

An analysis of graduate students' perceptions of civic engagement in higher education in Côte  
d'Ivoire

by

N'zoret Innocent Assoman

B.A., University Felix Houphouet Boigny, 2015

M.A., University Felix Houphouet Boigny, 2019

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Leadership Communication

Staley School of Leadership

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2024

## **Abstract**

This study explores the perceptions of civic engagement among graduate students in the Ivorian higher education system, utilizing Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) as the methodological framework. The study identifies key themes through qualitative analysis, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities within the institutional landscape. There is substantial literature (Jacoby, 2009; Prentice, 2011) that demonstrate the important role of higher education in preparing students to become civically engaged citizens for their nations. However, in the Ivorian context findings reveal a traditional management structure, limited administrative support towards students' engagement, and varied student initiatives across disciplines. Recommendations include empowering administrative leadership, amplifying student voices, and establishing interdisciplinary civic engagement programs and clubs across universities. My future research agenda involves translating key chapters for broader accessibility, engaging in action-oriented collaboration, and contributing to global conversations on civic engagement. The study seeks to enrich the scholarly discourse and promote positive change within the Ivorian higher education system and beyond. The study reveals a strength of CPAR inquiry for this research in the Ivorian context as a tool in facilitating mindset change. By employing CPAR, participants accustomed to an environment where leadership is often associated with hierarchical structures and positions were able to embrace a collaborative mindset. This shift enabled them to recognize the collective power they possess to effect social change.

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Approved by:

Major Professor  
Brandon W. Kliewer, Ph.D.

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## **Dedication**

To my beloved grandfather, whose unconditional support has been a beacon of strength throughout my academic journey. Your encouragement, wisdom, and unconditional love have guided me every step of the way, shaping the person I am today. I am profoundly grateful for your constant belief in my potential and for instilling in me the values of resilience and determination.

I extend my deepest gratitude to my parents, whose unwavering dedication and sacrifices have paved the path for my success. From nurturing my curiosity as a child to providing endless support and encouragement through every milestone, your love and investment in my growth have been the cornerstone of my achievements. I am forever indebted to you for your boundless love, guidance, and unwavering belief in my dreams.

## Preface

This dissertation represents the culmination of years of dedicated research, analysis, and contemplation on the subject of the Graduate Students Perceptions of Civic Engagement in Higher Education in Côte d'Ivoire. As a scholar-practitioner, I embarked on this journey with a fervent curiosity and a commitment to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of leadership, particularly civic leadership, social change leadership and youth empowerment.

Throughout this dissertation, I have endeavored to explore the perceptions of graduate students of the role of the Ivorian higher education in supporting civic engagement at the institutional and disciplinary levels. Drawing upon a combination of theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence through literature, and personal insights, I aim to shed light on the importance of civic education in higher education.

I am deeply indebted to my dissertation committee, my professors and colleagues, the Staley School of Leadership, Kansas State University Community, University Félix Houphouët Boigny and LEAD+AFRICA. Their guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback have been invaluable in shaping the trajectory of this work.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and rigor of the research presented herein, I recognize that no scholarly endeavor is without its limitations. It is my hope that this dissertation will not only contribute to academic discourse but also inspire further inquiry and dialogue within the field of leadership.

In closing, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my parents and friends, as well as to the readers who engage with this dissertation. May it serve as a catalyst for continued exploration and discovery.

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

Côte d'Ivoire, a former French colony located on the Western Coast of Africa, gained its independence in 1960, resulting in a ruling structure that is heavily influenced by its colonial past with France. Consequently, many administrative structures in the country still bear traces of the French presence. One significant example of this colonial legacy is the Ivorian higher education system, which can be traced back to the colonial period. Over the years, this system faced numerous challenges, mainly political crisis and social turmoil leading to a state of considerable disarray. The situation worsened notably during the socio-political crises in 2002 and the one of 2010-2011 and its aftermath. As a matter of fact, Sany (2010) stated that “As we have seen, the conflict in Côte d’Ivoire has had a devastating impact on the education sector, which is of course not unusual in civil conflicts” (p.7). The education system encountered challenges prior to the socio-political crisis, which were exacerbated in its aftermath. In response, the government has taken steps to address and improve the higher education system through various redressal measures.

To address these difficulties and rebuild the higher education system, the Ivorian government as reported through an article of Oxford Business Group (2017)

set out a series of actions, outlined in the 2016-20 National Development Plan (Plan National de Développement, PND), under which it allocates an ambitious indicative budget totalling close to CFA5trn (€7.5bn) for education, including public and private contributions (Oxford Business Group, 2017).

Those crucial efforts of government are yet to be effective with concrete actions in the higher education system, especially in a socio-political context that suffered from crisis and

political turmoil. This observed lack of intention with practical solutions raises curiosity and relates fundamental questions regarding the role of the higher education system of Côte d'Ivoire in training students to be civically engaged citizens both within the educational environment and beyond, within society. Universities serve as the primary hub for empowering and training students to become engaged citizens for public or civic purposes. A comparative look at higher education systems in Western contexts, such as Europe and North America reveals a significant interest in promoting civic engagement initiatives through service-learning particularly within the realm of “for-academic-credit” programs and innovative pedagogical approaches. In this chapter, we will explore the rationale behind this study, its purpose, and the key research questions. Following this, we will delve into an overview of the study's theoretical framework and the definition of key terms.

### **Rationale for the Study**

There is substantial literature (Jacoby, 2009; Prentice, 2011) that demonstrate the important role of higher education in preparing students to become civically engaged citizens for their nations. In the context of the Ivorian higher education system, a significant gap becomes evident regarding its role as a hub in fostering a culture of civic engagement. Despite being a prominent institution, the government has established separate entities like the National Office for Civic Service (Office du Service Civique National-OSCN) under the Ministry for Youth Promotion, Professional Integration and Public Service (Ministère de la Promotion de la Jeunesse, de l'Insertion Professionnelle et du Service Public) responsible for civic service. The major actions of the 2023-25 Government Youth Program focus on civic service as a medium to re-create hope in youth and give them a second chance to contribute to the nation's social development. This setup indicates that while there is an intention to promote civic engagement

with young people as key participants, it remains disconnected from the higher education environment. There is a lack of models in the Ivorian higher education environment that promotes civic engagement as a priority or make it as part of the premiere role of the university. However, it is worth noting that the government acknowledges the importance of promoting civic engagement, with a particular focus on the youth as vital contributors. Indeed, numerous government initiatives have been introduced to solidify this aspiration of the government. One notable example is the creation of the National Youth Council of Cote d'Ivoire, which is designed with the primary objective of fostering youth civic engagement. Though the premises of these actions of the government are significant, they are still not effective to provoke considerable social change. An approach aiming to create social change would have facilitate connection with the youth that leverage existing power dynamic and foster sharing of power. In this regards, Desmurger (2021) argued that "As social change is acquired through increased levels of power sharing, youth have to mediate and negotiate power dynamics with a range of actors at the micro, meso and macro levels as they move from engagement to participation" (p.19). For the perspective shared in the statement above to work in the Ivorian context, government should enable spaces that encourage the interaction of youth with them. In fact, the National Youth Council of Cote d'Ivoire aims "to encourage youth civic participation, to represent the country's culturally, politically and social diverse youth and share opinions and advice on matters regarding young people" (youthpolicy.org, 2023). Though government is investing considerable effort to build a generation of young active citizens, one of the potential environments to consolidate a sustainable civic education for youth is higher education.

Addressing this disparity and bridging the gap between the higher education system and civic engagement represent a crucial area for improvement. Through a comprehensive analysis

of the current state and identifying potential areas for synergy, this study explores the role of the Ivorian higher education system in advancing civic engagement education at the institutional level and disciplinary level through analyzing the perceptions of its graduate students. One of the priorities of this study consists of revealing the role of Ivorian higher education in advancing civic engagement education, with the aim of fostering youth civic participation in communities and driving positive social change. Likewise, it seeks to highlight local practices promoted by graduate students, as referring to what Jacoby (2009) claimed to be the transformative function of higher education as a prominent space for learning, development, and the cultivation of responsible citizens.

More specifically, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the perceptions of graduate students within the Ivorian higher education system concerning civic engagement. We focus specifically on graduate students from the country's oldest and most esteemed public university, University Félix Houphouët Boigny, with a particular emphasis on those enrolled in three departments (economics, languages, and law.) These departments have traditionally been recognized for their graduates' ease of penetrating into the job market. However, over the past decade, a notable shift has been observed as more graduates from these units are choosing to engage in volunteering and community service activities. These three departments serve as our primary sample groups, given their historical significance in Ivorian higher education. Through this study, we seek to gain deeper insights into how graduate students in economics, languages, and law perceive the role of higher education in supporting their civic engagement initiatives or shaping them into effective agents of change. This pertains not only to their academic journeys but also to their broader contributions to society. Throughout this study, we will use the terms "agent of change" and "civically engaged citizens" interchangeably, referring to individuals who



actively contribute to advancing the common good. For a precise definition of these terms, please refer to the "Definition of Terms" section later in this chapter.

This sets a first step to the foundation of this study regarding its rationale. In the following section, we will delve into the significance of the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study relies on two main gaps that I identified through my exploration of literature. First, a faction of scholars continuously supports the importance of advocating for civic education in higher education as the place by excellence to promote sustainable civic education and practice (Komives et al., 2009). However, they do not stress on instances where students who are participants or stakeholders in the higher education experience civic engagement education promoted in the system. Second, within the Ivorian higher education system, the limited promotion of civic education undermines its civic mission to serve as a central hub for fostering a culture of civic engagement. This observation appears paradoxical for a country which government puts forth initiatives and reforms throughout the numerous strategic plans that have been developed post-socio-political crisis aimed at fostering youth empowerment nationwide. These efforts recognize that young people play crucial role as central agents in the nation's development, particularly given that more than half of the nation's population are young people.

Moreover, the significance of advocating for civic engagement education among graduate students holds a prominent position within the realm of higher education. It stands as a foundational strategy for fostering active citizenship and nurturing a sense of social responsibility among the students. This idea is supported by Prentice (2011), whose assertion emphasizes the imperative integration of civic education into academic curricula, spanning

across diverse disciplines and levels within the higher education landscape. In this line, Prentice (2011) stated, "For civic education to reach more students and have greater visibility, this education needed to be integrated into academics across all disciplines and levels of higher education" (p. 843). This perspective underscores the far-reaching and transformative potential of civic engagement education in academia, aiming to empower a well-rounded, socially aware, and civically engaged cohort of graduate students. Moreover, some scholars (Ehrlich, 1997; Jacoby, 2009; Bringle & Steinberg, 2010) emphasized the importance of enriching content with civic knowledge (Bell, 2023), sharing, and development to prepare students to become active citizens. Steinberg et al. (2011) also stress the value of educational and civic experiences during college years in promoting students' ability and sense of responsibility towards societal issues. In other words, investigating the role of the Ivorian higher education system in supporting civic engagement, my study delves into the perception of graduate students from University Felix Houphouët Boigny, the oldest and largest public university. It investigates their perceptions on civic engagement and how it (higher education) nurtures them to become civically engaged citizen for the common good, its impact on their social involvement and community development.

For the theoretical perspectives, I chose approaches that fall under collaborative research paradigm (Stoecker, 2013). The main objective of this study is to analyze graduate students' perception of civic engagement in the Ivorian higher education system. Therefore, the foundation of the study leans on a "collaborative research paradigm", Cummings & Kiesler (2007). Hence, the study will be conducted under a participatory action research methodology, drawing upon the principles outlined by Stoecker (2013). In the subsequent section, an overview of the theoretical framework will be presented, laying the foundation for the empirical investigation to follow.

## Overview of Theoretical Framework

In this section, I offer a brief overview to orient the reader to the theoretical basis of this study. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I will delve deeper into the epistemological and theoretical frameworks underpinning this study. Meanwhile, this section is dedicated to a focused discussion of three critical pillars: Social Constructionism, Social Change Leadership (SCL), and Participatory Action Research (PAR). These pillars serve as the overarching theoretical framework, guiding the methodological approach to unpack the primary research questions.

Firstly, the social constructionism perspective underpins the data analysis process, focusing on scrutinizing the meaning-making of research participants during focus group facilitation. It examines how their interpretations connect with the researcher's approach to data analysis.

