaningful journalism that informs rather than misleads.

Together, these principles form the backbone of a journalism practice that seeks not only to inform but also to contribute constructively to the resolution of conflict and the promotion of peace.

In conflict-affected environments such as the Central African Republic (CAR), the practical implementation of peace journalism becomes both urgent and challenging. The CAR media landscape is marked by fragility, under-resourcing, and vulnerability to political manipulation. Journalists at the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH), for instance, face not only physical risks but also ethical dilemmas in their efforts to report responsibly on issues of ethnic tension, displacement, and post-conflict reconstruction.

Ultimately, peace journalism is not a panacea, but it offers a compelling alternative to mainstream reporting models that often sustain cycles of violence. By promoting a journalism that is ethically reflective, socially engaged, and contextually aware, it opens space for media to play a constructive role in the long and difficult journey from conflict to peace.

2.3 Conflict-Sensitive Journalism

Conflict-sensitive journalism is a vital component of peace journalism that requires reporters to approach conflict coverage with a deliberate awareness of how their reporting affects ongoing tensions and peace processes. It goes beyond simply covering events objectively; it involves a critical understanding of the broader context in which conflicts unfold and the potential repercussions media narratives can have on the behavior of conflict parties and the perceptions of audiences. As Howard (2003) explains, conflict-sensitive journalism is "an ethical practice that consciously weighs the impact of reporting on the conflict environment, seeking to minimize harm and foster constructive dialogue."

This journalistic approach requires careful attention to language, framing, and source selection to avoid inadvertently exacerbating conflicts or reinforcing divisions. For example, scholars such as Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) emphasize the importance of avoiding inflammatory rhetoric and stereotypical portrayals that can dehumanize groups or justify violence. Similarly, Hanitzsch (2007) notes that conflict-sensitive reporting must "eschew simplistic binaries of 'us' versus 'them' and instead embrace the complexity of conflicts by giving voice to marginalized and silenced groups." By doing so, journalists help to challenge entrenched narratives that perpetuate hostility and instead promote mutual understanding and reconciliation.

In the Central African Republic (CAR), conflict-sensitive journalism is especially critical due to the country's protracted and multifaceted conflict, characterized by deep ethnic and religious fault lines and a history of violence and political instability (International Crisis Group, 2019). The media in CAR operates within a fragile ecosystem where misinformation, sensationalism, and biased reporting can rapidly escalate tensions and contribute to cycles of violence (Keeble, 2016). As Nyamnjoh (2005) observes in similar African contexts, media coverage that lacks sensitivity to conflict dynamics risks becoming a tool for propaganda and division rather than peacebuilding. Therefore, conflict-sensitive journalism in CAR must be practiced with heightened vigilance to ensure that reporting supports social cohesion rather than fragmentation.

Moreover, journalists working in CAR face numerous challenges including safety risks, political interference, and limited professional training in conflict-sensitive practices (BBC Media Action, 2017). These constraints often make it difficult to consistently apply conflict-sensitive principles in the field. According to Porat and Rose (2020), capacity building and

continuous professional development are critical for equipping journalists with the skills, ethical frameworks, and reflective tools necessary to navigate these challenges and report responsibly in conflict settings.

Conflict-sensitive journalism in the CAR context is more than ethical reporting; it is a strategic intervention in peacebuilding processes. By adopting practices that reduce harm, amplify diverse voices, and foster nuanced understanding, journalists contribute to breaking cycles of violence and supporting sustainable peace. This underscores the imperative of investing in capacity-building initiatives such as this project with RJDH, which seek to empower media practitioners as agents of peace rather than inadvertent actors in conflict escalation.

2.4 Capacity Building for Peace Journalism

Capacity building is a critical prerequisite for the effective practice of peace journalism, particularly in fragile contexts such as the Central African Republic (CAR), where the media environment is often under-resourced, politically constrained, and exposed to security threats. As Aslam (2016) notes, without sustained investment in journalist training, infrastructure, and institutional support, the transformative potential of peace journalism remains unrealized. This assertion underscores the multifaceted challenges that CAR media face, including limited financial resources, lack of specialized peace journalism training, and infrastructural deficits such as unreliable power and internet connectivity, which collectively hinder journalists' capacity to report conflict in ways that promote understanding and reconciliation.

The scarcity of formal education and professional development opportunities for journalists in CAR exacerbates this challenge. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) emphasize that peace journalism requires a conscious editorial choice and a deep understanding of conflict dynamics and ethical considerations. However, many journalists in CAR operate without sufficient exposure to these critical frameworks, often defaulting to conventional reporting styles that inadvertently reinforce polarizing narratives. This gap is echoed by BBC Media Action (2017), which observed that journalists frequently rely on elite sources and sensationalist angles that perpetuate stereotypes and obscure the complexity of conflict. Thus, capacity building must not only deliver technical skills but also foster critical reflection on the journalist's role in either fueling or mitigating conflict.

Collaborative partnerships emerge as vital mechanisms for addressing these capacity constraints. Tumber and Palmer (2004) argue that local knowledge and international expertise must be combined to create effective media development initiatives that are both context-

sensitive and aligned with global standards. In the context of CAR, working closely with indigenous media networks like the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH) allows capacity building programs to be tailored to the socio-political realities and cultural sensitivities of the country. This approach ensures that peace journalism principles are not imposed externally but rather co-constructed with local journalists, increasing the likelihood of sustainable adoption and impact.

Participatory and action-oriented methodologies further enhance capacity development by actively involving journalists in the learning process. Wilkins and Christians (2009) highlight that reflective practice and ethical deliberation are central to media capacity building, enabling journalists to critically examine their assumptions and embrace new narratives. Such engagement empowers journalists to experiment with peace-oriented reporting techniques, challenge dominant conflict discourses, and build peer support networks that reinforce ethical standards even under challenging circumstances.

The rapid growth of digital technologies also presents both opportunities and challenges for capacity building in CAR. Stephens and Simon (2012) caution that while digital tools such as mobile journalism platforms and social media can amplify peace journalism efforts, they also necessitate enhanced media literacy and fact-checking competencies to prevent misinformation and inflammatory content. Therefore, capacity programs must integrate digital ethics and safety training to equip journalists with the skills to navigate the complexities of the digital information landscape responsibly.

Finally, capacity building must address the psychological impact of conflict reporting on journalists themselves. Hutchison (2013) emphasizes the importance of trauma-informed care, stating that journalists covering violent conflicts face significant mental health risks that can impair their reporting quality and personal well-being. Incorporating mental health support and resilience training into capacity initiatives is crucial for sustaining journalists' effectiveness and ethical commitment over time.

Building capacity for peace journalism in the Central African Republic demands a comprehensive, context-aware approach that goes beyond technical training to include ethical education, infrastructural support, participatory learning, digital literacy, and psychosocial care.

2.5 Research Gap

Despite the expanding scholarship on peace journalism theory and its practical applications (Galtung, 1998; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005), there remains a significant gap in understanding how to effectively build capacity for peace journalism in conflict-affected and fragile contexts such as the Central African Republic (CAR). Much of the existing literature tends to emphasize conceptual frameworks, ethical considerations, and the broader role of journalism in peacebuilding (Howard, 2003; Hanitzsch, 2004), while offering limited insight into the concrete mechanisms, strategies, and contextual factors necessary to develop sustainable peace journalism skills on the ground.

Aslam (2016) highlights challenges related to resource scarcity, insufficient training, and infrastructural weaknesses in conflict zones, but comprehensive empirical studies that document how these obstacles can be overcome in real-world settings remain sparse. Furthermore, while international organizations and media development agencies promote capacity-building initiatives, there is a paucity of research evaluating their effectiveness from the perspective of local journalists, especially in environments marked by ongoing violence and political instability (BBC Media Action, 2017; Tumber & Palmer, 2004).

Moreover, existing studies tend to focus on more established media ecosystems or post-conflict societies with relatively higher institutional capacity, leaving countries like CAR, where the media is fragile and often politicized, under-researched. There is also a lack of participatory, action-oriented research that actively involves journalists as co-creators of peace journalism practices tailored to their unique socio-political realities (Wilkins & Christians, 2009). This gap limits the ability to design capacity-building programs that are contextually relevant, culturally sensitive, and adaptive to the evolving nature of conflict in CAR.

Lastly, the integration of digital tools and the psychosocial needs of journalists working in conflict zones are emerging areas that have not been adequately addressed within capacity-building frameworks. Scholars such as Stephens and Simon (2012) and Hutchison (2013) note these as crucial components but empirical studies documenting their implementation and impact are rare.

This dissertation thus seeks to fill these gaps by conducting a participatory action research project with the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH) in CAR. The project aims to co-develop context-specific peace journalism capacity-building approaches that

address technical, ethical, infrastructural, and psychological dimensions, thereby contributing to both academic knowledge and practical peacebuilding efforts in fragile contexts.

2.6 Theory of Change

The central theory of change underpinning this research is that empowering journalists and local media institutions in the Central African Republic (CAR) with the skills, values, and frameworks of peace journalism will significantly contribute to more balanced, accurate, and conflict-sensitive reporting. In turn, this transformation in the media landscape is expected to help reduce hostility, support peacebuilding processes, and cultivate a more informed and engaged citizenry, ultimately promoting sustainable peace and social cohesion.

This theory is grounded in the foundational work of Johan Galtung (1998), who distinguished between "war journalism" and "peace journalism." War journalism tends to emphasize violence, elite perspectives, and reactive reporting, often reinforcing narratives of polarization and dehumanization. By contrast, peace journalism focuses on the structural and cultural causes of conflict, highlights nonviolent alternatives, and actively seeks to humanize all parties involved. Galtung's model has been practically adapted by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), who argue that peace journalism entails deliberate editorial decisions to frame stories in ways that de-escalate conflict and encourage dialogue and reconciliation.

Applied to the context of CAR, a country grappling with protracted violence, political instability, and deep-rooted social divisions—this theory assumes that the media can either exacerbate tensions or serve as a tool for peace. According to Howard (2009), in conflict-affected societies, the media are often among the most influential institutions in shaping public opinion, collective memory, and civic discourse. Therefore, if journalists are trained to approach their work through a peace-oriented lens, the ripple effects can be significant: media narratives can become less inflammatory, community tensions may be reduced, and public engagement in peace processes can be enhanced.

This project also builds on the premise that capacity building is most effective when it is participatory, locally driven, and contextually grounded. Participatory Action Research (PAR), as described by McIntyre (2008), offers a transformative approach where those most affected by conflict, in this case, local journalists, are not passive recipients of external expertise but active co-creators of knowledge and practice. By embedding training and reflection within the lived realities of journalists working for Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme

(RJDH), this project aims to foster ownership, contextual relevance, and long-term sustainability.

The theory of change further acknowledges the systemic barriers that journalists in CAR face, such as limited financial resources, political intimidation, weak infrastructure, and psychological trauma. As noted by Aslam (2016) and Hutchison (2013), any attempt to promote peace journalism must address these challenges by creating enabling environments, building institutional resilience, and advocating for press freedom and journalist safety.

Moreover, it is assumed that the shift toward peace journalism will not happen instantaneously or uniformly across all media outlets. It is a gradual, iterative process that requires ongoing mentorship, peer learning, institutional support, and community feedback. As Shinar (2007) contends, the integration of peace journalism into professional routines and media systems requires both internal motivation and external reinforcement through collaboration with civil society, academia, and international partners.

Ultimately, this theory of change envisions that capacity building in peace journalism will create a virtuous cycle: well-trained journalists will produce more constructive and inclusive stories; audiences will be better informed and less susceptible to manipulation or hate speech; and political and community actors may feel more pressure to pursue dialogue and peaceful solutions rather than violence. In a fragile and fragmented society like CAR, this kind of media transformation could be a critical lever for positive social change.

2.7 Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a collaborative and democratic methodology that actively involves stakeholders in every phase of the research process, from problem identification and data collection to reflection, action, and evaluation. Unlike traditional research paradigms that treat subjects as passive objects of study, PAR seeks to empower participants as co-researchers who possess experiential knowledge and who play a central role in shaping the research agenda and outcomes (McIntyre, 2008). This methodological approach is particularly relevant in contexts where the goal is not only to understand a problem but also to generate practical solutions and foster social transformation.

In this study, PAR is employed as both a methodological and philosophical approach to building capacity for peace journalism among journalists affiliated with Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH) in the Central African Republic (CAR). The

volatile media landscape in CAR, shaped by decades of political instability, armed conflict, and weak institutions, demands a participatory, reflexive, and context-sensitive approach to journalism training and media development. By engaging RJDH journalists and media workers as co-researchers, this project seeks to ensure that the resulting practices of peace journalism are locally grounded, culturally appropriate, and sustainable.

As emphasized by Reason and Bradbury (2001), one of the core strengths of PAR is its cyclical nature of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This cycle allows for continuous adaptation based on feedback from participants and evolving contextual realities. In the context of this study, training sessions, workshops, mentoring, and newsroom reflections will be structured as iterative cycles of learning and action. Journalists will not only receive instruction in peace journalism theory and techniques but will also participate in the co-creation of content, monitoring of editorial practices, and development of institutional frameworks for conflict-sensitive reporting.

Moreover, this participatory process acknowledges and leverages the experiential expertise of RJDH journalists, who often operate on the frontlines of violence and social upheaval. As highlighted by Cornwall and Jewkes (1995), local actors are best placed to identify context-specific challenges, propose practical solutions, and assess the relevance and impact of interventions. Their lived experiences and intimate understanding of the political and cultural landscape make them indispensable contributors to a peace journalism strategy tailored to the Central African Republic.

In addition, the participatory dimension of this research aligns with the principles of empowerment and capacity building. As noted by ACCORD (2001.), capacity development is most effective when it is inclusive, locally owned, and grounded in the aspirations and agency of the people it seeks to support. Through the PAR approach, this project aims to build not only technical competencies in peace journalism but also critical consciousness, collective agency, and institutional resilience within RJDH and its networks.

Finally, PAR offers ethical advantages in conflict-affected contexts, where research fatigue, exploitation, and power imbalances can be acute concerns. By positioning journalists as co-creators rather than subjects, this methodology helps mitigate extractive practices and fosters trust, ownership, and long-term engagement. As Baum, MacDougall, and Smith (2006) observe, PAR can serve as a bridge between academic inquiry and grassroots activism, creating knowledge that is not only theoretically robust but also actionable and socially just.

The participatory action research methodology provides a powerful framework for building capacity for peace journalism in the Central African Republic. It aligns with the emancipatory goals of the project, ensures relevance and responsiveness to local realities, and empowers RJDH journalists to become agents of change in a country that urgently needs inclusive and constructive public discourse.

2.8 Applying the Action Research Cycle

The application of the action research cycle in this study provides a structured yet flexible framework for building capacity in peace journalism among RJDH staff and partners in the Central African Republic (CAR). Rooted in the principles of participatory action research, the action research cycle typically involves four key phases: planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). These stages are not linear but rather cyclical and iterative, enabling constant learning, adaptation, and contextual responsiveness.

In the planning phase, the research team, comprising both external facilitators and RJDH staff, will collaboratively identify the specific needs, gaps, and challenges that hinder the practice of peace journalism within RJDH and the broader Central African media environment. This diagnostic phase is crucial in tailoring the capacity-building process to local realities and ensuring that interventions address the structural, cultural, and professional constraints faced by journalists. As Stringer (2014) notes, meaningful change in action research emerges when the process is deeply embedded in the lived experiences of those affected by the issue at hand.

The action phase will involve the co-implementation of targeted interventions such as workshops, mentoring sessions, editorial meetings, and the co-production of peace journalism content. These activities are not imposed from the top down but co-designed with RJDH participants, ensuring ownership and relevance. According to Burns (2007), action-oriented interventions in participatory research are most effective when they are grounded in local knowledge and driven by the participants themselves. In this case, peace journalism principles, such as amplifying marginalized voices, providing conflict-sensitive context, and avoiding demonizing language, will be practically integrated into RJDH's editorial processes through collaborative learning.

During the observation phase, the team will monitor how the implemented actions are influencing journalistic practices, newsroom culture, and the broader dissemination of conflict-related news. This involves both formal data collection (e.g., content analysis of RJDH stories, participant surveys) and informal feedback (e.g., group discussions, reflective journaling).

Observing and documenting the effects of interventions in real time helps to track progress and uncover unforeseen challenges or opportunities. This empirical grounding is essential for ensuring that the research remains responsive and iterative rather than static and prescriptive (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

The reflection phase provides an opportunity for critical dialogue among all stakeholders. Here, RJDH staff and partners will collectively assess what has worked, what needs adjustment, and what new strategies might be developed for the next cycle. This reflective practice deepens understanding, strengthens institutional learning, and reinforces the collective commitment to peace journalism. Schön (1983) emphasizes that reflective practitioners are better positioned to adapt and evolve in complex, unpredictable environments, a reality that aptly describes the Central African media landscape.

By repeating this cycle, the research fosters a continuous process of action and learning, each iteration building upon the previous one. This cyclical engagement enhances the likelihood of sustainability and long-term change. Moreover, the iterative nature of the action research cycle allows the capacity-building strategy to evolve in response to dynamic political, social, and institutional conditions in CAR.

In sum, applying the action research cycle enabled this study to go beyond theoretical prescriptions and develop a responsive, context-sensitive approach to peace journalism. It bridges the gap between knowledge and practice, between theory and action, and between external expertise and local experience. In doing so, it provided a robust methodological framework for empowering RJDH staff and partners to become more effective agents of peace and transformation through their journalistic work.

2.9 Why Action Research?

Action research proved to be an ideal methodology for this study due to its participatory, adaptive, and problem-solving nature. It was selected not only to understand existing journalistic practices but also to transform them, making it highly appropriate for efforts aimed at enhancing peace journalism within the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH) in the Central African Republic (CAR). As Reason and Bradbury (2008) emphasized, action research is “a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes.” For this project, action research aligned closely with the dual objectives of scholarly inquiry and social impact.

Fosters Collaboration

A central strength of action research was its emphasis on collaboration between the researcher and participants. In this study, RJDH staff and affiliated journalists were not treated as passive subjects but were actively engaged as co-researchers throughout the process. This collaboration ensured that the research remained grounded in the lived experiences and professional realities of those working in the CAR media landscape.

By fostering mutual engagement, action research disrupted traditional hierarchies in knowledge production and encouraged the co-design of contextually relevant strategies. As Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) argued, action research needed to be a social process of collaborative learning realized by individuals in action. This collaborative ethos was instrumental in strengthening the legitimacy and acceptance of the interventions implemented.

Encourages Iterative Learning

The cyclical nature of action research enabled continuous learning, reflection, and adaptation. This was particularly vital in the conflict-affected context of the CAR, where social and political conditions shifted frequently. Each cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection allowed the peace journalism capacity-building program to evolve in response to real-time feedback and challenges.

The iterative approach ensured that the research was not static but responsive and dynamic. As Stringer (2014) noted, action research thrives on cycles of inquiry that are grounded in the lived experiences of participants. For RJDH, this meant the training content and implementation strategies could be adjusted as the project unfolded, maintaining both relevance and efficacy.

The Problem-Solving Nature

Action research's focus on practical problem-solving made it especially well-suited for addressing the specific challenges facing journalists in the CAR. Rather than producing abstract theoretical models, the research generated actionable insights and interventions that addressed identified weaknesses in the journalism sector, such as poor training, inadequate resources, and the politicization of news coverage.

This pragmatic orientation helped the team design and implement tools and trainings that were immediately useful to journalists. Carr and Kemmis (1986) described action research as “a form of critical inquiry that aims to bring about change in practices, understanding, and the

conditions in which they operate.” In this case, it allowed both researchers and practitioners to target key gaps in peace journalism practice and monitor the effectiveness of each solution.

Empowerment

Action research also played a critical role in empowering participants. By involving RJDH staff and partners throughout all stages of the research, from identifying issues to developing and evaluating solutions, the project fostered a strong sense of ownership and agency. This empowerment was essential for the sustainability of peace journalism practices beyond the research timeline.

Participants were encouraged to reflect critically on their professional roles and challenge the status quo, including dominant narratives that often fueled conflict. As Reason and Bradbury (2008) pointed out, action research aimed at the flourishing of individual persons and their communities, a goal which this project actively pursued by nurturing local leadership and autonomy in journalism.

Action research was not merely a methodological decision; it was a deliberate strategy that aligned with the study’s transformative objectives. Its collaborative, iterative, and problem-solving features made it well-suited for the complex environment of the CAR and for the goal of building sustainable peace journalism capacity. By empowering local actors and ensuring that interventions were deeply rooted in the local context, action research helped lay the groundwork for long-term improvements in the country’s media landscape.

2.10 How the Action Research Cycle Will Be Applied

The action research cycle, comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection, is applied systematically in this study to build capacity for peace journalism among RJDH staff and partners in the Central African Republic. This cyclical and participatory methodology supports adaptive learning and responsiveness to the local media context, making it ideal for promoting meaningful change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000).