Secondly, the Social Change Leadership framework is utilized to unpack the findings and select main themes in response to the guiding questions of the study. This framework aids in identifying patterns and understanding the implications of the research outcomes.

Lastly, participatory action research informs the methodological inquiry, particularly in engaging graduate students who may feel marginalized in the system. It fosters a collaborative atmosphere, empowering them to serve as co-researchers in the study and ensuring their perspectives are central to the research process.

These three components are integral to the foundation of this study. It is worth noting that Participatory Action Research (PAR) is not merely a method but is deeply intertwined with a specific set of theoretical and epistemological principles. In this context, the social constructionist perspective, which views meaning as a product from interactions between people,

shapes my ontological stance, while the social change leadership paradigm informs my epistemological position as the researcher. These theoretical underpinnings collectively guide and enrich the conceptual framework within which this study unfolds. Social change leadership serves as a lens in this study and informs the positionality of the researcher.

## Social Constructionism

I approach this study through the lens that leadership is a social construct (Komives et al., 2007). Therefore, leadership practice is considered as a tool for enacting positive change, emphasizing the importance of collective collaboration and actions among the actors or agents involved in the process. Thus, the emphasis of the analysis will move from the individual leader to the collective interaction/engagement. In this regard, I will draw on the perspective of Ospina & Foldy (2016) who introduced the idea that “Those who perceive collective leadership as a lens draw on social constructionism, a social theory with great currency in the social sciences. Like collective leadership as trend, constructionist approaches view leadership, in all its forms, as a type of organizing agreement constructed in social interaction” (p.4).

Also, social constructionism is an epistemology and speaks to a way of knowledge, thus, I believe that those (graduate students) engaged in the development of leadership programs or initiatives in the Ivorian higher education system will interact in ways that build a shared discourse. From this discourse, they can customize their ideal change or leadership practices that will trigger dynamic movements of change. This approach emphasizes complicity and co-creation (leadership, actions, change, civic initiatives) among the involved actors. They will be deeply invested in a cultural discourse meaningful to their context and reality, co-creating leadership and civic acts that lead to change.

My stance is reinforced by the idea that "Social constructionism regards individuals as integral with cultural, political, and historical evolution, in specific times and places, and so resituates psychological processes cross-culturally, in social and temporal contexts" (Galbin, 2014, p. 85). Therefore, the focus of this study will be on how the perception of civic engagement reflect co-created knowledge, actions, and practices that can lead to transformative change.

## **Social Change Leadership**

I draw on social change models and frameworks traced through literature (Ganz, 2010; Ospina & Foldy 2005, 2010) with a focus on exploring the relational connection that exists between constituents of systems and individuals. My standpoint is that being socially engaged starts with a choice and an intention to be committed to the common good. This commitment is a leadership act that not all social beings can admit or accept to hold. Indeed, for Ganz (2010) “Leadership is accepting responsibility to create conditions that enable others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty” (p.527). This is how the movement of enacting change starts from an individual to a group. Leadership as a collective action toward a common goal is a social construct (Raelin, 2011).

The focus point here consists of unveiling how leadership directs to social change. In fact, social change leadership requires actors or agents of change to get educated about the issues/problems by diving into understanding the root causes. This tenet of social change leadership empowers actors in the process. Then the actors situated themselves in the process of navigating/driving to the aspired outcome which in our case is “change”. This illustrates how actors collaboratively co-create the meaning of collective actions through shared discourse. Therefore, leadership practices are socially constructed through interactions. As a matter of fact, Raelin (2011) posits that “Leadership forms from actors making sense from their ongoing interactions” (p.202).

Likewise, Uhl-Bien views leadership as the outcome of human social construction emerging from the rich connection and interdependencies of organizations and their members. As leadership arises in communities so it is perceived as “a relational phenomenon”. A piece of our analysis will consist of revealing the relational between the higher education systems and youth civic engagement.

Leadership actions as social movements for change. Though the contexts are different, I do agree with Ganz (2010) when talking about leadership development and stating that “The challenge has become particularly difficult in recent years because institutional mechanisms that equipped large members of people with basic civic skills are in eclipse” (Ganz, 2010, p.559).

Social change leadership framework: reframing discourse, bridging discourses and harnessing human energies are essential because those principles will serve in the data analysis to surface the leadership acts experience by research participants as efforts to advance civic engagement.

### **Participatory Action Research with a focus on Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)**

In this section, I offer a short overview of the methodological approach, Participatory Action Research, that this study leans on to guide the reader. It will be developed in detail in the Chapter 3 of this dissertation. I opt for an approach that can help to account for the lived experience of participants (graduate students) and allow their voices to be heard and surface the ideas that could emerge through the process. Participatory Action Research is an approach that I detected while exploring the literature to be a good fit to this study for various reasons. For Johnson (2017) “PAR aims to build reciprocal research relationships with individuals and communities toward the development of emancipatory knowledge” (p.5). Through literature, PAR tenets consistently reveal that PAR has been used in multiple contexts and cases where the researchers were suspecting issues (problems) that they consider that a design that encourages collaboration and co-creation will be the best fit to address it. Critical theory has also contributed to PAR since it suggests that researchers attend to how power in social, political, cultural, and economic contexts informs the ways in which people act in everyday situations (Collins, 1998;

Kemmis, 2001). In this study, I draw on the perspective of Lewin (1946) a practitioner of PAR, that supports the idea that as the participants engage in the process of examination of their reality through the research process, they will be able to surface their challenges leading to change and transformation.

Through this entire study, I come in as a facilitator who draws stakeholders and community partners' civic practices and leadership practices by gathering graduate students' discourses (languages) that fosters social change. Indeed, the approach consists of unpacking how leadership occurs in their communities and how this form of knowledge can be a new set of knowledge and practice for community development. This where the critical participatory action research (Fine & Torre, 2021) perspective will come to play. This is in alignment with CPAR scholars Fine and Torre (2021) who argued that "Utilizing CPAR as the research methodology contributes to create the imagination of what else is possible" (p.19).

### **Subjectivity Statement**

In this section, I present my subjectivity statement, a reflection that will be further developed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. As the researcher embarking on this study, my unique life experiences have profoundly shaped my identity and worldview, as a scholar-practitioner. Growing up in a modest family in a rural community for over a decade with my parents has been pivotal in shaping my understanding of the world and its complexities. However, I recognize that my perceptions were once constrained, limiting my perspective to immediate concerns within my community.

This narrow viewpoint initially impacted my approach to research, restricting the scope of my study to issues I was familiar with. Recognizing this limitation, I actively sought to broaden my perspective by adopting participatory, collaborative, and action-oriented



methodologies. By engaging with diverse voices and experiences, I aimed to transcend my narrow worldview and address broader societal issues.

Over time, my involvement in community initiatives and volunteer work expanded my horizons and instilled in me a sense of responsibility and accountability. These experiences, coupled with my academic journey, have led me to advocate for social change and youth empowerment. Despite facing identity crises and challenges stemming from my diverse cultural and educational backgrounds (linguistics, entrepreneurship, French and English), I remain steadfast in my commitment to championing the rights and voices of marginalized communities, particularly young people.

As I delve deeper into my doctoral studies, I am continually evolving and refining my understanding of myself and the world around me. My subjectivity statement serves as a reminder of the journey I have undertaken and the transformative potential of research. By acknowledging my biases and limitations, I strive to conduct research that is inclusive, empathetic, and impactful, ultimately contributing to positive societal change.

### **Research purpose and Questions**

This study aims to investigate the perception of graduate students in Cote d'Ivoire's higher education system regarding civic engagement. The goal is to investigate the perceptions of graduate students regarding the role of Ivorian higher education system in supporting civic engagement (institutional level) and to explore how these graduate students perceive the role of their discipline/unit in fostering civic engagement (disciplinary/group level) within the educational context.

In order to dive into the purpose of this study, I consider the questions below:

1. How do graduate students perceive Ivorian Higher education role in supporting civic engagement (institutional level)?
2. How do graduate students perceive their academic unit or disciplines' role in supporting civic engagement (disciplinary level)?

### **Overview of the Ivorian Higher Education Leadership and Governance**

The higher education system of Cote d'Ivoire is ruled and governed under a centralized system. This structure of the system has led to some observable challenges regarding its governance and leadership. The dominant leadership in the system refers to a governance structure where government and the ministry in charge of the higher education has significant control and influence over the decision-making process, policies and practices (operations and activities) within the higher education system.

Indeed, the Ivorian higher education system is in a top-down management that constrains the key actors (administrative staff, professors and instructors, and students) in their collaboration and intervention. In other words, the leadership practice and associated leadership learning and development efforts are situated in this context. It is a hierarchical structure top-down decision making, and that limited generally the input and intervention of stakeholders of the system such as faculty, staff, and students.

### **Definition of Terms**

Throughout this study, I utilize several key terms and concepts that contextualized to delineate the scope of most concepts employed in this study:

1. *Civic engagement*: For this study I will stick on the definition of civic engagement introduced by Thomas Ehrlich (1997), who defined civic engagement as “individual and collective actions

designed to identify and address issues of public concern” (p.6) This definition gives a hint about a possible connection between civic engagement and social change leadership (SCL), specifically about their spark or motives. Therefore, it is important to explore further by elaborating on their distinction.

2. *Civic learning*: “They consider civic learning as including the knowledge, skills, values, and capacities that students ought to possess to be actively and purposefully engaged in society.” (Torney Purta et al. 2015, p.21). The statement above underscores the significance of civic engagement education, highlighting its role in nurturing essential skills and qualities among individuals, thereby equipping them to actively participate in community and societal affairs. This education not only empowers individuals but also fosters the formation of a community dedicated to driving positive social change (social change community).
3. *Social change community*: A social change community is community of committed actors driven to bring social change for the common good. In other words, what I refer to as a social change community is a group of active citizens who have voluntarily decided to share commitment or join hands to advance collective effort to address issues in there surrounding. I come to this terminology after diving into literature around social change, social change movements (Ganz, 2010; Wagner, 2009; Komives & Associates, 2017)
4. *Agent of change*: An agent of change in social change leadership is a person who acts as a catalyst for the change management process. They help an organization, or part of an organization, transform how it operates by inspiring and influencing others. In this study, I will lean on this definition to refer to an agent of change as a civically engaged citizen that contributes to positive changes in his/her surroundings and communities for the common good. (Dwan, 1999; Bevzenko, 2020)

5. *Relational leadership*: We define leadership as a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change. (Komives et al., 2007, p.29).
6. *Social responsibility* is a personal commitment to the well-being of people, our shared world, and the public good. (Komives et al., 2007, p.20)
7. *Civic responsibility* is the sense of personal responsibility individuals should feel to uphold their obligation as part of any community. (Komives et al., 2007, p.20).
8. *Paradigms* are patterns and ways of looking at things in order to make sense of them. (Komives et al., 2007, p.19).
9. *Social Change Leadership*: In this study the context or location is Cote d'Ivoire, especially the higher education system. While conducting a systematic literature review, I noticed that the existing literature revealed that there are challenges in the Ivorian higher education but for them (scholars) stuck to the urgent solution is infusing more financial support into the education system. Though, this can be one of the alternatives to support the system, I do believe the cultural milieu and the workforce as well as the students, for the sake of this study I will call this group the stakeholders of the Ivorian higher education could contribute/help to surface the key issues or touch the root causes of the issues in the Ivorian Higher Education. (Ospina, 2005)
10. *Civic Engagement and Youth Leadership Development in Higher Education*: The focus in this part will be on understanding what distinguishes a leadership act from a civic act. In recent youth engagement literature, one can see that most activities or initiatives are created to develop the civic capacities of students and young people in general. I am curious to scrutinize what is lacking when developing those programs without an implication of leadership. Therefore, I am looking at unpacking the intersection between civic engagement and leadership

practices. Jacoby (2009) posted that “Civically engaged scholarship is a dynamic and collaborative participatory process in which the rich resources of the university and community are combined to integrate research, learning, and service in identifying and addressing community-based issues and needs while promoting socially responsible knowledge” (p.188). The above statement of Jacoby summarizes the real contribution of this study and how it will favor the higher education system.

*11. Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR):* Critical participatory action research enacts an ethical, relational, and complicated commitment to research with people, communities, and movements. (Fine & Torre, 2021, p.21)

*12. Symbolic Interactionism:* In this study, I will lean on the description Bhattacharya (2017) made about symbolic interactionism by focusing on the following feature: “Understanding social reality as experienced by participants while they make meaning of their interactions with their world” (p.60).

## Conclusion

By shedding light on these issues, this study seeks to explore the graduate students of the higher education of Côte d'Ivoire perception of civic engagement. In some part of the world like in the Western context, higher education institutions prioritize instilling a culture of civic engagement among college students to empower them throughout their academic journey and beyond. However, this is not universally observed, as demonstrated by the case of Côte d'Ivoire.

The Ivorian context is a good example. In fact, the Ivorian government's plans to promote or develop the culture of civic engagement looks disconnected from the mission of higher education unlike in the Western context. The actions and initiatives in the Ivorian context toward civic engagement are not associated with the higher education system. The only connection found through the government effort to connect the promotion of civic engagement with a higher education institute was the creation of a civic service and citizenship training center.

While elsewhere (Western Context), resources are mobilized to promote civic engagement and key components like service learning, and civic education through the higher education system, in Côte d'Ivoire the focus is not on higher education. The statement above shows an attempt to connect a civic service space to an institution of higher education whereas those institutions existed for decades. I do think what is required in this context is to hit the status quo by redesigning policies that will give the existing higher education institutions a standard civic mission to be implemented nationwide. There is a need to enable policies for academic civic engagement promotion in Cote d'Ivoire. Previous case studies by Koffi (2018), Zinsou and Tra Bi (2016) shed light on issues such as inadequate funding, political interference, weak institutional capacity, and limited stakeholders' participation. These studies, along with personal observations, provide insight into the governance and leadership challenges in the Ivorian higher education system.

It consolidates the researcher's commitment to conducting the study in a socially just manner and promotes the principles of inclusion, representation, and equity (Crethar et al., 2008). By prioritizing social justice, the research can capture diverse perspectives and amplify the voices of the graduate students to share their experience through interviews because in the system they are generally perceived as marginalized individuals, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of students' perception of civic engagement.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This literature review explores the notion of civic engagement, youth participation, and community engaged scholarship as central terms for the study. It further scrutinizes the profound significance of civic engagement education in mobilizing youth participation in community development (for social change). The first section will reveal the challenge or limitation of the Ivorian higher education for not creating space for youth active participation toward social issues as well as not contributing to defining policies that will work for the promotion of civic engagement in the Ivorian higher education.

Moreover, the review elucidates the importance of civic engagement education (Prentice, 2011) by progressing from the foundational literature to subsequently transitioning into an exploration of the underlying conceptual framework of the study by shedding light on the scope of the study in the higher education of Côte d'Ivoire. Thus, the emphasis will be on highlighting the important role the research participants (graduate students) play in sharing their perception about the role of the Ivorian higher education in supporting civic engagement in Ivorian higher education.

Scholarly discourse, as documented by Moore (2014) and Jacoby (2019), underscores the importance of integrating civic engagement education within higher education systems. This integration serves to fortify democratic practices or endeavors, thereby propelling individuals towards becoming active agents capable of effecting positive change. Additionally, the interplay of myriad theories and practices emerges as a testament to the evolution and advancement of



civic engagement education within the realm of Western higher education, especially in the United States. Consequently, the cultivation of civic education assumes paramount significance, especially within a socio-political milieu that suffered from crises and political instabilities as the case of Côte d'Ivoire. The commitment to infuse higher education with a pivotal role in the development of proactive and accountable young people committed for social change is rooted in the desire of young people not to live in isolation or being marginalized when they can contribute to affect change in their community. This resolute dedication is driven by an awareness of the precarious socio-political landscape that endeavors to fortify its institutional mechanisms. The convergence of these factors leads towards the positioning of higher education as an instrumental apparatus for fostering the acquisition and dissemination of civic knowledge and skills (Johnson, 2017). Those skills and knowledge will contribute to the readiness of the youth (encompasses graduate students) in their effort to pursuit social change.

This mobilization reveals the eminent role that higher education plays as a conduit par excellence for generating and diffusing civic knowledge and civic skills. This veneration for higher education as a conduit aligns with the perspective that it serves as an exemplary conduit for the cultivation of civic knowledge and civic skills. The discourse then transitions towards the foundational underpinnings of civic engagement education, marked by theoretical insights contributed by Moore (2014) and Jacoby (2019). This review thereby underscores the role of higher education as a catalytic agent for democratic consolidation, serving as a citadel for nurturing and propelling individuals towards civic engagement and responsible citizenship, particularly in contexts where social relationships are broken due to crisis.

The discourse then shifts towards the foundational underpinnings of civic engagement education, drawing on theoretical insights contributed by Moore (2014) and Jacoby (2019). This review

emphasizes the pivotal role of higher education as a catalyst for democratic consolidation, nurturing individuals towards civic engagement and responsible citizenship, especially in contexts marred by social crises. It is imperative to delve into the process of meaning creation from the participants of the study.

Following the exploration of the public purposes of higher education, I will briefly introduce the meaning-making process that informs this study within the framework of social constructionism. The study acknowledges the social presence in moderating meaning. As Barrett (2015) posited, "Meaning does not exist independently inside people's heads; meaning is a matter of coordinated activity among interacting people" (p.70). This underscores the significance of meaning-making through participation and interaction, a crucial aspect of the participatory approach employed in the study.

In this chapter, I will address three main ideas: 1) Provide framing and excerpts from the Ivorian Higher Education, 2) Contextualize the scope of the study, and 3) Introduce the conceptual framework.

### **Framing and Excerpts from the Ivorian Higher Education**

This section delves into the extensive body of literature, aiming to grasp a precise elucidation of the concept of civic engagement and correlate it with the specific context of Côte d'Ivoire. It became evident that a multitude of definitions exist alongside a notable scholarly interest in scrutinizing the dimensions of civic engagement in higher education globally. Prentice (2011) argued that "Higher education has been called upon to prepare its graduates to be civically engaged community members. Since the 1980s, faculty have taken up this call" (p.842). This statement illustrates a call to action for higher education to play a significant role in the

education of the citizens. It goes further to provide a historical background to when it started in the American context. It serves as a reference to other contexts around the globe.

Likewise, the concept of civic engagement has been explored in various scholarly works, resulting in different definitions tailored to the specific objectives and scope of individual studies or research endeavors. As a matter of fact, Jacoby (2009) notably recognizes the absence of a singular definition for civic engagement. The definitions, much like the scholars invested in this realm of inquiry, exhibit a considerable degree of variance. Amidst this diversity of perspectives, one definition particularly resonates with the contextual underpinnings of this study.

Ehrlich offered in *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* (2000):

Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes (Preface, vi).

Considering the definition above, civic engagement is a social act that goes along with skills and values development of those involved in the process with the desire of affecting change that will lead to social change as Matthews (2014) qualified it of the act of the “*informed citizen.*”

Therefore, civic engagement should be contextualized because space, time and context have a significant role in the process of developing policies for civic engagement education.

### **The Notion of Civic Engagement in Cote d’Ivoire**

This section will explore the perception of engagement in the Ivorian context and how authorities frame civic engagement in the national civic space. Documented sources found did not connect the promotion of civic engagement initiatives with the higher education system.

Meanwhile civic services are highly mentioned or promoted in official documents and official platforms of the Ivorian government. As a matter of fact, on the government's official website, civic services are presented as part of the current government strategic plan. But still there are no traces in the definition that connect civic engagement or their definition with the civic mission of the university. As a matter of fact, the definition of the current government regarding civic service is that:

Le service civique vise principalement à l'épanouissement de la personnalité de l'individu et à sa socialisation pour en faire un citoyen conscient de ses devoirs envers l'État et de ses responsabilités envers la société. (<https://www.gouv.ci/actualite-article.php?d=2&recordID=13650&p=436> From a government communiqué, June 16, 2022)

English translation: Civic service aims mainly at the development of the individual's personality and his/her socialization to make him/her a citizen conscientious of his/her duties towards the State and his/her responsibilities towards the community (Translation of the author).

This statement is a summary that explains the vision and shared understanding of government about civic service. They acknowledge the attributes of civic service as capable to develop people into conscientious citizens. But there are no traces of formally approved approaches assign to the higher education system to be followed by one individual to become a conscientious citizen as they express it. To make a comparison between the statement made by Erlich and the one from the Ivorian government, I will surface how both statements emphasize the need of the individual to acknowledge their civic responsibilities vis-à-vis their nation. But the nuance is that in the view of Erlich, individual through the process of civic engagement develops knowledge, skills to make differences in the life of their community members through political and non-political processes.

This approach of the Ivorian government raises curiosity about the relationship between government and the primary beneficiary (youth) of its civic initiatives. In other words, it seems challenging to admit an effortless intention of the Ivorian government to develop policies that propel the Ivorian higher education system to create a healthy environment for the advancement of civic engagement. Therefore, in the next section, I will situate the study in the Ivorian context and highlight its scope. Therefore, it becomes crucial to frame the conceptual framework of the study to elucidate the disconnections between government, the youth, and the higher education system.

### **Contextualizing the Scope of the Study**

Coming to the Ivorian context, I can notice some aspirational moves which give insights into possible attempts to promote civic engagement nationwide. The following passage illustrates some efforts of the government to position civic engagement as a priority in the national development plan. As a matter of fact,

In 2016, the government created the Ministry for Youth Promotion, Employment and Civic Services (MPJEJSC) to fill the gaps of previous administrations and to coordinate and monitor youth policies. In this context, the MPJEJSC led the process to develop the Youth National Policy (2016-2010), which was adopted in 2016. In order to win consensus, the policy was elaborated in cooperation with all the relevant stakeholders (private sector, technical and financial partners, civil society and youth organisations). The text of the policy provides a transversal and comprehensive framework for youth policies by adopting a horizontal approach. The policy is based on eight key operational priorities, namely institutional environment, society and culture, regional and international cooperation, education and training. (OECD, 2017)

Though the statement above illustrates the good intention of the government, there is no emphasis on actions and initiatives in the system that put national higher education as a core entity to promote civic engagement, while they mentioned education as part of the key operational priorities. Civic engagement activities are lacking from the policies of higher education to the pedagogy in the Ivorian context. On the other hand, it seems like education and training are the focal point for the implementation of the priority policy of government when it comes to the dissemination of youth policy that will encourage their commitment in social life and community development. However, there is still no direct instruction from the government to facilitate the civic education of the Ivorian youth through the higher education system. In fact, decisions regarding the Ivorian higher education system are made directly from the Ministry of Higher Education and they affect straight the universities, especially the internal policies which govern the system.

This approach of the Ivorian government remains problematic in the sense that the country has most of its youth in higher education which is the arena par excellence to educate the next generation of conscientious and responsible citizens by instilling civic engagement values in the system.

Therefore, in the next section I will shed light on the scope of the study and the main consideration.

### **Consideration of the Study**

Though there is an evident divorce between government and the youth, we can still observe that youth are playing their role of committed citizens. Youth demography represents an important asset in the development of nations around the globe. Young people are generally marginalized in the process of decision-making. In Côte d'Ivoire, we can observe a huge disconnection between

government (political systems) and its youth. Though young people undertake nationwide initiatives to support the movements for social development. In the course of supporting the national development initiatives, it is common to see that the young social agents are committed to what makes their hearts beat rather than what is imposed to them as most important issue from external forces.

As a matter of fact, Agodio (2022) stated that “young people are no longer following traditional approaches (whether conventional or unconventional) but are instead following modern approaches to participation via the Internet and are increasingly oriented toward the subjects of ‘megatrends’ that are close to their hearts” (p.378). From this statement, we acknowledge that there is a new pathway that Ivorian youth are exploring to ensure their participation in the development of their nation, and it needs to be scrutinized accordingly. The youth who are disregarded in the process should be heard and their perspectives understood. This study intends to provide such a platform to youth contribution, especially graduate students from the university Felix Houphouët Boigny and document their perspectives to be shared.