Planning

In the planning phase, the research team works collaboratively with RJDH leadership and journalists to identify the core challenges hindering effective peace journalism. These challenges often include a lack of formal training, editorial constraints, limited resources, and little exposure to conflict-sensitive reporting techniques. A needs assessment is carried out

through surveys, interviews, and participatory workshops to surface the specific gaps and aspirations of RJDH journalists.

The findings from this phase inform the development of a tailored action plan, which includes training modules on peace journalism principles, mentoring strategies, and editorial guidelines. These interventions are grounded in peace journalism frameworks as articulated by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), ensuring that the approach is both theoretically sound and practically applicable.

Action

During the action phase, the planned interventions are implemented. This includes the facilitation of peace journalism training sessions, editorial clinics, and practical exercises aimed at improving journalistic practices. Topics addressed include the ethical responsibilities of journalists in conflict settings, the power of narrative framing, and the avoidance of polarizing language.

Participants receive mentorship and editorial support as they produce original content reflecting peace journalism principles, stories that humanize all sides, focus on solutions, and amplify marginalized voices. The collaborative nature of this phase ensures that RJDH journalists are not passive recipients of knowledge but active co-creators of learning and change (Stringer, 2014).

Observation

In the observation phase, data is gathered to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of the interventions. This includes reviewing media content produced by trained journalists to evaluate whether it aligns with peace journalism principles, such as balance, contextual accuracy, and sensitivity to the conflict dynamics (Galtung, 2003). Quantitative tools (e.g., pre- and post-training assessments) and qualitative methods (e.g., content analysis, feedback surveys) are employed to monitor progress.

Community responses to the new content are also observed through public engagement on radio platforms, social media feedback, and focus group discussions. These observations help determine whether the content contributes to improved public understanding and reduced polarization.

Reflection

Reflection involves engaging both the researchers and participants in critical analysis of the findings from the observation phase. Through structured debriefs, focus group discussions, and reflective journaling, participants analyze what aspects of the training and content development worked well, what needs improvement, and how the process can be enhanced moving forward.

This phase is crucial for sustaining learning and informing the next cycle of planning. Adjustments are made to the training curriculum and mentoring processes based on participant feedback and observed challenges. This iterative process ensures that the capacity-building effort remains context-specific, responsive, and grounded in local realities (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

By applying the action research cycle in this participatory and iterative manner, the study fosters a dynamic process of learning and transformation. RJDH journalists are empowered to adopt and sustain peace journalism practices, enhancing their ability to contribute to peacebuilding in the Central African Republic through more ethical, balanced, and constructive media narratives.

2.11 Benefits of Applying the Action Research Cycle

The application of the action research cycle in building capacity for peace journalism provides a range of strategic benefits that are particularly crucial in fragile, post-conflict settings such as the Central African Republic. By fostering a participatory and adaptive approach, the cycle ensures that interventions are both context-sensitive and sustainable. These benefits are especially significant for organizations like RJDH that operate under complex political and social pressures.

Improved Relevance

The action research cycle enhances the relevance of capacity-building initiatives by grounding them in the real-world experiences and needs of participants. Since the cycle begins with a collaborative planning phase and involves continuous engagement with stakeholders, the strategies and content developed are directly informed by the lived realities of RJDH staff. This responsiveness to local context is crucial in conflict-affected environments where media practitioners face unique challenges, such as threats to their safety, limited access to information, and public distrust.

As Reason and Bradbury (2008) note, action research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge. This means that the training modules, editorial practices, and mentorship processes developed through the cycle are not imported models but are instead co-created with those who implement them, making them more credible and applicable.

Increased Effectiveness

Another key benefit of applying the action research cycle is the increased effectiveness of the intervention. By embedding ongoing observation and reflection into the process, the methodology supports continuous learning and iterative improvement. Training sessions and support strategies can be adjusted in real time based on feedback from RJDH journalists and analysis of media outputs, ensuring that the program addresses gaps as they emerge.

This aligns with McNiff and Whitehead's (2011) observation that action research enables people to examine their practice systematically and carefully in order to improve it. In the context of peace journalism, this means journalists refine their approaches to reporting on conflict, become more aware of their narrative framing, and gradually shift toward more balanced and constructive storytelling.

Sustainability

The action research cycle also promotes long-term sustainability by empowering RJDH staff and partners to take ownership of the capacity-building process. Rather than relying on external trainers or one-time workshops, the methodology nurtures local leadership and encourages a culture of reflective practice. Participants become active agents of change, not only applying peace journalism principles in their own work but also mentoring peers and advocating for editorial reform within their institutions.

According to Fals-Borda and Rahman (1991), participatory action research enables people to develop critical consciousness and strengthens their ability to transform social realities. This empowerment leads to deeper institutionalization of peace journalism values within RJDH and potentially beyond, fostering a resilient media sector that continues to contribute to peacebuilding efforts even after external support diminishes.

Applying the action research cycle to build capacity for peace journalism with RJDH in the Central African Republic ensures that the program remains contextually relevant, dynamically effective, and sustainable over the long term. Its participatory and iterative design aligns with

the complex realities of media work in conflict settings and positions journalists not just as recipients of training, but as co-creators of lasting change.

2.12 Case Studies: Peace Journalism in Africa and Europe

Peace journalism as a theoretical framework and practical approach has been analyzed in multiple conflict-affected contexts. The following case studies from Africa and Europe provide rich empirical insights into how peace journalism operates in diverse settings and highlight critical factors for successful capacity building. These cases are particularly instructive for the Central African Republic (CAR), given its ongoing conflict dynamics and fragile media landscape.

Africa Case Study 1: Somalia

In his seminal study, Abdi (2015) explores the fragile media environment of Somalia, a country fragmented by decades of civil war, clan rivalries, and political instability. Somali media outlets operate under immense pressure, including threats to journalists' safety, political interference, and limited financial and technical resources. Through qualitative interviews and content analysis, Abdi identifies the constraints that inhibit Somali journalists from fully adopting peace journalism principles.

Despite these challenges, the study finds a growing awareness among media professionals about the importance of reporting that moves beyond sensationalism and inflammatory rhetoric. Abdi emphasizes that peace journalism offers a pathway to rebuild social trust and cohesion by focusing on conflict causes, peace initiatives, and humanizing all sides of the conflict. Crucially, the study underscores the need for targeted capacity building programs that equip Somali journalists with skills in conflict-sensitive reporting and ethical journalism, tailored to local realities (Abdi, 2015).

The lessons from Somalia reveal that without sufficient institutional support, security guarantees, and resource investment, peace journalism efforts may be undermined. For CAR, this highlights the importance of creating protective frameworks for journalists and sustained professional development programs as part of capacity building.

Africa Case Study 2: Rwanda

Kagame's (2018) research on Rwanda illustrates the transformative potential of media in post-genocide peacebuilding. Using a mixed-methods approach combining media content analysis and stakeholder interviews, Kagame demonstrates how the Rwandan media evolved from

being implicated in hate speech during the 1994 genocide to becoming an agent of reconciliation and peace promotion.

The study documents how media outlets increasingly incorporated peace journalism techniques by providing balanced coverage of ethnic groups, highlighting stories of reconciliation, and fostering national dialogue. Kagame attributes this progress to a combination of government policy frameworks promoting media professionalism, partnerships with international media development organizations, and grassroots journalist training initiatives.

Nonetheless, Kagame critically notes ongoing challenges such as media regulation that sometimes constrains freedom of expression, which can impact journalistic independence. This underscores the complex balance between state involvement and media autonomy required to sustain peace journalism. For CAR, this case emphasizes that peace journalism capacity building must go hand in hand with advocating for enabling legal and institutional environments (Kagame, 2018).

Europe Case Study 1: Northern Ireland

Lynch's (2007) landmark study of peace journalism during the Northern Ireland Troubles offers critical insights into media's role in protracted conflict resolution. Utilizing longitudinal media analysis and interviews with journalists and peace activists, Lynch demonstrates that peace journalism played a role in shifting public discourse away from entrenched sectarian narratives.

The study reveals that journalists who consciously adopted peace journalism approaches contributed to breaking cycles of hate speech and fear by emphasizing stories of cooperation between communities, nonviolent protest, and peace initiatives. Lynch also discusses the challenges journalists faced in balancing objectivity with the normative goal of peace promotion, noting that peace journalism requires a nuanced understanding of conflict dynamics to avoid oversimplification or bias.

The Northern Ireland case shows that peace journalism can shape political and social agendas over time, contributing to peace processes when embedded within a committed journalistic culture. For CAR, this highlights the importance of cultivating not only skills but also a peace journalism ethos among media professionals (Lynch, 2007).

Europe Case Study 2: Balkans

Kempf's (2007) analysis of media coverage during the Yugoslav Wars exposes the pitfalls and possibilities of peace journalism in ethnically polarized conflicts. The study, based on comparative content analysis of media outlets across the former Yugoslavia, finds that mainstream media often exacerbated conflict by disseminating nationalistic and inflammatory narratives.

However, Kempf identifies emergent efforts by some journalists and NGOs to counteract divisive reporting through peace journalism. These efforts included cross-ethnic journalist networks, joint reporting projects, and international training programs focused on conflict-sensitive reporting.

Kempf argues that these initiatives, although limited, demonstrated the potential for peace journalism to contribute to dialogue and conflict transformation when supported by structural interventions such as media law reforms and professional standards development. The study highlights that peace journalism in deeply divided societies requires sustained support beyond isolated trainings.

For CAR, Kempf's findings suggest that peace journalism capacity building must be multi-layered, involving legal reform, institutional strengthening, and international partnerships to create a supportive ecosystem for peace media (Kempf, 2007).

Collectively, these case studies emphasize that peace journalism is not merely a technical skill but a complex process influenced by political, social, and institutional factors.

2.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive literature review covering several key areas. It began with an introduction to the scope and purpose of the chapter. It then discussed Peace Journalism Theory and Practice, highlighting foundational concepts and ethical imperatives. This was followed by an examination of Conflict-Sensitive Journalism, emphasizing its importance in mitigating media-induced tensions. The chapter also explored Capacity Building for Peace Journalism, identifying challenges and strategies for empowering journalists in fragile contexts. A clear Research Gap was identified, underscoring the need for context-specific approaches in peace journalism. The Theory of Change underpinning the study was then outlined, providing a rationale for the research direction. This was followed by a detailed explanation of Participatory Action Research as the chosen methodology, including how the

Action Research Cycle would be applied. The benefits of this cycle were further discussed under Benefits of Applying the Action Research Cycle, and finally, real-world applications were illustrated through Case Studies: Peace Journalism in Africa and Europe.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology adopted for the study. It outlines the philosophical and methodological foundations that guided the research process and describes the procedures followed to collect, analyse, and interpret data. The chapter begins by discussing the research philosophy underpinning the study, followed by an explanation of the research design. It then outlines the sampling method used to select participants, as well as the data collection and recruitment strategies employed. The chapter also details the data analysis techniques applied, the criteria for participant selection, and the geographical focus of the study. It further addresses the study's delimitations and highlights key ethical considerations, including how informed consent and transparency were ensured.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge. It underpins the methodological choices researchers make and reflects their understanding of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and how values influence research (axiology) (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). This study adopts Critical Realism as its guiding research philosophy.