Youth leadership in the African context at large, especially in the Ivorian context is very complex to frame and understand because many cultural tensions affect their acts. Indeed, there is an intergenerational gap that exists between the young generation and the adults. As a matter of fact, Vite (2019) stated that “It is persuasive that the perception that the way elders often consider young people is as juvenile and incompetent people, viewing them as irresponsible to be full members of society” (p.4). Likewise, the perception of engagement as seen by young people is not always perceived the same way by the old generation (adults of another age). In this study, whenever we use the word youth, it refers to young people of 16-35 years old, in Côte d’Ivoire, this is considered the official range of youth, (Ivory Coast | Factsheets |

Youthpolicy.org, 2022). From a cultural background, the social structure of the Ivorian communities is divided in a way that the young people have to be consistently the followers of adults, based on age, social status, and background. Thus, young people are expected to always accept what comes from the adults/elders, this social construct created a barrier that seems to challenge young people's commitment to collaboration with government officials who are seen as the majority adults, from a different generation than theirs. Moreover, in communities, this setting/structure through which many families educate their kids drives adults or some parents to close the collaborative (inclusive) interconnection between them and the youth.

In alignment with research conducted about youth in the Ivorian context, Kouakou (2009, 2021) put his focus on youth empowerment and community engagement by using the internet or digital platforms. Therefore, in Kouakou's work (2009, 2021) he presented that Ivorian youth are victims of many social issues, and one of the most challenging is its social integration. As a matter of fact, he argued that "The Ivorian youth is like those in developing countries. It faces many challenges related to education, health, employment issues and the central question of its social integration." (Kouakou, 2021, p. 142) In the same line, Vite (2019) approaches the reality of young people and engagement from a more global perspective rather than what Kouakou did which is centered on the reality of a nation (Côte d'Ivoire) which is the context of this study. However, the work of Vite (2019) revealed the universality of challenges around youth engagement. Building upon the aforementioned viewpoints, this study is undertaken with a focus on engaging graduate students from University Felix Houphouët Boigny as its primary participants.

From a communication standpoint, it is admitted that wherever communication occurs much-hidden reality occurs too, a willingness to account for them is necessary to grasp the



phenomena as an entity than as a spectrum of events (consecutive events) because communication (interaction) even between two people is not linear. Thus, the issue of generational definition and meaning making by young people become obvious and different from the perspective of the old generation.

In fact, being young is a social fact (related to age) and same the notion government should be, built as a social body that holds power. However, engagement is socially built through interaction or conversation. The way youth perceived government officials through the process of meaning-making is crucial. Likewise, in the realm of policy creation or definition there is an influence of the old generation (adult) on the perception of young people.

With Coordinated Meaning Management (CMM), Pearce (2005), the meaning-creating process is at the core of the communication act. Therefore, I think analyzing situations from the lens of CMM in the Ivorian case will help to develop meaningful notions that can serve as standpoints to formulate deliberative dialogue between government and young people. That way, a context will be set to the progressive reinforcement of collaboration that will end up by creating conditions for youth inclusion in the development of policies for more impact because youth are major actors around the world to bring impactful change. In fact, most of the Ivorian government projects developed for youth failed to get a ripple effect, therefore I think by addressing the issue from the root causes hope will surface.

Likewise, social fragmentation and divisions generally impede young people to demonstrate their social responsibility in the decision-making process. As a matter of fact, Fletcher (2006) defines his concept of *Authorize young people* in those words: “Authorizing young people means going beyond historical expectations for children and youth by actively providing the training, creating the positions, and allowing the space they need in order to affect

change” (Fletcher & Vavrus, 2006, p.6). This statement is a call to action that invites adults (government officials) to show their responsibility in front of the youth. There is also an invitation for enabling spaces needed by young people to affect change, if those spaces are created without consulting the youth, I doubt that it is going to provide for their needs when it comes to effective contributions in the nation’s life.

Despite the commitment of young people toward the social causes, the system always portrays a one-way communication in a top-down (government to youth) approach in which decisions are made without their (youth) contribution. I think communication issues can be evoked as part of the root causes of the disparities that surface in the relations between government and young people. Therefore, thinking about communication principles that can foster youth involvement in public engagement by bridging the existing gap between government and young people, Pearce (2010) stated that “Until our society acknowledges the importance of foregrounding patterns of communication, engaging in public dialogue has the best chance of flourishing in discussions facilitated by skilled practitioners. (p.124). This statement reveals the importance of communication patterns in public dialogue.

## **Leadership and Civic Engagement Through a Social Constructionist Lens**

### **Conceptual Framework**

In this section, I will provide insights into the conceptual framework that underpins this study. This study will be grounded in the overarching framework of social constructionism and social change leadership. Accordingly, the fundamental elements of the research approach are shaped by the perspective that leadership is inherently relational and is manifested through collective human endeavors aimed at addressing shared challenges (Komives et al., 2007; Ospina

& Foldy, 2012). As discussed in the preceding section, both the Ivorian government and the Ivorian higher education system have not prioritized structures and policies that facilitate the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes or their contributions to social development. Nevertheless, observations have revealed the individual efforts of young people, including graduate students, in contributing to the common good. Graduate students represent a significant segment of the Ivorian youth demography, and they play an integral role in fostering a robust social network for the nation's community development. Hence, this study targets them (graduate students) as primary research population to assess their perceptions of civic engagement as a collective and collaborative effort.

The collaborative efforts within this study will expose the research participants, who are graduate students, to the concepts of *reframing discourse*, *bridging differences*, and *harnessing human energies* (Ospina & Foldy, 2012). These principles are presented in the work of (Ospina & Foldy, 2010, 2012) as special practices that produced collective capacities to leverage the organizations' power to produce systemic social change. These concepts will be put into practice as the graduate students come together in a shared setting during the focus group facilitations to narrate their stories, informed by their unique backgrounds and social experiences.

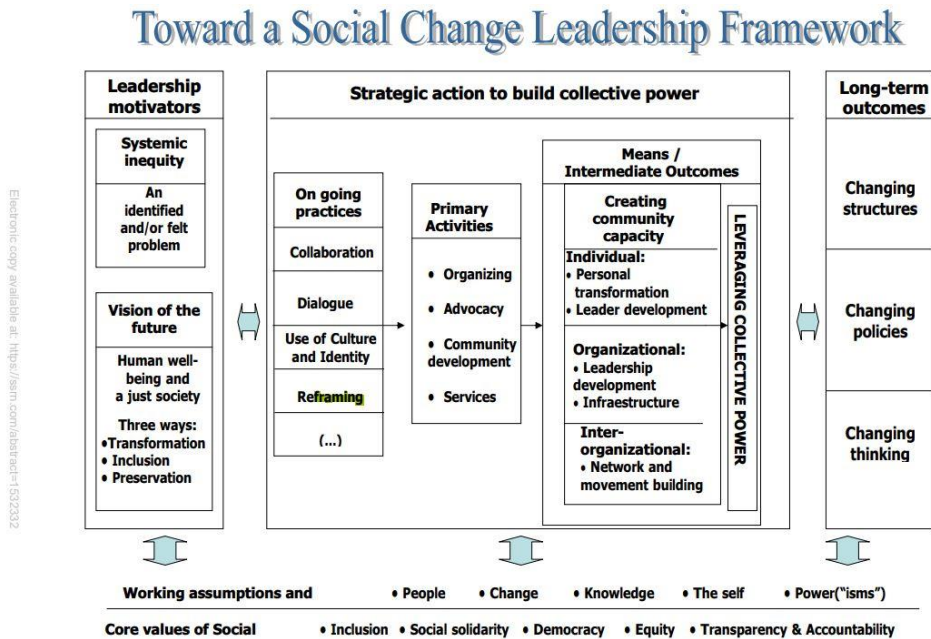
### **Social Change Leadership (Ospina & Foldy)**

Ospina and Foldy (2010) posited the necessity of event facilitators to stimulate participation and mobilize resources in the quest to address issues affecting the studied population. This examination of social change leadership holds significant implications for the broader field of leadership in two distinct ways. Firstly, it sheds light on social constructionist perspectives of leadership, emphasizing its collective nature rather than being solely inherent in

visible individuals. Secondly, it underscores the critical interplay between beliefs and behaviors, highlighting that both worldviews and actions are fundamental aspects of leadership.

I anticipate that through effective facilitation, participants will engage in a reflective sense-making process that will inspire members of their groups, associations, or organizations, at the institutional level, to partake in practices and activities aimed at nurturing collective power. This collective power can then be harnessed to yield long-term social change outcomes, both at the institutional and group levels. While considering the framework below titled *Toward a Social Change Leadership Framework*, there are agencies to develop action that can lead to build collective power. Therefore, the notion of reframing discourse becomes a pillar in this study because the research participants (graduate students) have many things in common like their experience, living and coming from the same context (university in Côte d'Ivoire) that will inform their stories. Though, they (research participants) will join the study from different disciplinary units (departments of economics, languages and law) during the focus group facilitation sessions, they will be together in the same setting, and they will be given the opportunities to tell their stories that are informed with their unique experiences following a discussion guide (facilitation guide) developed to facilitate focus groups. Those moments will be captured by the researcher and serve as prompts during the debrief of the focus group to lead them to collective actions.

**Figure 2.1. Toward a Social Change Leadership Framework**



Source: Ospina & Foldy, 2010, P.13

The idea of leveraging collective power, leading to change, and leveraging social injustice that are highlighted in this framework connects to some extent to key principles of CPAR. Hence, CPAR is considered for the methodological approach of this study.

### Overview of Critical Participatory Action Research

Considering the scope of the study and the evident gaps or disconnection related to civic engagement within the higher education system of Côte d’Ivoire, the study will be conducted under the guise of Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR), especially the perspective of Fine & Torre (2021). This choice is rooted in CPAR's harmonious alignment with the principle of conducting research collaboratively, involving both the study itself and the communities, it aims to impact. In this case, the study engages with graduate students within their community. CPAR approach emphasizes the strong relationship between the researcher and the participants

to unveil their lived experience in their context. An in-depth description the CPAR approach is offered in chapter 3.

### **Conclusion**

Upon completion of this comprehensive literature review, it has become evident that the Ivorian government and the higher education system of Cote d'Ivoire lacks policies that promote youth contribution to civic engagement especially at the higher education institutional level. Furthermore, we can observe that the civic mission of the Ivorian higher education is not a strategic priority from the government based on the excerpts we discovered from government official announcements. Therefore, in this study I lean on social change leadership framework lens and critical participatory action research as methodological approach to analyze both the perceptions of graduate students on the role of the higher education system in supporting civic engagement at the institutional level and at their disciplinary units in advancing civic engagement.

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This study is rooted in the collaborative research paradigm as proposed by Cummings & Kiesler (2007). Within this paradigm, I draw upon theoretical perspectives, specifically social constructionism and social change leadership, which align with the collaborative research approach, as outlined by Stoecker (2013). The synergy between these theoretical perspectives informs my choice of a methodological approach centered on participation, collaboration, and action; critical participatory action research (CPAR). Consequently, the primary purpose of this study is to analyze graduate students' perceptions of civic engagement within the Ivorian higher education system. To achieve this, I will explore the following research questions:

1. How do graduate students perceive the role of the higher education in supporting or advancing civic engagement (institutional level)?
2. How do graduate students perceive their academic units or disciplines' role in supporting civic engagement (disciplinary level)?

This chapter offers a description of the methodology and the research design inspired by the research purpose and questions. To explore the research questions, this study employs a participatory action research inquiry, especially CPAR and a data generation method, semi-structured focus group (Bhattacharya, 2017). In this study, I adopted online focus group (Kamberlis & Dimitriads, 2005).

## Choice of Methodology

This study will be guided by the methodological inquiry of critical participatory action research (CPAR). Considering the context of the study and the research population (graduate students) who are generally identified in the higher education system as marginalized population; this approach harmoniously merges critical theory and participatory action research to effectively tackle social justice issues (Bell, 2023; 2016). CPAR is not merely a research method; it is a dynamic process that actively involves marginalized communities in research endeavors, catalyzing the co-creation of knowledge and driving the wheels of social change.

To establish the methodological underpinning of the study, I will draw upon the insights of Fine and Torre (2021) as articulated in their book, "Essentials of Critical Participatory Action Research." In their work, Fine and Torre (2021) present CPAR as "a modest move to democratize and decolonize research as praxis with communities under siege, one dedicated to research that bends toward action" (p. 4). Hence, we approach this study with the intent of fostering the stakeholders, research participants (graduate students from university Felix Houphouët Boigny) capacity through two focus group facilitations guided by CPAR's perspective to be able to formulate their learning into collective action (action decided as a group based on their shared knowledge) that can lead to promote student led initiatives or ideas that contribute to the advancement of civic engagement in the higher education system. Indeed, through the focus group session the research participants will get the opportunity to unleash their human energies to reduce the power imbalance in their context and share their stories that will lead to collective action as outcome of the research participants' group facilitation (Ospina & Foldy, 2010). While the outcome of the focus group facilitations is to generate data, the participatory action research approach empowers research participants to anticipate thinking of



possible programs or initiatives within their (graduate students) disciplinary units that will foster the advancement of the civic mission of the university by taking an active role that is more inclusive with the active contribution of each participant. In fact, CPAR is a purposeful approach that places a strong emphasis on actionable outcomes. It achieves this by empowering marginalized communities to actively contribute to research, respecting their values and contextual nuances, and ensuring their narratives are acknowledged and valued in the research process. Therefore, the researcher will assure that the data collected through this study faithfully acknowledge the voices, stories and narratives of the participants (graduate students) so that they are fully translated in the findings. In the next section, I will provide an overview of CPAR and its main tenets.

### **Introduction to CPAR**

Fine and Torre (2021) present CPAR as far more than a simple research methodology; it serves as a comprehensive framework and an epistemological perspective. Succinctly defined by Fine and Torre (2021), CPAR is "a framework for engaging research with communities interested in documenting, challenging, and transforming conditions of social injustice" (p. 3). This approach seamlessly integrates critical theory with participatory action research, providing an effective means to address issues of social justice. CPAR transcends the realm of research methodology; it is a dynamic process that actively involves marginalized communities in research endeavors, fostering the co-creation of knowledge and propelling the wheels of social change. Additionally, under CPAR, research participants are considered as experts, so they are engaged as co-researchers.

Within the specific context of this study, which focuses on a public university in Côte d'Ivoire, the prevalent top-down administrative management approach, and the exclusion of key

stakeholders, particularly students, from decisions directly affecting them, underscore the urgent need to challenge the status quo. The adoption of an approach like CPAR, which engages research participants as co-researchers, offers a promising pathway to bridge the existing gap of social injustice within the higher education system, at least to some extent. In essence, the CPAR approach may reveal, within this particular context, the imperative for the system and its officials to prioritize inclusivity and diversity. This shift is essential for bringing a diverse range of voices to the table, ultimately contributing to the establishment of a more sustainable system that promotes civic engagement internally, through curriculum and pedagogy, and externally through community-engaged activities.

In a similar vein, Kemmis and McTaggart (2017) argue that CPAR serves as an approach to alleviate the oppressive conditions faced by marginalized populations. A pivotal question at the heart of CPAR, as posed by Fine and Torre (2021) is, "Who is the expert?" (p. 12). This query serves as the foundation for a critical perspective that seeks to deconstruct and challenge the prevailing notion of expertise as defined and sanctioned by those entrenched in the field, often marginalizing certain voices within academia and communities. This proposition supports the idea that by utilizing CPAR, the purpose is not just to disseminate knowledge, but it is also an opportunity to apply and to construct new knowledge (Howard et al., 2023). Thus, the next passage will give insights about the historical root of CPAR and its core tenets.

The perspectives of Fine and Torre (2021) on CPAR draw significantly from the influential work of critical scholars, most notably Anisur Rahman (1985). Fine and Torre (2021) emphasized that "CPAR is rooted in the activist call "No research on us, without us" (p.3). This statement shows the commitment of a researcher conducting research under the guise of CPAR by designing an inclusive, collaborative and socially just approach that is centered on an active

adhesion of the concerned population. Furthermore, Fine and Torre (2021) elucidated that “Theoretically CPAR is inspired by a range of critical perspectives: critical race, feminist, post-structural, decolonial, disability, Marxist, Indigenous, and/or queer theory” (p.6). Unlike the other Participatory Action Research variations, “CPAR focuses intentionally on questions of power and injustice, intersectionality and action” (p.6). The scholarly work of Pain et al. (2019) suggested seven core themes central to CPAR as follow: a) *collaboration*, b) *knowledge*, c) *power*, d) *ethics*, e) *theory building*, f) *action*, g) *emotion* and h) *well-being*.

CPAR recognizes that all of us possess deep and unique knowledge and understanding of our everyday lives, including the experiences of our families and communities. Hence, CPAR will be an essential tool in this study to leverage the voice of research participants for collaboration and co-creation of knowledge. The tenets of CPAR reveals that, CPAR challenges the tradition of whose knowledge has value, whose expertise is recognized, whose expertise or ignorance needs to be challenged and to whom research is accountable.

CPAR is identified by researchers in the field of action research as an approach that fosters collaborative social change. This statement shows a connection between the theoretical perspectives of leadership for social change and CPAR. It is with these profound premises and tenets of CPAR in mind that I have chosen to conduct my study under the CPAR framework.

This approach helps to generate actions that will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

### **Rationale for Participatory Action Research**

Stemming out from the premises of the participatory action research, this study will heavily lean on CPAR. CPAR is fundamental to this study in the sense that it provides a forum for the researcher and the research participants to connect deeply within their context and their

values to shape interactions and actions that will lead to social change. This decision comes from the recognition that the research participants (graduate students) from three departments: economics, languages, and law are situated in a hierarchical higher education environment (university Félix Houphouët Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire), grapples with pronounced power imbalances, with administration acting significant authority over students, who occupy the lower ranks of the institutional hierarchy. This described context and environment is an illustration that the research participants (graduate students) are not just part of the marginalized people, but they are also somehow part of the oppressed by the system (Fine & Torre, 2021). CPAR should provide the forum and platform for the graduate students (research participants) to communicate their perception or experience regarding civic engagement in their context (higher education of Côte d'Ivoire) by addressing the facilitation questions, which are designed for group interactions and equal share of perspectives from participants without putting them in any uncomfortable positions. Assuring research participants to feel comfortable to fully engage in the conversation without reluctance was crucial to the study.

Considering the connection with the research context and its participants, this study seeks to analyze the perception of graduate students from the Ivorian higher education regarding the role of higher education in advancing civic engagement both at the institutional level and disciplinary level. Essential factors informed the choice of using CPAR as research approach for this study. One of the key factors is that the Ivorian higher education is structured in hierarchical structure with students at the bottom. This constitutes a huge barrier for the system to acknowledge the creation of knowledge by and with students and how their (students) efforts contribute to repaint the image of the atmosphere regarding leadership and engagement. By employing CPAR principles, the facilitations stimulated the research participants unique

leadership perspectives through this collaboration to raise their voice against any disfunctions observed in the system that negatively impacts their efforts to support civic engagement. In this same line, Sadik (2019) argues that “As noted before, AR, PAR and CPAR share common characteristics such as action and participation focus” (p.25). This statement reinforces the idea that action and participation are core to CPAR. In fact, while the research considered CPAR approach, it emphasizes the participants’ opinions which are welcome by the researcher and through that experience of generating data they received training about social change leadership and civic engagement in higher education with related notions like civic knowledge, civic skills before, during and after the facilitation. This activity prepares them (research participants) to anticipate on collective action as one group to reflect on ways in which their disciplinary units can contribute to advancing civic engagement. Not just that, it also solidifies their conviction and commitment that some of their past initiatives/activities can be identified as civic actions and there exist scientific affiliations to those. This highlights the interconnection of practice and theory.

In the following section, I will offer a detailed insight about the methodological framework underpinning this study.

### **Methodological Framework**

In this section, I will offer a detailed presentation of the methodological framework. This research leans on CPAR which is an epistemology as well as a methodology to grasp the rich dynamics that the context and the research participants will bring to the study. The idea of capturing the graduate students’ perceptions of civic engagement raised my curiosity in being

very critical with the choice of methods that can effectively respond to the guiding questions that governs this study as follow:

1. How do graduate students perceive Ivorian Higher education role in supporting civic engagement (institutional level)?
2. How do graduate students perceive their academic unit or disciplines' role in supporting civic engagement (disciplinary level)?

Likewise, this study draws on an interpretivist qualitative approach (Bhattacharya, 2017). The methodological framework of the overarching approach in this study is informed by a collaborative research approach. The inquiry of this study demands methodological approaches that can drive change. Hence, CPAR as a matter of fact, Fine and Torre (2021) posited that "...the research should facilitate some form of social change" (p.70).

CPAR is a good choice to conduct this study in the sense that where a positive change is expected CPAR becomes a relevant research approach to account for. CPAR contributes to changing the paradigm when engaging in research which prioritizes a bottom-up approach in negotiating change and transformation within the higher education system. (Fine & Torre, 2021)

Moreover, the research design should be aligning with principles of social change leadership because I am navigating through a group of stakeholders. From the social change leadership stance, I draw on the relational connections among research participants because they share to some extent the same stories and realities. Hence the focus group facilitations will drive to build power and leverage community capacity, by exploring the core principles of social change leadership *reframing, bridging and unleashing* (Ospina & Foldy, 2010; 2012). Starting from the primary questions of the study and the guiding questions for the focus groups' facilitation, they

were defined in a way that encourage the research participants to address them (questions) from a holistic standpoint. In other words, the phrasing of the questions and the participatory methodological inquiry prompt the research participants to provide responses as translations of their experiences through the principles of *reframing discourse*, *bridging differences* and *unleashing human energies*. Through these principles, the research participants express the social dynamic in their environment which are examples of leadership practices, but the focus of the study will not focus on individuals' traits rather on the collective action. Another crucial point for conducting the research under social change framework is the unit of study in the field of leadership which shifted progressively to a level, where a vast range of scholars in the field of social change leadership agree to explore the relational in leadership instead of the individual (Wagner, 2017). In the same line, I can assert that leadership is portrayed as a process that bring a variety of actors who are united around a common purpose. These phenomena keep evolving through generation. As a matter of fact, scholars (Uhl-Bien, 2017; Ospina, 2019) view leadership as the outcome of human social construction emerging from the rich connection and interdependencies of organizations and their members. There is a deep connection between the ideas shared above and CPAR fundamentals.

Indeed, CPAR helps to leverage the power dynamics among participants, also the group facilitations for focus group 1 and 2 with the same research participants will build relationships among participants though they are from different disciplinary units, but they will share their opinions about the same social challenge. This is how they will leverage the collective leadership created through this experience to build something strong in their community. Here we can see how social change leadership and CPAR connect, thus lead to social change.

## Research Design

My epistemology is informed by social constructionism, thus I put the focus on the importance of conversations as generative factors that will enable the emergence of shared ideas and stories directing to change that derive from the shared understanding of participants when diving into their individual experience and translation of common living experience in the context of the Ivorian higher education system. In this line, Block (2018) emphasized the importance of small group by arguing that “The small group is the unit of transformation” (p.95). For Block (2018) “The small group is the bridge between our own individual existence and the larger community” (p.99). The statements of Block (2018) show the importance of the small group and how powerful it can be.

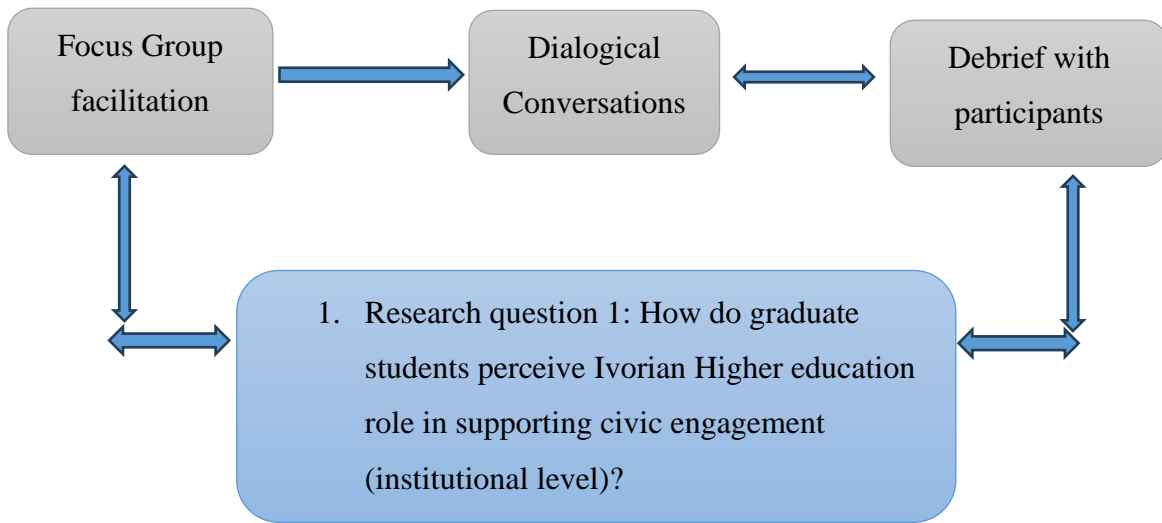
Likewise, drawing from the theoretical framework of social constructionism and social change leadership that underpins this study; the researcher seeks to unpack the perceptions of graduate students while addressing the research questions:

1. How do graduate students perceive the role of the higher education in supporting or advancing civic engagement (institutional level)?
2. How do graduate students perceive their academic unit or disciplines’ role in supporting civic engagement (disciplinary level)?