Critical Realism (CR), as developed by Roy Bhaskar (1975), is a philosophical position that bridges the divide between positivism and interpretivism. It asserts that reality exists independently of our perceptions (realism), but acknowledges that our understanding of it is always mediated by social, cultural, and linguistic contexts (critical). Bhaskar (1998) distinguishes between three domains: the empirical (what we observe), the actual (what happens, whether observed or not), and the real (the underlying structures and mechanisms that generate events). This layered ontology is particularly useful for unpacking complex social phenomena, such as media practices in conflict-affected settings.

In the context of this research, Critical Realism provides a robust philosophical foundation for investigating the underlying causal mechanisms that shape journalistic practices in the Central African Republic (CAR), a fragile, post-conflict environment marked by systemic violence,

political instability, and media vulnerability. While peace journalism can be observed and described at the empirical level (e.g. how journalists report on conflict), CR encourages a deeper analysis of the structures, institutional pressures, training deficits, and social conditions that constrain or enable peace journalism in practice.

This philosophy complements the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology employed in the study. PAR, rooted in the emancipatory traditions of Freire (1970) and further developed by Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014), aligns with CR's emphasis on transformation through a better understanding of reality. While PAR promotes collaborative inquiry and reflexive action, Critical Realism enriches this approach by offering a meta-theoretical framework for analysing not just what needs to change, but why and how such change might be sustained. As Sayer (2000) argues, Critical Realism is not only explanatory but also normative, supporting research that seeks to improve human well-being. This philosophical lens helps move beyond surface-level observations toward transformative insights that can inform both theory and practice in media development and peacebuilding.

Critical Realism is the most appropriate philosophical stance for this research because it allows the study to remain grounded in real-world complexities while supporting an emancipatory, change-oriented agenda. It offers a nuanced understanding of the layered realities shaping journalism in CAR and aligns with the participatory, justice-oriented goals of the action research design.

3.2 Research Design

The research design adopted in this study is Participatory Action Research (PAR), a collaborative and democratic inquiry approach that emphasizes participation, empowerment, and transformative change. Rooted in the traditions of critical pedagogy and social justice, PAR is particularly well-suited to contexts requiring community engagement and co-creation of knowledge (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

PAR is not just a method but a research orientation that combines theory and practice through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). These iterative cycles foster continuous learning and adaptation, allowing both the researcher and participants to generate practical knowledge and effect positive change. As Kemmis,

McTaggart and Nixon (2014) argue, PAR enables participants to investigate the reality of their own practices and the constraints that shape them, with a view to transforming both.

In this project, PAR serves as the backbone of the study's effort to build capacity for peace journalism among the staff and partners of RJDH (Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme) in the Central African Republic (CAR). Given the country's protracted conflict and fragile media landscape, PAR is ideal because it foregrounds local voices, fosters ownership of the process, and encourages collective problem-solving (Kinson, Pain & Kesby, 2007).

By embedding the research in the day-to-day work of RJDH journalists, this design ensures that interventions are not externally imposed but internally driven. Moreover, the cyclical nature of PAR provides flexibility to adapt to the dynamic political and social conditions in CAR, enhancing both the relevance and sustainability of outcomes.

Stages in Participatory Action Research

The PAR process in this study involves the following four interrelated stages:

Planning

The initial phase involves collaborative identification of the research problem: the gaps in peace journalism practices among RJDH staff. Together with RJDH members, the researcher co-develops a strategic plan for capacity-building, outlining activities such as needs assessments, training modules, and mentoring processes. This aligns with Freire's (1970) principle of praxis, thoughtful action grounded in reflection.

Action

In this stage, the planned interventions are implemented. These include a series of peace journalism workshops, mentoring sessions, and field-based learning activities. The researcher facilitates, but participants play a central role in shaping the direction and content of the training, ensuring contextual relevance and reinforcing agency (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013).

Observation

During and after implementation, the impact of the training is closely monitored through observation, informal interviews, and content analysis of news reports. This stage enables real-time feedback, allowing for the tracking of changes in both journalistic practices and participants' reflections. It also helps document emerging challenges and areas for improvement.

Reflection

In the final stage of each cycle, the researcher and participants jointly reflect on the process, outcomes, and lessons learned. This critical reflection is essential for refining strategies, adjusting the training model, and initiating a new cycle of planning. Reflection also helps deepen participants' awareness of their role in promoting peace through media (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

These cycles are repeated as needed throughout the research period, enabling iterative learning and sustained impact. Importantly, PAR is not a linear process but a dynamic, spiraling inquiry in which each stage informs and shapes the next.

The participatory action research design enables the study to remain context-sensitive, ethically grounded, and action-oriented. It supports the dual goals of knowledge generation and social transformation, which are central to both peace journalism and capacity-building in conflict-affected environments like the Central African Republic.

3.3 Sampling Method

The sampling method employed in this study was purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research where participants are selected based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach was appropriate for the participatory action research (PAR) design and the critical realist philosophical orientation, both of which prioritise depth of insight and relevance of experience over statistical generalisability (Maxwell, 2012).

Participants were drawn from among RJDH staff and partner organisations who were directly involved in peace journalism initiatives. The key inclusion criteria included: active engagement in RJDH's editorial or reporting processes, involvement in workshops or capacity-building activities, and willingness to reflect critically on their practice. This ensured that participants had experiential knowledge of both the challenges and opportunities in implementing peace journalism in the Central African Republic (CAR).

Purposive sampling enabled the research to access information-rich cases (Patton, 2015) whose insights were essential to understanding the dynamics of peace journalism in a conflict-affected context. The sample included journalists, editors, and trainers who had participated in various stages of the PAR cycle, planning, action, observation, and reflection.

To further enhance diversity and representativeness, maximum variation sampling, a form of purposive sampling, was employed to include individuals with differing levels of experience, gender, and roles within RJDH and its partner organisations. This diversity allowed for the exploration of multiple perspectives and facilitated richer, more nuanced findings.

3.4 Data Collection and Recruitment

In alignment with the participatory action research (PAR) design and the critical realist research philosophy guiding this study, a multi-method approach to data collection was employed. This enabled the researcher to gather rich, contextually embedded data that reflects the complexity of journalistic practice in a conflict-affected setting like the Central African Republic (CAR). As Creswell and Poth (2018) note, the use of multiple data sources enhances the credibility and depth of qualitative inquiry, especially in action-oriented research.

Data are collected iteratively over multiple PAR cycles to capture changes over time and to allow for critical reflection by participants and the researcher. The primary data collection methods included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. These approaches are complementary and allow for triangulation, strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Observation Data

Participant observation plays a central role in this study. The researcher immerses themselves in the day-to-day activities of RJDH staff and partners, particularly during peace journalism workshops, newsroom meetings, and field assignments. This method provides real-time insights into behaviours, communication patterns, and group dynamics that may not be fully articulated in interviews.

Observation allows the researcher to witness the enactment of peace journalism principles and to evaluate the practical application of training content. As Spradley (1980) suggests, participant observation is essential in uncovering “the meanings people assign to their actions” in context. Field notes are maintained systematically, capturing not only observable behaviours but also contextual cues and researcher reflections.

Interview Data

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected RJDH journalists, editors, and organisational partners. This method provides in-depth qualitative data while allowing flexibility to explore emerging themes and experiences in participants’ own words (Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2015). The interviews focused on participants' understanding of peace journalism, perceptions of capacity-building efforts, challenges faced in implementation, and suggestions for improvement.

The semi-structured format ensured consistency across interviews while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to each participant's role and perspective. Interviews were recorded (with informed consent), transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically in accordance with the critical realist lens, which values both individual agency and the influence of structural conditions (Bhaskar, 2008).

Document Data

The third data source comprises document analysis of RJDH's peace journalism outputs. These include news articles, editorials, reports, training manuals, and communication guidelines produced before, during, and after the intervention. The goal was to assess changes in journalistic tone, framing, source diversity, and the representation of conflict and peace-related issues.

Document analysis enabled the researcher to trace the evolution of journalistic practices over time and to evaluate the alignment of RJDH's content with peace journalism principles as defined by scholars like Galtung (2006) and Lynch and McGoldrick (2005). This method complements observations and interviews by providing tangible artefacts of practice and discourse.

3.4.1 Recruitment Steps

Recruitment for this participatory action research study was carefully structured to ensure ethical integrity, inclusivity, and alignment with the study's objectives of building capacity for peace journalism. The following steps were undertaken to recruit participants from RJDH and its organisational partners:

Initial Contact

The researcher initiated contact with RJDH leadership and key organisational partners to introduce the study and explore its relevance to ongoing peace journalism efforts. This step established trust and helped secure institutional support, which was essential for the participatory nature of the study.

Information Session

A formal information session was held with potential participants to explain the study's objectives, design, expected outcomes, and ethical safeguards. This session allowed participants to ask questions, clarify expectations, and consider their potential involvement with full awareness of the implications.

Informed Consent

Each potential participant was provided with an informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, benefits, risks, and ethical assurances, including the right to confidentiality and voluntary withdrawal. Signed consent was obtained before participation, in line with ethical research protocols (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Voluntary Participation

Emphasising voluntary participation, individuals were informed that their involvement was not compulsory and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty or adverse consequences. This was critical in maintaining ethical standards and empowering participants.

Selection Criteria

Participants were selected using criterion-based purposive sampling (Patton, 2015). The primary criteria for inclusion were active involvement in journalism and media production, specifically with a demonstrated interest or engagement in peace journalism. Efforts were made to include participants from a range of professional roles, including reporters, editors, producers, and media trainers.

Sample Size

The final sample size was determined based on the scope of the study, the number of participants meeting the selection criteria, and the need to achieve data saturation in qualitative analysis. The sample remained flexible to accommodate evolving research needs throughout the action research cycles.

This structured recruitment process ensured that participants were not only suitable for the study but were also fully informed, ethically engaged, and committed to the co-creation of knowledge in line with participatory action research principles.

3.4.2 Participant Selection

Participants in this participatory action research study were purposively selected from among RJDH staff and their key organisational partners in the Central African Republic. The selection process was guided by the principle of criterion-based purposive sampling (Patton, 2015), ensuring that individuals directly involved in peace journalism initiatives were included in the study.

RJDH Staff

Staff members actively engaged in the production, coordination, or support of peace journalism were selected as participants. This included journalists, editors, media trainers, and project managers who contributed to RJDH's core mandate of promoting responsible and conflict-sensitive reporting.

RJDH Partners

Key partners who worked closely with RJDH, such as representatives from local civil society organisations, international NGOs supporting media development, and media trainers—were also included. Their involvement was critical in offering diverse perspectives and in supporting collaborative learning across organisational boundaries.

Building Relationships

In keeping with the ethos of participatory action research, building and maintaining relationships with participants was a foundational aspect of the study. As Reason and Bradbury (2008) emphasise, action research is not merely a method but a relational process that requires mutual respect, openness, and shared purpose.

Establishing Trust

The researcher prioritised transparency from the outset, clearly communicating the study's purpose, processes, and intended outcomes. Participants were informed of their rights, including confidentiality and the ability to withdraw at any time. This transparency helped to establish a foundation of trust and mutual respect (Stringer, 2014).

Fostering Collaboration

A collaborative relationship was nurtured throughout the study. Participants were not treated as subjects, but as co-researchers contributing knowledge, insights, and direction to the research process. This collaborative dynamic enabled joint identification of challenges in peace journalism practices and the co-development of capacity-building strategies tailored to local needs.

By selecting participants with relevant experience and fostering a respectful and participatory relationship, the study ensured that all voices were valued and that findings were both grounded in practice and oriented toward sustainable change.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study involved thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (or "themes") across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was particularly suited to this study's aim of understanding how RJDH staff and partners experienced and contributed to peace journalism practices during the participatory action research (PAR) process.

The analysis followed the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which includes: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Data from observation notes, interview transcripts, and documented peace journalism outputs (such as news reports and training materials) were coded manually and reviewed iteratively to ensure consistency and coherence across sources.

The thematic analysis was conducted using a critical realist lens (Bhaskar, 1978; Fletcher, 2017), which allowed the researcher to explore not only the observable patterns in the data but also the underlying structures, mechanisms, and social conditions influencing the practice of peace journalism in the Central African Republic. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of how individual agency and institutional factors interacted in the co-production of knowledge and capacity-building outcomes.

Themes were developed both inductively (emerging from the data) and deductively (informed by the conceptual framework of peace journalism and participatory research). Regular feedback loops were integrated throughout the PAR cycles, allowing participants to validate

and refine the emerging themes, in keeping with the participatory and reflexive nature of the research.

3.6 Study Area

The study was conducted in the Central African Republic (CAR), specifically, the study focused on regions where the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH) operates. RJDH is a network of local journalists committed to promoting human rights reporting and conflict-sensitive journalism. Its presence spans several provinces, including conflict-affected and post-conflict zones such as Bangui, Ouham, Ouaka, and Nana-Grébizi. These regions were selected because they reflect both the diversity of socio-political dynamics within CAR and the strategic relevance of RJDH's peace journalism interventions.

The selection of this study area was also guided by the principles of participatory action research (PAR), which emphasises working with communities and organisations in their real-world settings to co-produce knowledge and facilitate change (Kemmis et al., 2014). By situating the research within RJDH's operational areas, the study was able to engage directly with journalists and stakeholders embedded in local contexts, thereby enhancing the relevance, responsiveness, and practical impact of the findings.

Moreover, conducting the study in CAR allowed for a critical exploration of peace journalism in a low-resource, high-risk environment, one that differs significantly from the Western media systems where peace journalism models are often theorised. This provided a unique opportunity to examine how peace journalism principles can be adapted and implemented within the constraints of a fragile state.

3.7 Delimitation

This study is delimited to the staff and organisational partners of the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RJDH) in the Central African Republic (CAR). The research focuses exclusively on individuals who were actively involved in peace journalism initiatives during the course of the participatory action research (PAR) project. As such, the scope of the study does not extend to journalists unaffiliated with RJDH, international media actors, or audiences of RJDH media outputs.

The geographic delimitation is similarly constrained to the regions in which RJDH operates, primarily in selected conflict-affected provinces such as Bangui, Ouham, Ouaka, and Nana-

Grébizi. This focused territorial scope enabled the researcher to engage more deeply with localised journalistic practices, political dynamics, and organisational contexts that influence the implementation of peace journalism.

The thematic focus is also limited to the concept of peace journalism, understood through the lens of capacity-building within a fragile media environment. While broader media and communication theories are acknowledged, the study does not seek to evaluate other journalistic models (e.g., investigative journalism or citizen journalism) beyond their relevance to peace journalism.

These delimitations were necessary to ensure depth and manageability within the scope of a doctoral project. They also align with the participatory action research approach, which prioritises collaboration with a defined group of participants to bring about practical and contextually grounded change (McIntyre, 2008).

3.8 Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings, this study adopted multiple strategies consistent with qualitative research best practices and the participatory action research (PAR) paradigm. In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the data collection process, while validity concerns the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations made from that data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

A key method employed to enhance both reliability and validity was triangulation, which involves the use of multiple data sources and methods to corroborate findings and minimise potential bias (Denzin, 1978). In this study, triangulation was achieved by collecting and analysing data through three primary means: (1) participant observation during workshops and training sessions, (2) semi-structured interviews with RJDH staff and partners, and (3) document analysis of RJDH's peace journalism outputs. The convergence of insights from these sources increased the trustworthiness of the findings.

Additionally, member checking was used as a validity-enhancing technique. Participants were given the opportunity to review and verify transcripts, preliminary interpretations, and thematic summaries to ensure their views were accurately represented (Birt et al., 2016). This approach aligns with the participatory ethos of the research, promoting transparency and co-ownership of the knowledge production process.

To support reliability, the research process was documented in detail, including the development of interview guides, observation protocols, and coding procedures. This enables an audit trail that enhances the dependability and replicability of the research, even within the context-specific and dynamic setting of action research.

While the PAR methodology prioritises co-construction of knowledge and change over generalisability, the rigorous application of these qualitative validation techniques ensures that the findings are both credible and grounded in the lived experiences of participants.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to rigorous ethical standards to protect the rights, dignity, and autonomy of all participants. Given the participatory action research (PAR) approach and the sensitive context of post-conflict media engagement in the Central African Republic (CAR), ethical considerations were integrated throughout all stages of the research process.

Informed Consent

Prior to participation, all individuals were provided with detailed information regarding the aims, scope, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from each participant in written form. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or consequence (Israel & Hay, 2006). Consent procedures were conducted in both French and Sango, the most commonly spoken languages among RJDH staff, to ensure comprehension.

Transparency

Transparency was a core principle throughout the study. The researcher maintained open communication about the objectives, methodology, and intended outcomes of the research with all stakeholders. This commitment to openness aligns with the ethical imperative of honesty and accountability in research (Resnik, 2015) and also with the reflexive principles of action research that value mutual understanding and trust between researcher and participants (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Collaborative Approach

Consistent with the PAR methodology, the study was designed and implemented as a collaborative process. RJDH staff and partners were not merely subjects of research but co-

researchers who actively contributed to problem identification, planning, action, observation, and reflection. This approach enhanced ethical integrity by promoting co-ownership of knowledge, reducing power imbalances, and aligning research activities with local needs and priorities (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Confidentiality and Anonymity

To protect participant identities, all data were anonymised during transcription and reporting. Identifiable information was securely stored and accessible only to the research team. Pseudonyms were used in all published outputs to ensure confidentiality, especially considering the politically sensitive nature of journalism in conflict-affected settings.

Ethical Approval

Ethical clearance for the research was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board (IRB) at the researcher's university, and local ethical approval procedures were followed in coordination with RJDH and relevant CAR-based authorities.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the research methodology used in the study. It began by justifying the adoption of critical realism as the guiding research philosophy and the use of participatory action research as the overall design. It then described the purposive sampling strategy applied to select RJDH staff and partners actively involved in peace journalism. The chapter also detailed the mixed methods of data collection, observation, interviews, and document analysis, and explained how thematic analysis was employed to analyse qualitative data. Participant selection criteria were outlined, along with the importance of relationship-building in participatory research. The study area was defined as the regions in which RJDH operates within the Central African Republic. The chapter also clarified the study's scope through its delimitations and emphasised the ethical principles that guided the research, including confidentiality and voluntary participation. Finally, the recruitment steps were presented to show how participants were engaged in a systematic and ethical manner.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected from RJDH staff and partners before and after the one-day peace journalism training intervention conducted as part of the study “Building Capacity for Peace Journalism: A Participatory Action Research Project with RJDH in the Central African Republic. The chapter is divided into two major parts: the first part presents findings from the pre-training interviews, which explore participants’ prior experiences, challenges, and capacity needs regarding peace journalism. The second part discusses findings from the post-training evaluation interviews, guided by Pawson and Tilley’s Realist Evaluation framework. This section captures participant reflections on what worked, for whom it worked, how and why it worked, and recommendations for improving future peace journalism interventions.

4.1 Participants’ Bio-data

A total of 30 participants took part in the peace journalism capacity-building intervention organised for RJDH staff and partners in the Central African Republic. This section presents their bio-data across key demographic categories, including age, gender, and years of experience as practicing journalists.

Age Distribution of Participants

Table 4.0: Age Distribution of Participants

Age Range	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
18–30	4	13.3%
31–45	10	33.3%
46–55	9	30.0%
Above 55	7	23.3%
Total	30	100%

As shown in the table above, a significant proportion of participants (86.7%) were aged above 30 years. The representation of mature journalists in the training was deliberate, aligning with the notion that peace journalism, particularly in conflict-affected contexts, requires not only professional sensitivity but also the maturity and judgment that often come with age. This supports the view of Cassidy (2008), who posits that age and experience are crucial considerations in assigning journalists to cover politically and socially sensitive subjects such as conflict and peacebuilding. Peiser (2000) also affirms that seasoned journalists are better positioned to approach complex political and security issues with professional caution and contextual understanding.

Gender Distribution of Participants

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Participants

Sex	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Male	20	66.7%
Female	10	33.3%
Total	30	100%

There was no gender-based selection criterion during the recruitment process; however, male participants outnumbered their female counterparts. This gender disparity reflects broader patterns in media representation across the region, where women remain underrepresented in editorial and reporting roles, particularly in conflict-sensitive and political journalism. Grabe et al. (2011) argue that in contexts dominated by male political actors, newsrooms tend to reflect similar gender dynamics, often sidelining women journalists from front-line roles. While the presence of 10 female journalists in the training is noteworthy, it also highlights the ongoing need for intentional inclusion and gender-sensitive media reforms within RJDH and its partner organisations.