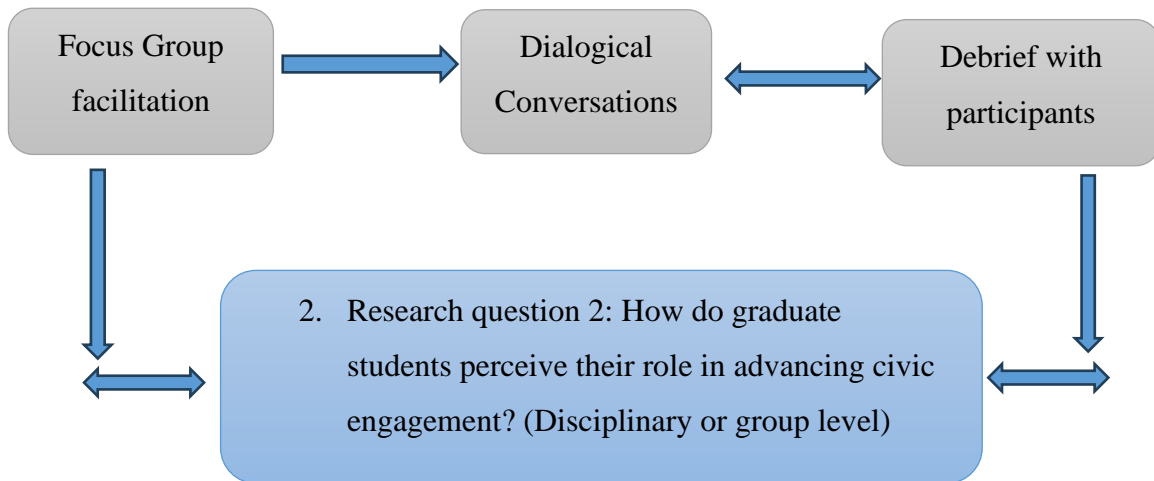
In the passage below, I will offer two figures that give a visual representation of the focus group facilitation process. The arrows show the movement from one step to another though the virtual facilitation may not be linear as illustrated below.



**Figure 3.1. Visual Representation of Focus Group Facilitation Round 1**



**Figure 3.2. Visual Representation of Focus Group Facilitation Round 2**



The figures 1 and 2 above illustrate the facilitation process leading to generate data for the study.

The duration for each focus group facilitation was 75 minutes.

By the end of the facilitation, we had fifteen minutes with all participants (graduate students) as debrief time. In fact, this stage consisted of harnessing participants sensemaking process after going through the dialogical conversations to highlight what are the leadership roles, structures, incentives, and actions the higher education (university) plays to support civic

engagement. For instance, while addressing research question 1 (RQ 1) and subsidiary questions and prompts that ask participants to share about how they perceive the Ivorian higher education's role in advancing civic engagement, they drew on their lived experiences within the system. Based on their years of engagement within the higher education system, those individual knowledges were translated into shared knowledge of the group (research participants). This process triggered to unleash their human energies for collective actions as knowledge sharing, design initiatives or even reframing discourse. This particular piece highlights the co-creation of knowledge and lead to the actions expected by the group of research participants to lead change within their immediate environment (disciplinary unit) and the university as a whole. This is an example of bridging differences because the participatory approach and facilitation enable the research participants to engage and recognize what is common to them. This is where their culture and stories come to play.

### **Research site**

This study is conducted with graduate students from University Félix Houphouët Boigny situated in Abidjan, the economic capital of Cote d'Ivoire. Abidjan, a bustling metropolis is home for more than five million inhabitants. University Félix Houphouët Boigny named after the first president of Côte d'Ivoire is situated in Cocody on a land size of about 200 hectares with 46 703 students during the time of the study. It is the biggest and oldest university of the country. The research participants are graduate students from three different departments (economics, languages, and law). Thus, the study will consist of analyzing the perceptions of these graduate students regarding the role of the higher education in supporting civic engagement both at the institutional and disciplinary level.

Through literature, PAR tenets consistently reveal that PAR has been used in multiple contexts and cases where the researchers were suspecting issues (problems). Hence, they consider a research design that encourages collaboration and co-creation. This inspires the choice of CPAR to inform the methodological inquiry of this study. In this study, I engage through the perspective of Kurt (1947) a practitioner of PAR, who supports the idea that as the participants engage in the process of examination of their reality through the research process, they will be able to surface their challenges leading to change and transformation.

By using CPAR as an approach, it is not just directing to address or account for the research purpose, but it will move the study to an extra mile by providing avenues to account for relevant actions and practices needed in the context to bring transformation through action. As a matter of fact, Johnson (2017) stated that “In PAR, the products of the research are not limited to research reports and articles, but they might also include curricula, public service announcements, action plans, advocacy effort and/or media campaign” (p.6).

### **Participant Selection**

The recruitment process for participants in this study followed rigorous eligibility criteria. Participants were required to be graduate students from the University Félix Houphouët Boigny, specifically from three targeted departments: economics, languages, and law. Additionally, participants needed to be in good academic standing and have been part of the university community for a minimum of three years.

To be eligible, participants had to meet the following criteria:

- Completion of at least a bachelor’s degree from the University Félix Houphouët Boigny in Abidjan.
- Current enrollment in a master’s or doctoral program at the university.

Initially, the plan was to recruit 15 students, with the goal of having representation (five students) from each department or disciplinary unit. To facilitate this, I reached out to former colleagues and professors at the university via email. I wanted to recall that I did my graduated from that University, so I do still have ties with some people there. However, due to time constraints and limited effectiveness, I adjusted my approach. So, I adopted a new strategy inspiring by snowballing approach (connect with a student and he or she refers me to a potential peer). Inspired by a snowballing technique, I engaged volunteers from our organization, LEAD+AFRICA, who were current students at the university, to connect me with potential participants. This strategy proved fruitful, resulting in the mobilization of 38 students from the targeted departments.

The informal connections established through platforms like WhatsApp and Zoom were instrumental in facilitating communication with potential participants. Despite efforts to engage students through pre-focus group facilitations, some did not attend. Ultimately, the study proceeded with a sample size of 12 participants, comprising five male and seven female students.

### **Research Participants**

At the beginning of the study, I was left with a sample size of 12 participants, consisting of five each from both economics and law disciplines, and three female students from languages' unit.

I proceeded with this poll of 12 participants for convening two rounds of semi-structured virtual focus group interactions via Zoom. To keep participants' identities confidential, I assigned pseudonyms to participants in the data analysis process. See (Table 3.1) below.

**Table 3.1. Research Participants and Pseudonyms**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Pseudonyms</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Marcus
<b>Participant 2</b>	Denis
<b>Participant 3</b>	David
<b>Participant 4</b>	Henry
<b>Participant 5</b>	Jane
<b>Participant 6</b>	Joyce
<b>Participant 7</b>	Trysta
<b>Participant 8</b>	Francisca
<b>Participant 9</b>	Brenda
<b>Participant 10</b>	Jessyca
<b>Participant 11</b>	Helena
<b>Participant 12</b>	Carolyn

### **Data Collection**

The methodological approach adopted for this study heavily relies on the principles of Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR), which emphasizes establishing strong connections with research participants and fostering a collaborative environment where their voices are valued. Through CPAR, participants are considered as co-researchers, enabling them to openly share their experiences regarding the role of higher education in supporting civic engagement at both institutional and disciplinary levels.

To collect data, I employed online focus group facilitation, aligning closely with CPAR principles to ensure active participant engagement. Two virtual convenings were conducted, with each session lasting 75 minutes. The first round of virtual convenings focused on research question 1 (RQ 1) and its connection to the theoretical framework of the study. This initial round involved conducting focus group discussions to explore graduate students' perceptions of the higher education system's role in advancing civic engagement.

For the second session guided by research question 2 (RQ 2), I started by placing participants from the same discipline into separate breakout rooms to address the first sub-question. After this phase, we brought everyone back to the main meeting room to continue the collaborative discussion.

In fact, the second round focused on social change leadership that is reflective through the university disciplinary unities to advance civic engagement. The process was conducted following a semi-structured focus group (virtual via Zoom), the first round consisted of a facilitation about the graduate students' perceptions of civic engagement in the Ivorian higher education and the second round was about how that group of participants as co-researchers' disciplinary do to creating a dynamic civic engagement environment within their disciplinary units. This means how the group of participants contribute to influence aspects of the Ivorian higher education to be more supportive of civic engagement.

**Table 3.2. Data Collection Rounds and Dates**

Dates and Duration	Data Collection	Observations
<b>January 9, 2024 (75 minutes)</b>	Recorded audio and video via Zoom. I created facilitation notes (researcher’s memo). All data were collected in French.	Most participants closed their camera after the introduction for internet quality. I presented the PowerPoint to guide the facilitation. Also, I maneuvered the facilitation by sharing the prompt or questions to be discussed in the chat box.
<b>January 10, 2024 (75 minutes)</b>	Recorded audio and video via Zoom. I created facilitation notes (researcher’s memo). All data were collected in French	Most participants closed their camera after the introduction for internet quality. I presented the PowerPoint to guide the facilitation. Also, I maneuver the facilitation by sharing the prompt or questions to be discussed in the chat box.

The data collected from the semi- structured focus group setting are recorded through Zoom. The recordings are saved in online cloud where only the researcher and the principal investigator have access. Additionally, the recordings are transcribed as a raw draft by using the zoom transcription tool, then revised and edited by the researcher during the precoding phase. During that phase, I assign pseudonyms to participants as illustrated in (Table 3.1).

To make sense of the data and have an in-depth analysis, I draw on an inductive analytical process for the data analysis. Bhattacharya (2017) posits that “Data analysis involves creating processes that would allow for deep insights that reflect how the researcher integrated theoretical and analytical frameworks, previous understanding of literature, and the focus of the research purpose and questions.” (pp.149-150). This statement illustrates how important the data analysis is coherently structured and connected with the theoretical and analytical frameworks of the study.

As I mentioned it earlier, in my study, the data derived from the semi-structured focused group facilitations. Each semi-structured focus group ended with a debrief where all participants were given the opportunity to discuss pending questions or asked questions for clarity. It was also an avenue for the researcher to clarify some of the responses given to make sure, they were captured rightly. During debrief potential interactions leading to take actions that fosters change occurred. The participants are French speakers, this is an indicator that the raw data was collected, transcribed, and analyzed in French. Then, the main themes generated through the coding are translated into English as well as the interpretations of the researcher.

In fact, when I refer to Saldaña (2021), he argued that the type of question guiding the study influences that of the choice of coding method the researcher may consider. Therefore, in this study, I chose *themeing* and *In Vivo* as the coding methods considering the nature of the



data. Beyond this technical aspect the data analysis is conducted through first and second cycle coding. Saldaña makes a clear distinction between the first cycle coding and the second cycle coding. Saldaña (2021) supported the idea that the first cycle coding “is analysis taking things apart” and the second cycle coding is “synthesis putting things together”. Thus, upon collection of the raw data and the management process, the first step of the of the analysis will focus on the coding phase.