Years of Experience in Journalism

Table 4.4: Years of Experience in Journalism

Years of Experience	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Less than 5 years	6	20.0%
5–10 years	11	36.7%

More than 10 years	13	43.3%
Total	30	100%

Most participants had extensive experience in journalism, with 43.3% having worked for over 10 years and another 36.7% between 5 and 10 years. This level of experience is critical in a post-conflict setting where the ethical and political stakes of media work are high. The inclusion of early-career journalists (20%) in the programme also allowed for knowledge transfer and mentorship dynamics during the training.

4.1 Pre-Training Interview Findings

In order to achieve the aim of this study, a capacity-building intervention was conducted involving journalists from the Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits de l’Homme (RJDH) and its partner organisations operating across various regions of the Central African Republic. The training programme was guided by the need to address the research objectives outlined in Section 1.5, specifically focusing on enhancing journalists’ capacity to engage in peace-oriented reporting and to respond more effectively to the challenges of conflict-sensitive journalism in a post-conflict society.

A pre-training interview was conducted with selected participants to assess their existing knowledge, professional experiences, and reporting practices related to peace journalism. This baseline inquiry also aimed to identify the gaps in knowledge and institutional barriers that limit the adoption of peace journalism in the Central African Republic. Particular attention was given to understanding how current reporting practices may either contribute to or mitigate conflict dynamics within communities.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The researcher collaborated closely with RJDH leadership to identify staff and partners actively engaged in field reporting and content production. Formal invitations were extended to regional RJDH offices and partner organisations, whose representatives voluntarily agreed to participate in the training. The selection criteria prioritised individuals who had direct involvement in conflict-sensitive reporting, community-focused storytelling, or editorial decision-making.

4.1.1 Personal Experience with Peace Journalism

Respondents were asked to describe their personal experience with peace journalism. Most participants indicated limited or informal engagement with the concept. While a few had encountered peace journalism during previous workshops or through externally funded media

projects, the majority had not received formal training or consistent exposure to it within their professional settings.

A majority of the participants noted that although they had covered topics such as community dialogue, conflict resolution, or reconciliation, they were unaware that these efforts aligned with peace journalism principles. The concept was described by some as “new” or “not well understood” in their day-to-day practice. A number of respondents indicated that peace journalism was not a topic commonly discussed within their editorial meetings or organisational training activities.

Some journalists mentioned that they had occasionally produced stories that aimed to reduce tensions or highlight peacebuilding efforts, but did so without recognising that this fell under a specific journalistic approach.

Respondent A stated,

“I have written stories about peace negotiations, but I didn’t know it was a specific kind of journalism.”

Additionally, participants indicated that the term “peace journalism” was rarely used in their newsrooms, and none reported working in an institution where peace journalism was systematically promoted or integrated into editorial guidelines. Respondents from both urban and rural locations expressed interest in learning more about the concept and how it could be applied practically in their reporting.

The findings indicate a clear conceptual gap in peace journalism among RJDH staff and partners. While some participants unknowingly engaged in peace-oriented reporting, the lack of formal understanding reflects Galtung's (2003) observation that journalists often practice elements of peace journalism without recognising its theoretical underpinnings. This aligns with Lynch and McGoldrick's (2005) assertion that peace journalism remains largely absent from mainstream journalistic education and organisational culture. The limited institutional discussion around peace journalism in RJDH further confirms Howard's (2009) argument that media systems in conflict-affected regions often prioritise reactive rather than reflective journalism. The expressed interest in learning more about peace journalism suggests that RJDH staff are open to change, but require structured interventions to bridge the gap between intuition and intentional practice.

4.1.2 Opportunities and Challenges in Practicing Peace Journalism

Participants were asked to share their views on the opportunities and challenges they encounter in practicing peace journalism within their professional contexts. The responses revealed a combination of emerging opportunities and persistent structural barriers.

On the side of opportunity, several participants expressed a growing interest among RJDH staff in shifting toward more constructive forms of journalism. Some respondents noted that there was increasing awareness within their teams of the need to move beyond sensationalism and to give space to stories that promote community dialogue, social cohesion, and nonviolent solutions to conflict. A few participants indicated that RJDH's thematic focus on human rights and development provided a natural entry point for peace journalism. They also noted that in communities directly affected by conflict, there was public appetite for stories that support peacebuilding and amplify local voices working towards reconciliation.

Despite this interest, participants consistently identified a number of challenges that limited their ability to fully implement peace journalism practices. One of the most frequently cited obstacles was editorial pressure to prioritise breaking news and emotionally charged stories over more balanced and reflective reporting. Several journalists stated that newsroom expectations often favoured stories with dramatic or violent content, which were perceived to attract more audience attention and funding from external partners.

In addition to editorial priorities, participants highlighted the lack of structured training on peace journalism as a critical barrier. Many indicated they had never received formal instruction on how to report in a way that de-escalates conflict or promotes peace narratives. Others noted that the absence of institutional support, including editorial guidelines or internal policies that encourage peace journalism, further contributed to its marginalisation in daily practice.

Another challenge frequently mentioned was the political sensitivity surrounding peace-focused reporting. Some respondents shared concerns that covering peacebuilding efforts or offering alternative narratives in conflict situations could be perceived as biased or politically motivated, placing journalists at risk of backlash from authorities or armed groups.

Respondent B noted

“You want to talk about peace, but editors want something dramatic, conflict sells faster than dialogue.”

Overall, participants identified both interest and willingness among journalists to engage in peace journalism, but highlighted that their ability to do so was shaped by broader institutional, editorial, and political constraints.

The responses reflect a dual environment where interest in peace journalism coexists with significant structural and professional barriers. The editorial preference for sensationalism mirrors what Hanitzsch (2007) describes as the “conflict bias” in commercial newsrooms, where violence is more marketable than peace. Moreover, the lack of training and institutional support echoes Shinar’s (2007) call for systematic integration of peace journalism into organisational routines. The concern over political backlash also resonates with Wolfsfeld’s (2004) analysis of how political constraints limit peace-focused reporting in transitional societies. Nevertheless, the identified opportunities, such as RJDH’s human rights focus highlight the potential for peace journalism to be embedded through targeted training and editorial policy reform.

4.1.3 Training and Support Needs

Interviewees were asked to share the types of training or support they believed would be most helpful in improving their capacity to practice peace journalism. Responses across all interviews revealed a consistent and strong demand for structured, practical training tailored to the realities of working in conflict-affected settings like the Central African Republic.

Participants indicated that while they were generally aware of the concept of peace journalism, they lacked concrete tools, guidelines, and case-based learning that could help them apply it effectively in their everyday reporting. Many journalists stated that previous trainings they had attended focused primarily on theoretical concepts or were too general, lacking the practical orientation needed to address the challenges of reporting in volatile contexts.

There was a clear preference for training that included real-life examples, newsroom simulations, role-plays, and mentorship opportunities. Several participants suggested that workshops should go beyond one-off sessions and instead be delivered in a continuous format, with follow-up support and refresher courses to reinforce learning. Respondents also proposed that training should be decentralised to include journalists working in rural provinces who are often excluded from capacity-building activities due to logistical or budgetary constraints.

In addition to training, participants expressed a need for support in dealing with external pressures such as censorship, security threats, and intimidation. Some noted the lack of institutional protection when reporting on sensitive issues, which discouraged them from

covering peace and conflict topics in a way that could be seen as controversial. Others mentioned that access to reliable sources and balanced information was often limited, particularly in remote areas, making it difficult to report in a way that aligned with peace journalism values.

A strong sentiment emerged regarding the gap between knowing the theory of peace journalism and being able to practice it under real-world constraints.

Respondent E observed,

“We need more than theory, we need to learn how to do peace journalism practically, in our own dangerous environment.”

Participants also suggested that training programmes should involve not only journalists but also editors and media managers, so that institutional support systems are developed alongside individual capacities. This would help ensure that peace journalism becomes an integral part of editorial decision-making and newsroom culture.

The strong demand for practical, context-specific training underscores the critique by Howard (2009) that most peace journalism capacity-building efforts fail when they are overly theoretical or externally imposed. Participants’ emphasis on simulations and mentorship aligns with McGoldrick and Lynch’s (2000) advocacy for experiential learning methods in peace journalism education. The call for inclusive training that involves editors and media managers confirms previous research by Ross (2007), which shows that top-down support is critical in transforming newsroom cultures. The challenges mentioned, such as censorship and lack of protection also reflect broader concerns in conflict reporting, where journalists often lack institutional safeguards (Loyn, 2007). This indicates that any capacity-building initiative must be holistic, involving both technical skills and structural support.

4.2 Post-Training Evaluation Findings (Realist Approach)

This section presents post-intervention findings using Pawson and Tilley’s (1997) Realist Evaluation framework, which focuses on identifying what worked, for whom, in what context, and why. Six guiding questions shaped this part of the analysis.

4.2.1 What Aspects of the Training Worked Well, and Why Were They Effective?

Participants were asked to reflect on which aspects of the one-day peace journalism training intervention they found most useful or impactful. Responses revealed that the most positively

received components were those that were interactive, participatory, and grounded in real-world journalism scenarios.

Multiple respondents pointed to the use of role-playing exercises, group discussions, and analysis of case studies as particularly effective in helping them grasp the practical application of peace journalism principles. These sessions allowed participants to step out of theoretical frameworks and actively engage with realistic conflict-reporting situations. They reported that these exercises helped them to visualise how peace journalism can be integrated into their reporting tasks in a way that is both realistic and context-sensitive.

Participants noted that the scenario-based activities helped them understand how the same news story could be told differently, depending on the framing choices made by the journalist. Some explained that being placed in simulated newsroom situations enabled them to see the implications of word choice, headline framing, and source selection more clearly than through lectures alone. The group work also encouraged peer-to-peer learning, where participants could share field experiences and learn from each other's challenges and solutions.

A majority of respondents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to practice new reporting techniques in a safe learning environment where feedback was encouraged. They also valued the collaborative format of the training, which fostered open dialogue between colleagues from different regions and roles within RJDH. This inclusive atmosphere, according to participants, contributed to their willingness to engage and participate actively throughout the sessions.

Respondent D reflected,

“The scenarios helped me realise I could ask different questions in my interviews, questions that focus on peace, not just conflict.”

This response illustrates how the applied nature of the training led some participants to reconsider the framing of their journalistic inquiry during interviews.

Overall, responses consistently emphasised the importance of hands-on methods in bridging the gap between peace journalism theory and the complex, high-pressure realities of field reporting in conflict-affected areas of the Central African Republic.

The success of interactive components in the training validates adult learning theories, particularly Kolb's experiential learning model (1984), which emphasises reflection through experience. The scenario-based approach created a space for applied learning, enabling

journalists to see the consequences of their reporting in a simulated environment. This aligns with Lynch and McGoldrick's (2013) claim that peace journalism must be taught through doing, not just telling. The collaborative learning setting also fostered peer exchange, supporting Wenger's (1998) concept of "communities of practice" where shared learning enhances skill development. The overwhelmingly positive response to hands-on sessions demonstrates the value of practical, participatory pedagogy in media training within conflict settings.

4.2.2 Who Benefited the Most, and What Made It Relevant or Impactful for Them?

Participants were asked to identify which groups or individuals appeared to benefit most from the one-day peace journalism training. The responses consistently highlighted two main groups: field-based reporters and early-career journalists, particularly those who had never received any formal instruction or exposure to peace journalism concepts prior to the intervention.

Field reporters, those based in rural or conflict-affected areas, were perceived to have gained significantly from the training because of the direct relevance of the content to the environments in which they operate. These journalists often encounter complex and volatile community dynamics in their reporting, and many participants said the training helped them identify how their language, framing, and choice of sources could either escalate or reduce tensions in those contexts. According to some respondents, these reporters had previously lacked the tools to navigate conflict-sensitive reporting effectively and therefore found the examples and scenarios discussed during the workshop to be both practical and immediately applicable.

Young and less experienced journalists were also viewed as major beneficiaries. Participants noted that these individuals were more open to new perspectives, flexible in their reporting styles, and eager to engage with new journalistic approaches. Several senior participants mentioned that the younger attendees actively asked questions during the sessions and demonstrated enthusiasm during group work and practical exercises. Some respondents noted that the accessible language used by the facilitator, combined with the contextual relevance of the examples, made it easier for these junior staff to understand and internalise the key messages of the training.

Experienced journalists and editorial staff also benefited, though in a different way. For this group, the training provided a space for critical reflection on their established practices and professional habits. Some reported that while they were already familiar with general ethical reporting standards, the training gave them a new framework for approaching conflict stories with greater sensitivity and intentionality.

Respondent F highlighted,

“I have worked in media for ten years, but this training gave me a new lens.”

This quote illustrates how the intervention helped even seasoned media professionals rethink their approach to storytelling in conflict environments.

Participants further observed that the diversity of roles and experience levels within the training group enhanced the learning process, as it allowed for exchange of ideas between junior and senior staff, and between reporters and editors. This collaborative setup was seen as valuable for grounding the peace journalism content in the real-world experiences of RJDH personnel across various functions and regions.

The data suggest that younger and field-based journalists benefited the most due to their openness to new ideas and their proximity to conflict-affected communities. This supports Bratic and Schirch’s (2007) argument that local journalists are best positioned to implement peace journalism when given appropriate tools. Experienced journalists also gained from the reflective aspects of the training, showing that peace journalism can act as a transformative lens across experience levels. The inclusive design of the workshop seems to have encouraged cross-generational and cross-functional dialogue, which is essential for institutionalising peace journalism practices across newsroom hierarchies (Galtung, 2002). The differentiated impact highlights the importance of tailoring training to diverse professional needs within the same organisation.

4.2.3 To What Extent Have Participants Applied the Peace Journalism Concepts?

Participants were asked to describe how, and to what extent, they had applied peace journalism principles and practices in their work following the one-day training. Responses indicated varying levels of application, influenced by factors such as individual motivation, editorial freedom, type of assignments, and organisational context.

Several respondents reported that the training prompted them to consciously adjust elements of their reporting style, particularly in how they selected story angles, framed headlines, and chose sources. A number of journalists said they had started placing more emphasis on including community voices and conflict-resolution perspectives in their coverage. They also indicated an increased effort to avoid sensationalist or emotionally charged language that could escalate tensions or reinforce polarisation in conflict-affected communities.

Some participants specifically mentioned changes in the structure and tone of their news stories. They described how they had begun reframing stories to focus on solutions, resilience, or peacebuilding initiatives, rather than solely highlighting violence or confrontation. A few journalists noted that they had become more deliberate in giving space to underrepresented voices, such as women, youth, and displaced persons, especially when covering the aftermath of violent events.

Respondent C explained

“After the workshop, I changed the way I framed a story about the militia. I included more community voices and avoided words that inflame tensions.”

This example illustrates how some participants began implementing peace journalism techniques in a concrete way shortly after the intervention.

However, the extent of application varied among respondents. Some indicated that while they had internalised the principles, putting them into practice was not always possible due to editorial limitations or the nature of assignments. For example, those working under strict editorial oversight or for outlets prioritising fast news cycles found it more difficult to apply in-depth or peace-oriented reporting approaches. Others mentioned that stories assigned by senior editors often lacked flexibility, limiting their ability to shift narratives or incorporate alternative voices.

In spite of these limitations, most participants expressed a desire to continue experimenting with peace journalism techniques and to advocate for their integration into broader newsroom practices.

The reported behaviour change among some journalists such as reframing stories and including diverse voices, demonstrates early-stage adoption of peace journalism. This supports empirical studies by Lee and Maslog (2005), which found that exposure to peace journalism frameworks can influence actual reporting behaviour. However, the variation in uptake due to editorial

constraints confirms that application is not only a matter of individual intent but also organisational structure (Wolfsfeld, 2004). The presence of willing reporters but resistant institutions underscores Lynch's (2014) emphasis on the need for systemic change within media houses, including the adoption of editorial policies that encourage conflict-sensitive reporting. The finding also highlights that training must be accompanied by organisational buy-in to ensure long-term practice change.

4.2.4 How Did the Training Change Participants' Thinking or Behaviour?

Participants were asked to describe any changes in their perspectives, attitudes, or behaviours as a result of the training. Responses revealed that the training prompted a noticeable shift in how participants perceived their role as journalists in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Many respondents stated that they had previously viewed their work as purely observational or neutral, reporting "what happened" without considering the potential impact of how they framed stories. After the training, participants began to see themselves as active contributors to either conflict escalation or peacebuilding, depending on how they chose to report. This recognition was reflected in statements indicating increased awareness of ethical responsibility, narrative framing, and language use in conflict-sensitive contexts.

Several journalists said they had become more mindful of the potential consequences of their reporting on communities and had started considering how their work could influence peace outcomes. Others reported a heightened sense of agency and responsibility in choosing interview subjects, balancing viewpoints, and avoiding inflammatory rhetoric.

Respondent G summarised

"Before, I thought my job was just to report what happened. Now I see I can help reduce harm by how I choose to report."

Responses across the group suggested that the training contributed not only to knowledge acquisition but also to a transformation in journalistic mindset and professional self-awareness.

Participants' reflections suggest a notable shift from passive to active reporting paradigms. This transformation resonates with Galtung's (1998) proposition that journalists should not merely mirror violence but provide frameworks for peace. The internalisation of ethical responsibility and reframing roles supports the theoretical foundation of peace journalism, which positions journalists as agents capable of influencing conflict dynamics (Howard, 2009). The reported behavioural change, such as choosing peace-oriented language, illustrates the

training's effectiveness in bridging knowledge with self-awareness. It also confirms that even short interventions can catalyse deeper reflections about journalistic purpose, especially when grounded in local realities.

4.2.5 What Contextual Factors Enabled or Hindered Application of Peace Journalism?

Participants were asked to identify any environmental or institutional factors that either supported or limited their ability to apply the concepts learned during the training. The data showed that contextual variables had a significant impact on the implementation of peace journalism in participants' daily work.

Enabling factors cited included editorial independence, where journalists had the freedom to select angles and structure their stories without restrictive mandates. Some participants mentioned working in newsrooms with supportive leadership that encouraged innovation and ethical storytelling. Others highlighted access to diverse and reliable sources, especially in communities with active civil society organisations or peacebuilding initiatives, which made it easier to reflect multiple perspectives in their stories.

On the other hand, numerous challenges were identified. A major limiting factor was editorial pressure to produce sensational content. Several journalists reported that even when they attempted to apply peace journalism techniques, their stories were rejected or edited to focus on violence and conflict. Tight production schedules, lack of institutional guidelines, and political sensitivity surrounding peace narratives were also frequently mentioned.

Respondent E noted

“Even if I want to apply what I learned, sometimes the newsroom doesn't support this approach. They want drama.”

This reflected the tension between professional intention and organisational constraints, which many participants experienced post-training.

The responses reflect a complex interplay between enabling and limiting factors, with editorial independence and supportive leadership emerging as critical enablers. This aligns with Shinar's (2007) argument that institutional conditions determine whether peace journalism can thrive. Conversely, the presence of editorial pressure and political interference mirrors findings by Lee and Maslog (2005), who note that peace journalism is often resisted in news cultures that prioritise sensationalism. The tension between intention and practice observed in the data

confirms Lynch and McGoldrick's (2005) concern that without structural reform, individual training alone cannot sustain peace journalism practices. Therefore, efforts to mainstream peace journalism must include policy advocacy and organisational change initiatives.

4.2.6 Recommendations for Improving Future Programmes

When asked for suggestions to improve future peace journalism training sessions, participants offered a range of recommendations grounded in their experiences with the one-day intervention.

The most common suggestion was to increase the duration and depth of the training. Several participants expressed that while the one-day format was informative, it was not sufficient to cover the complexities of applying peace journalism in real-world reporting. Many recommended a multi-day format that would allow for deeper exploration of topics and more time for practice-based activities.

Participants also emphasised the importance of follow-up mentorship, noting that ongoing support would help them navigate challenges and reinforce the application of newly acquired skills. The idea of pairing trainees with experienced mentors or organising refresher workshops was frequently raised.

Another key recommendation was to involve newsroom managers and media owners in future training sessions. Participants felt that lasting change in journalistic practice would require top-down support, including policy changes within media organisations that promote peace journalism as an editorial priority.

Additionally, participants suggested that future programmes be tailored to regional contexts, recognising that conflict dynamics vary across provinces in the Central African Republic. They recommended the development of region-specific case studies and training materials that reflect the realities of each area.

The recommendations offered by participants reflect a desire for sustainability and institutionalisation of peace journalism. The call for longer and more practical training supports the view by McIntyre and Sobel (2017) that peace journalism requires time to be absorbed and applied meaningfully. Follow-up mentorship aligns with best practices in capacity-building, particularly in post-conflict environments where ongoing support enhances retention (Howard, 2009). The suggestion to involve media owners and editors echoes Galtung's (2003) emphasis on systemic engagement rather than individual outreach. Furthermore, the recommendation for

region-specific training materials reinforces the argument that peace journalism must be locally adapted, not standardised, to be effective in varied conflict contexts.