To capture the data analysis process, I suggest a visual representation below:

**Figure 3.3. Visual Representation of Data Analysis**

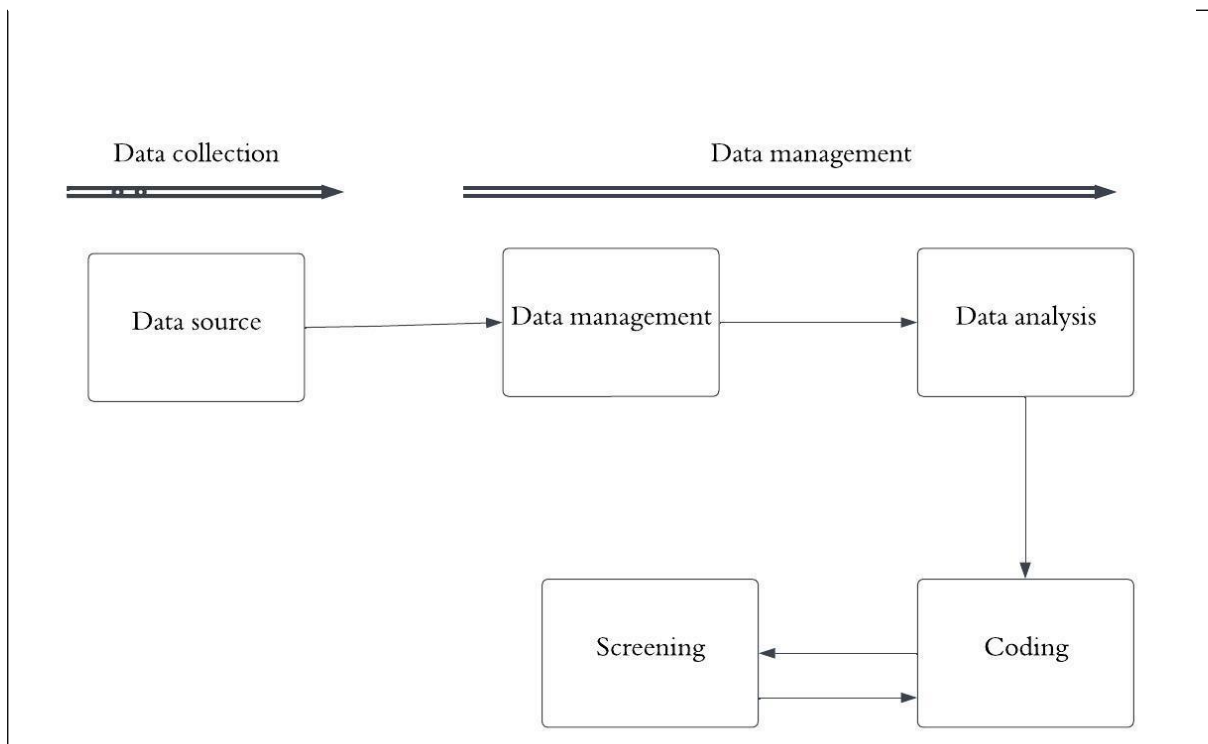


Figure 3.3 is an illustration of the data analysis process that was conducted after the collection of raw data from the semi-structured focus groups. The screening phase helps to assure that, the researcher is focusing on data that speaks to the primary research questions and objective.

## **Data management**

In the effort to present a strong data analysis process in qualitative research, I focused on setting the ground about how qualitative data management operates in my research design, starting from the data collection to the data analysis. In fact, the qualitative data management cycle covers a big portion of the effort of the researcher in qualitative research.

According to Bhattacharya (2017) “Data management is the process through which the researcher manages a large volume of data” (p.149). Therefore, considering that my research is conducted under the guise of qualitative research approaches, for the data management and analysis I opted for an inductive approach, especially the coding phase regarding the data analysis. In other words, I mean it was not a linear process, I proceeded by clustering and categorizing in an analytical manner the phrases, notions and statements collected from the raw data.

Moving on Bhattacharya (2017) stated that “Data analysis involves creating processes that would allow for deep insights that reflect how the researcher integrated theoretical and analytical frameworks, previous understanding of literature, and the focus of the research purpose and questions” (pp.149-150).

From the scholarly work of Saldaña, it is emphasized that coding is an important piece in the work of a qualitative researcher. “Coding is just one way of analyzing qualitative data, not the way.” (Saldaña, 2021, p.5) Indirectly, this statement is informing us that there are various possibilities to conduct data analysis in qualitative research. However, in this specific context, our analysis utilized coding. This will consist of a meticulous process of data analysis and whereabouts.

In the next section, I will give details about tools and approaches, I will utilize throughout my data analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

For the analysis of the raw data collected from the two semi-structured focus group facilitations, I combined the utilization of traditional approach which consist of transcribing the recordings on a Word document. Indeed, the Zoom software offered a transcription that I revised during the precoding stage to edit the initial transcripts from Zoom while listening the recording in order to capture missing words, phrases or sentences.

I completed this initial phase to assure accuracy of the transcripts before starting the data analysis with the coding steps.

#### **First and Second Cycle Coding**

Saldaña (2021) makes a clear distinction between the first-cycle and second-cycle coding which has been so helpful when I reflect on that phase. Indeed, for Saldaña, the first cycle coding “is analysis taking things apart” whereas the second cycle coding is “synthesis putting things together”. Therefore, the first step of the analysis in my research will cast on the coding phase. During this phase, I screened the data and coded in a way that it surfaced themes matching with the research question and objective. The first and second coding cycles are essential parts of the coding process of data analysis.

#### **First coding cycle**

For the first coding cycle, considering the main research question of my research which is: What are the participants’ experiences with the higher education system in Cote d’Ivoire? I opt for coding approaches that I believe will contribute to achieving the research purpose. The chosen coding approaches are *In Vivo Coding*, *Themeing the data*. Themeing the data:

categorically provides descriptive detail about the patterns observed and constructed by the analyst” (Saldaña, 2021, p.259) and *versus coding* which will be used to surface the intriguing ideas of the graduate students’ perceptions regarding civic engagement in the Ivorian higher education system and within their unit of study.

The transition phase will consist of making connections between codes and themes, then writing my analytic memos.

### **Second coding cycle**

The second cycle coding phase was a heavy one in this study, considering the fact that data was collected in French and making sure that the interpretations remain exempt of my biases. I always have to make succinct comparisons between surfaced codes and the emerging knowledge related to the primary research questions. During this phase, I applied analytical and critical reflection to extend my interpretation of the codes that surfaced from the first coding cycle.

For example, I will reconsider the categorization and clustering made in the first coding circle to address the critical question “now what?”. In that way, I will dive deeper into the categorization process by reorganizing the themes that surfaced from the semi-structured focus groups.

**Table 3.3. Illustration of First Cycle Coding and Second Cycle Coding**

French		English	
First cycle coding <i>(Themeing the data)</i>	Second cycle coding	First cycle coding	Second cycle coding
<p>Une présence symbolique et passive « Engagement partiel des autorités administratives au sein de l’université (donne accord pour l’utilisation des salles’’ sous demande des étudiants »</p>	<p>Idée relatant le leadership existant au sein du système.</p>	<p>A passive and symbolic presence</p>	<p>Idea relating existing leadership in the system.</p>
<p>Une participation d’étudiants engagés  “Association des délégués organisent des conférences mais sans soutien de l’administration (groupe de délégués) »</p>	<p>Groupe d’étudiants engagés</p>	<p>A participation of engaged students  "The association of delegates organizes conferences but without the support of the administration (delegate group)."</p>	<p>Group of engaged students</p>

Moreover, during this phase, I tested my approach to see if it answers the main research question, in order to figure out what additional coding approaches I should consider. For the testing I verified my primary research questions, particularly Q 1 and make sure that it is phrased to understand or to explore the experience of individuals. Also, I dived into literature, especially in the scholarly work of Saldaña (2021) regarding coding, he confirmed through specific research question's features that match with my research questions intended to capture research participants' perceptions.

As a researcher, being with participants during those two sections, immersed me back to the academic culture and how some patterns of the systems have been static since I graduated with my master's back in 2018.

According to Creswell and Clark (2011), "Coding is the process of grouping evidence and labeling ideas so that they reflect an increasingly broader perspective" (p. 208). On the other hand, as to paraphrase Saldaña (2021), themes do not magically emerge; they are the interpretations and constructions of researchers.

Throughout the coding process, my focus on memoing revealed a sub-process of sensemaking during participant interactions. It became apparent that establishing a common definition of civic engagement was necessary, as evidenced by three participants initially seeking clarification: "What do you mean by civic engagement?" Despite providing a definition to guide them during the pre-facilitation meetings. This raised concerns about a potential lack of curriculum dedicated to reinforcing civic education.

The reframing process became pivotal, shifting towards the strategic leveraging of collective power. The participants expressed a collective desire to act, emphasizing the need for some

students to advocate for the university's support of civic engagement. Notably, the absence of an official syllabus or curriculum for teaching civic engagement from undergraduate studies to the current level was highlighted. However, a participant from the economics department mentioned a course during their first year of Master's (Master 1) that addressed the importance of civic and public service.

In the next section, I will give an overview of my data collection and data analysis timeline. The table below showcases the main dates that marked the progress of the study and where important decisions were made.

**Table 3.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis Timeline**

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Key Items/ Activities</b>
<b>December 15</b>	IRB Approval
<b>December 20</b>	Email and signature of consent forms
<b>January 5</b>	Introductory meeting with potential research participants
<b>January 8</b>	virtual semi-focus group – round 1 (Zoom)
<b>January 9</b>	virtual semi-focus group – round 2 (Zoom)
<b>January 15 - 31</b>	Focus groups recordings transcriptions
<b>January 25</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Coding cycle
<b>January 29</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> coding cycle
<b>January 30</b>	Revise the findings and upgrade contents
<b>February 5</b>	Submit first full draft of the dissertation

## **Epistemological Considerations and Subjectivity of the Researcher**

This dissertation is underpinned by a socio-constructionist epistemological framework, which acknowledges that knowledge is constructed through the interactions between researchers and participants, influenced by their subjective interpretations and socio-cultural contexts. As such, it is imperative to recognize the inherent subjectivity of the researcher and its implications for the research process and outcomes. I shared insight of my subjectivity in Chapter 1. In this chapter, I will emphasize on my subjectivity as a scholar practitioner who is bilingual (English-French) and how it affected my study.

The researcher's subjectivity inevitably shapes some aspects of the research journey, from the formulation of research questions to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. My own background, experiences, beliefs, and biases undoubtedly influence the framing of the research inquiry, the selection of methodologies, and the interpretation of findings. As a researcher deeply immersed in the field of civic leadership through my years of engagement work with youth in Sub-Saharan Africa and the United State, I have a particular stance in interacting with literature and the research design. My perspectives and preconceptions inevitably inform my approach to understanding leadership dynamics and civic engagement education within the Ivorian higher education system.

Moreover, the participatory nature of this study further accentuates the researcher's subjectivity. Engaging in dialogues and interactions with participants inherently involves a negotiation of meanings and interpretations, which are inevitably influenced by the researcher's subjective lens and assumptions about the Ivorian higher education system. This dynamic interaction between researcher and participants contributes to the co-construction of knowledge, enriching the research process but also necessitating reflexivity and critical self-awareness



during the analysis to avoid that the data speaks my mind rather than engaging the research objective and questions.

In fact, recognizing and acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher is not a limitation but rather a strength of this dissertation. By embracing reflexivity and transparency, I aim to mitigate the potential biases and limitations associated with my own perspective. Additionally, by engaging in reflexive practices throughout the research journey, I aim to enrich the rigor and credibility of the study.

Ultimately, while the subjectivity of the researcher undoubtedly shapes the research process, it is through reflexivity, transparency, and critical self-awareness that we strive to enhance the validity and reliability of this research endeavor. By embracing the complexities of subjectivity, we enrich our understanding of leadership dynamics within the Ivorian university settings and contribute to the ongoing discourse within the field of civic leadership.

### **Analytic Memos**

Reflecting on the qualitative research paradigm guiding this study, it becomes evident that the primary focus was not merely on gathering data but on understanding the lived experiences and perspectives of the research participants. As I documented information about the participants, I found myself grappling with the intricate interplay between my role as a researcher and my identity as an Ivorian scholar practitioner, intimately familiar with the higher education system under investigation.

Throughout the research process, I engaged in reflexive practices, acknowledging the inherent subjectivity that accompanies my positionality. As an Ivorian and a graduate of the same educational system, I couldn't help but consider how my own experiences and biases might

influence my interpretation of the data. This introspection prompted me to contemplate how my responses to certain questions might have differed had I been in the shoes of the participants.