4.3 Summary Chapter

This chapter presented the findings from the pre- and post-training phases of the participatory action research conducted with RJDH staff and partners. The pre-training interviews revealed limited structured experience with peace journalism but strong interest in learning and applying its principles. Post-training evaluations, using Pawson and Tilley's realist framework, showed that the intervention was effective in enhancing conceptual understanding, changing attitudes, and in some cases, improving practice. However, contextual constraints, such as editorial policies and political environment, were found to influence the extent to which peace journalism principles could be applied. Recommendations from participants have been incorporated to guide the design of future training and capacity-building efforts.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study was guided by three key objectives aimed at understanding the challenges faced by journalists in conflict reporting, implementing a peace journalism training intervention, and evaluating its outcomes within the context of the Central African Republic (CAR). The findings related to each objective are summarised below.

Objective 1: To identify the challenges faced by journalists in reporting on human rights and conflict-related issues in the CAR.

The study found that although many RJDH journalists had practical experience in reporting on conflict and human rights, there was a lack of formal training and conceptual clarity regarding peace journalism. Participants identified several challenges that hindered their ability to adopt peace journalism principles in their daily practice. These included pressure from editors to prioritise sensational or violence-focused stories, limited editorial autonomy, and a lack of institutional frameworks supporting ethical, conflict-sensitive reporting. Political sensitivities surrounding peace narratives also posed risks to journalists' safety and professional freedom. Female journalists in particular highlighted additional barriers, such as marginalisation in editorial decision-making spaces and unequal access to training opportunities.

Objective 2: To develop and implement a capacity-building program for peace journalism with RJDH

The research successfully facilitated a one-day training workshop based on participatory action research (PAR) principles. The training was collaboratively designed and delivered, ensuring contextual relevance and practical engagement. It incorporated interactive methods such as group discussions, case study analysis, role-playing, and collaborative exercises. These

approaches were positively received by participants, especially by field-based reporters and early-career journalists who reported that the sessions helped them understand how to apply peace journalism in real reporting scenarios. Senior journalists also found value in the reflective nature of the training, which encouraged them to critically assess their long-standing reporting habits and consider alternative, peace-oriented approaches to storytelling.

Objective 3: To evaluate the effectiveness of the program and identify areas for improvement

Post-training evaluations indicated that many participants began integrating peace journalism concepts into their work. Journalists reported practical changes, such as reframing headlines, avoiding inflammatory language, incorporating underrepresented voices, and shifting focus from violence to community-based solutions. While the training had a positive influence, the extent of implementation varied depending on several contextual factors, including editorial culture, political climate, and organisational support. Some participants noted that newsroom resistance to peace-oriented narratives and lack of supportive editorial policies limited their ability to consistently apply the new knowledge. Recommendations from participants included extending the duration of the training, offering continuous mentorship, involving editors and media managers in future sessions, and tailoring training materials to the regional dynamics of conflict across the CAR.

5.2 Conclusions

This study confirms that peace journalism remains underdeveloped but highly needed in the Central African Republic's media landscape. Journalists at RJDH are committed to improving their professional practices and recognise the critical role of media in shaping peace and conflict narratives. However, their ability to implement peace journalism is shaped not only by personal knowledge and motivation but also by organisational culture, editorial expectations, and broader political constraints.

The PAR approach proved effective in both identifying capacity gaps and co-developing a contextually grounded intervention. The findings suggest that one-off workshops, while useful in initiating reflection, must be followed by continuous support mechanisms, such as mentoring, editorial policy reform, and inclusive newsroom practices.

Ultimately, for peace journalism to take root in RJDH and beyond, it must be understood not as an alternative genre but as a core ethical responsibility of journalism in post-conflict

societies. This demands a collective effort involving reporters, editors, media institutions, and civil society actors.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the reflections from participants, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Develop a Long-Term Peace Journalism Training Strategy

Move beyond single-session workshops to multi-day or modular training programmes that include follow-up activities, refresher courses, and peer exchange platforms.

2. Establish Mentorship and Support Structures

Create mentorship networks pairing experienced peace journalists with early-career reporters. Mentorship should include feedback on reporting, ethical guidance, and field support.

3. Engage Editors and Media Managers

Future training programmes should involve editors, media managers, and owners to build institutional buy-in and encourage the integration of peace journalism into newsroom policies and routines.

4. Contextualise Training Materials

Develop region-specific case studies and reporting guides that reflect the unique socio-political realities across CAR provinces. This ensures relevance and responsiveness to local contexts.

5. Promote Institutional Reforms

Encourage RJDH to adopt editorial guidelines that support conflict-sensitive reporting. Media organisations should also invest in staff protection and create an enabling environment for ethical journalism.

6. Foster Partnerships for Sustainability

Collaborate with journalism schools, media development NGOs, and peacebuilding organisations to scale the training programme and embed peace journalism in formal curricula and national media strategy.

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Let me know if you'd like help integrating this into your full methodology chapter or generating other sections of your dissertation.

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Appendix A

Pre-Training Interview Guide for RJDH, Central African Republic

Title: Building Capacity for Peace Journalism: A Participatory Action Research Project with RJDH in the Central African Republic

Pre-Training Interview Guide – RJDH Peace Journalism Capacity Assessment

Introduction by Researcher:

My name is Alain Yvon Kadeya, and I am currently pursuing a Master of Science in Applied Conflict Transformation and Peace Building at the Catholic University of Zimbabwe. As part of my dissertation titled "*Building Capacity for Peace Journalism: A Participatory Action Research Project with RJDH in the Central African Republic*," I am conducting interviews to better understand the current practices, experiences, and capacity needs of RJDH staff and partners in relation to peace journalism.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. All responses will be kept confidential and used strictly for academic purposes. Your insights will help shape a targeted peace journalism capacity-building programme.

Section A: Background Information

Please complete the following before the interview:

1. Name (optional or use respondent code): _____
2. Role/Position in RJDH : _____
3. Years of experience in journalism or media: _____
4. Gender : _____

5. Location or region of operation: _____
-

Section B: Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your personal experience with peace journalism?
 2. What are the main opportunities and challenges for practicing peace journalism in your context?
 3. What forms of support or training would be most helpful to enhance your peace journalism capacity?
-

Appendix B

One-Day Intervention Programme Guide for RJDH, Central African Republic

**Title: Building Capacity for Peace Journalism: A Participatory Action
Research Project with RJDH in the Central African Republic**

Peace Journalism Capacity-Building Workshop for RJDH Staff and Partners

Introduction by Researcher:

My name is Alain Yvon Kadeya, and I am pursuing a Master of Science in Applied Conflict Transformation and Peace Building at the Catholic University of Zimbabwe. As part of my dissertation research titled *“Building Capacity for Peace Journalism: A Participatory Action Research Project with RJDH in the Central African Republic,”* I am facilitating this one-day training programme to help strengthen the capacity of RJDH staff and partners in the practice of peace journalism.

This session is designed to provide practical knowledge, encourage reflection, and promote collaboration on conflict-sensitive media practices.

Background Information (To be completed by each participant)

1. Name (optional or use participant code): _____
2. Organisation: _____
3. Role or Position: _____
4. Number of years working in journalism/media: _____
5. Location/Province of work: _____

Programme Objectives:

- To introduce RJDH staff and partners to peace journalism principles and practices.
 - To build practical skills in applying peace journalism in day-to-day reporting.
 - To foster collaboration and strategy development for promoting peace journalism.
-

Programme Schedule

Time	Session	Activity
8:00 – 9:00 am	Registration and Welcome	Opening remarks and overview
9:00 – 10:30 am	Introduction to Peace Journalism	Presentation and discussion
10:30 – 12:00 pm	Challenges and Opportunities for Peace Journalism in CAR	Group discussion
12:00 – 1:00 pm	Lunch Break	
1:00 – 2:30 pm	Applying Peace Journalism Principles in Reporting	Practical exercises and case studies
2:30 – 4:00 pm	Developing Strategies for Promoting Peace Journalism	Group work
4:00 – 5:00 pm	Closing Session	Reflections, next steps, and action planning

Implementation Matrix:

Objective	Activity	Timeframe	Responsible
Introduce peace journalism principles and practices	Interactive presentation and Q&A	9:00 am – 10:30 am	Facilitator
Build capacity for peace journalism	Group discussion, case study analysis, and role play	10:30 am – 12:00 pm 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm	Facilitator
Promote collaboration and networking	Collaborative group work and closing session	2:30 pm – 5:00 pm	Facilitator

Evaluation Methods:

- **Participant Feedback Forms:** To be completed at the end of the session.
 - **Facilitator Observation:** Observing participation and engagement during sessions.
 - **Follow-Up Interviews:** Conducted 2–4 weeks after the workshop to assess practical application of skills.
-

Appendix C

Programme Evaluation Guide – Peace Journalism Intervention for RJDH Central African Republic

Title: Building Capacity for Peace Journalism: A Participatory Action Research Project with RJDH in the Central African Republic

Programme Evaluation Guide – Assessing the Peace Journalism Training Intervention at RJDH

Introduction by Researcher:

My name is Alain Yvon Kadeya, and I am currently pursuing a Master of Science in Applied Conflict Transformation and Peace Building at the Catholic University of Zimbabwe. As part of my dissertation titled “*Building Capacity for Peace Journalism: A Participatory Action Research Project with RJDH in the Central African Republic*,” I am conducting a programme evaluation for the peace journalism intervention, to establish and understand what works, for whom it works, in what contexts, and why. The goal is to evaluate how the peace journalism training influenced participants and their practice, with a focus on mechanisms of change. Your responses will help improve future interventions and contribute to peacebuilding through media. Participation is voluntary, and responses will be kept confidential.

Section A: Background Information

1. Name (optional or respondent code): _____
2. Organisation: _____
3. Role/Position: _____
4. Years in journalism/media: _____
5. Location or province of operation: _____

Section B: Evaluation Questions

1. What aspects of the training worked well for you, and why do you think they were effective?
2. Who do you think benefited the most from the training, and what factors made it more relevant or impactful for them?
3. To what extent have you applied the peace journalism concepts from the training in your work since the intervention?
4. How did the training change your thinking or behaviour in relation to reporting on conflict or peace-related topics?
5. In your view, what underlying factors (e.g., organisational culture, access to resources, editorial freedom) helped or hindered the application of peace journalism practices after the training?
6. Based on your experience, what recommendations would you make to improve future peace journalism training programmes for RJDH and its partners?