Indeed, my dual role as both insider and outsider within the academic context under study offered unique insights into the dynamics at play. While my insider perspective afforded me a deep understanding of the cultural and contextual nuances shaping the participants' experiences, it also raised questions about objectivity and potential biases in data interpretation.

Moreover, my identity as a scholar practitioner added another layer of complexity to the research process. Drawing upon my academic training and professional expertise, I approached the study with a critical eye, seeking to balance theoretical frameworks with practical insights derived from my own experiences.

In essence, this analytic memo serves as a testament to the ongoing reflexivity and critical self-awareness inherent in qualitative inquiry. By acknowledging and interrogating my subjective stance as a researcher, I strive to enhance the validity and credibility of the study while remaining sensitive to the diverse perspectives and voices of the research participants. The next passage will be devoted to the ethical considerations of the study.

### **Ethical consideration**

This study has an international implication, therefore special training through the CITI platform is completed by the researcher to meet the requirement of conducting research in such an environment. The researcher and the principal investigator completed their CITI training for international research and internet-based research. Additionally, an IRB protocol was approved by Kansas State University on December 15, 2023. Additionally, the researcher took measures to ensure that the online setting (Zoom room) for the focus group and data collection was

convenient and comfortable for the research participants. No external member to this study was allowed to engage in the online process or the data analysis to assure transparency and respect of anonymity. Thus, in the next passage, I will introduce the rigor of the study.

## **Rigor of the Study**

Leaning on qualitative inquiry (Bhattacharya, 2017), ensuring the rigor and methodological soundness of this research was paramount throughout every stage of the study. Rigor in research involves meticulous attention to detail, transparency in methodology, and the adoption of strategies to enhance validity, reliability, and credibility.

Though this study utilized qualitative data collection approach, to uphold rigor, this study adhered to a systematic and well-defined research design. The methodology (CPAR) was carefully crafted to align with the research objectives and epistemological framework, facilitating the analysis of graduate students' perceptions of civic engagement in the Ivorian higher education system. Drawing upon Critical participatory action research (CPAR) principles, the research design emphasized collaboration, reflexivity, and the empowerment of participants leading to collective actions in order to foster change.

Furthermore, the selection of participants was guided by purposive sampling techniques, ensuring representation from diverse backgrounds and perspectives within the targeted departments (economics, languages, and law) at the University Félix Houphouët Boigny. The inclusion criteria were clearly delineated to ensure that participants possessed the requisite experiences and insights relevant to the research inquiry.

Data collection methods, including focus group discussions, were meticulously designed to elicit rich and nuanced insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and understandings of civic engagement and social change leadership. Reflexive practices, such as researcher memos, were employed to document the researcher's observations, reflections, and evolving interpretations throughout the research process.

Data analysis followed rigorous procedures, including thematic coding and consultation of research participants to enhance trustworthiness and confirmability.

Finally, the research findings were critically examined in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, contributing to theoretical saturation and ensuring the robustness of the conclusions drawn.

In sum, the rigor of this research was upheld through meticulous attention to methodological detail, transparency in procedures, and adherence to principles of trustworthiness and credibility. By maintaining rigor throughout the research process, this study offers valuable insights into civic engagement in higher education and contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field. The following section will address some limitations of the study.

### **Limitations**

This doctoral dissertation is not without its limitations, which merit consideration for a comprehensive understanding of the study's scope and implications.

One significant limitation lies in the absence of physical proximity between the researcher and the participants. The inability to be present in the same physical environment hindered the capturing of crucial non-verbal cues, like participants' body languages, the power dynamics and the participants' propensity related to gender differences. This limitation potentially impacted the depth of data gathered and the nuanced understanding of participant responses that could have been a relevant contribution to the analytic memos.

Another key limitation pertains to the reduced sample size, with the final research conducted with twelve participants instead of the initially targeted fifteen. This reduction was primarily due to internet connectivity faced by some participants, impeding their ability to join

the focus groups. This limitation may have affected the diversity and comprehensiveness of perspectives represented in the study. However, this research population still represents a good sample for qualitative research (Bhattacharya, 2017).

While this research adhered to participatory action research frameworks, a notable limitation is the absence of immediate actions or representations resulting from the focus group facilitation phases. However, it opens door for future potential research within the same environment and collaborative actions with the research participants to promote civic engagement. Despite emerging knowledge such as emerging leadership approaches and the strengthening of connections among participants, the lack of tangible outcomes may limit the immediate applicability of the research findings. However, these emergent themes provide fertile ground for future research endeavors.

Furthermore, this study's scope was confined to specific units (economics, languages, and law) at the University Félix Houphouët Boigny, disregarding the broader student population within Ivorian higher education. Additionally, the research did not delve into gender or age-related experiences, focusing solely on group dynamics. This narrow focus limits the generalizability of the findings and overlooks potential variations in experiences across different demographic groups. But it reveals the experiences of this group of research participants regarding civic engagement in the Ivorian higher education.

Acknowledging and addressing these limitations is crucial for contextualizing the study's findings and guiding future research directions. Despite these constraints, the insights gathered from this research offer valuable contributions to the understanding of leadership dynamics and civic education within the university's settings.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, I reviewed the description of my methodological approach guiding the study and I can deduct that both approaches fall under qualitative research methodology, but they are more oriented to collaborative research framework. Use both so that I will be able to capture both sides of the coin while looking at the issue or phenomenon. The impetus of both approaches resides in the fact that they focus on the process, social interaction and drive to positive change or transformation.

Both approaches demonstrate the capacity/potential to empower participants/stakeholders and contribute to address the issue/problem as solution providers. The piece of emerging knowledge is crucial because the research knowledge is going to connect with the knowledge of the participants to create an emerging knowledge holding on shared understanding and collaboration.

## Chapter 4 - Findings

### Introduction

This chapter offers an in-depth description of the research findings, primarily derived from two distinct sessions of semi-structured focus groups conducted via Zoom. The section will start with an exploration of the findings related to research question 1, followed by an examination of those pertaining to research question 2. All graduate students (economics, languages, and law) who constitute the research population actively participated in the same virtual space, engaging in an open conversation guided by the researcher's facilitation. For research question 2, a small group gathering by discipline in breakout rooms was adopted during the focus group facilitation. The key idea for adopting that approach was to put participants in situation where they connect through their unique stories in their discipline before coming together as a big group to share. Likewise, this facilitation approach puts participants at the corridor of social change leadership framework: *reframing discourse, bridging discourses and harnessing human energies* as introduced by (Ospina & Foldy, 2012). As proceeding with the data analysis, this framework introduced by Ospina & Foldy serve as containers to categorize the codes and themes. However, the coding process is conducted through In Vivo (Saldaña, 2021).

I wanted to recall that the data collection process was conducted entirely in French, aligning with the native language of the research participants, which comprises graduate students from three different departments/units (economics, languages, and law) from university Félix Houphouët Boigny. This linguistic choice ensures fidelity to the originality of the information collected, maintaining a contextual and authentic representation of the participants' perspectives and contributions. This is also a possibility for utilizing CPAR for leveraging the original voices



of the research participants who are native French speakers. It helps to avoid any linguistic discrepancies.

Regarding the primary transcription of the recorded data, a nuanced approach combining coding, In Vivo (Saldaña, 2021) and themeing will be employed. This method aims to extract meaningful patterns and insights from the gathered information, contributing to a comprehensive analysis of the research findings. Knowing that the research consists of collecting participants' perceptions hence themeing seems to be the best option for the data analysis.

The data analysis was conducted in French to stay close to the research participant voice and being able to provide an accurate sense-making of their stories and experiences in their native language. After identifying the key themes in alignment with the primary research questions, the interpretation was conducted in English and some components of the main themes were translated into English. The choice of translation is made in order to draw a broader audience to interact with the research findings. Additionally, navigating through the translation process it was intriguing to acknowledge how some of the notions like “étudiants engages”, the word “engages” in this phrase could be translated with engaged, committed, involved. But the choice was made by considering the context and full experience narrated by the participants. This shows how the researcher engagement and experience with participants during the focus group interactions become prominent in the data analysis aftermath to make the most accurate choices of words to convey the original message expressed by the research participants.

### **Findings by Research Question**

Upon conducting the data analysis in alignment with the main research question, the following themes emerged per research question.

Research question 1 (RQ 1) : Comment les étudiants diplômés perçoivent-ils le rôle de l'enseignement supérieur ivoirien dans le soutien à l'engagement civique (Au niveau institutionnel) ?

RQ 1 English version: How do graduate students perceive the role of Ivorian higher education in supporting civic engagement (At the institutional level)?

After an in-depth screening and analysis of the data from the raw transcription, utilizing In Vivo, the following three themes surfaced as per the research question 1:

**Table 4.1. Themes Research Question 1**

Themes	French	English
Theme 1	Une présence symbolique et passive	A passive and symbolic presence
Theme 2	Une participation d'étudiants engages	A participation of engaged students
Theme 3	Description de l'état actuel de l'administration au sein de l'université Félix Houphouet Boigny	Description of the current state of the administration within the University Felix Houphouet Boigny

**Theme 1:** Présence symbolique et passive/ Symbolic and passive presence

Through examination of the data, participants disclosed a symbolic presence of some agents/actors within the system by their side, when they organize or initiate activities/events. They further emphasized that these involvements are sporadic and typically occur upon the request of specific groups of students who initiate and desire their professors' presence in their initiatives and activities. The common ground shared by participants when it comes to experienced supports from the administration and their professors evolved around the fact of given them access when they (students) organized events like conferences, to venues. Moreover, a number of their professors attend these events, demonstrating their support for their students by

their physical presence. Furthermore, the following statement collected from a student during the focus group “Montrer les biens fondés de l’engagement à l’administration”/ “There is a need to show the impact of students’ engagement to the administration” points out concerns raised by participants. (Translation of the author) This is an illustration that for students, the inaction of administration regarding their engagement is due to lack of understanding of the real impact they are making within the context. In other words due to lack of organic relationship between administrative staff and the students, they are unable to realize the impact their acts can have on the students and the entire community when it comes to promoting civic engagement.

**Theme 2:** Une participation d’étudiants engagés / A participation of engaged students

Active and engaged students play a crucial role in shaping the dynamic and vibrant nature of the university community. Their participation extends beyond the traditional boundaries of the classroom, as they immerse themselves in various extracurricular activities, community projects, and civic initiatives. These students often serve as catalysts for positive change, advocating for causes they are passionate about and actively contributing to the betterment of both the university and the broader community.

Engaged students are frequently found at the forefront of student organizations, clubs, and associations dedicated to social and community issues. They take the initiative to organize events, workshops, and awareness campaigns, creating platforms for open dialogue and the exchange of ideas. Through their active participation, these students not only enhance their own personal and academic growth but also contribute to the overall development and enrichment of the university environment. Moreover, engaged students often exhibit a sense of social responsibility, actively seeking opportunities to address societal challenges and promote positive change. They may collaborate with faculty, administrators, and community leaders to implement

sustainable solutions, showcasing a commitment to making a tangible impact beyond the campus borders.

In essence, the participation of engaged students is characterized by a proactive and dynamic approach to learning and community involvement. Their contributions go beyond fulfilling academic requirements, reflecting a genuine dedication to fostering a culture of civic responsibility, inclusivity, and social awareness within the university community.

**Table 4.2. Themes and Quotes from Data**

Themes	Quotes in French	Quotes in English
Students' engagement	« il y a des actes ou des actions des étudiants à saluer »	« There are some of the students acts and actions to be acknowledged”
Presence of students' association	“Montrer les opportunités qu’offrent les associations et la possibilité d’offrir des formations »	« Highlight the opportunities presented by associations and the possibility to offer trainings”

In this research keep participants original voices is a must because it is a way to unpack their lived experiences and unique stories through the data. In other words, it consists of making the data ideally talk in their favor. The voice of the researcher become a second entry point to build on or emphasize what has been said originally.

**Theme 3 :** Description de l'état actuel de l'administration au sein de l'université Félix

Houphouet Boigny/ Description of the current state of the administration within the University

Felix Houphouet Boigny

The use of pejorative or negative adjectives to describe the administration. In fact, through the coding I kept this category « Lourdeur, passive, protocolaire » which were recurring

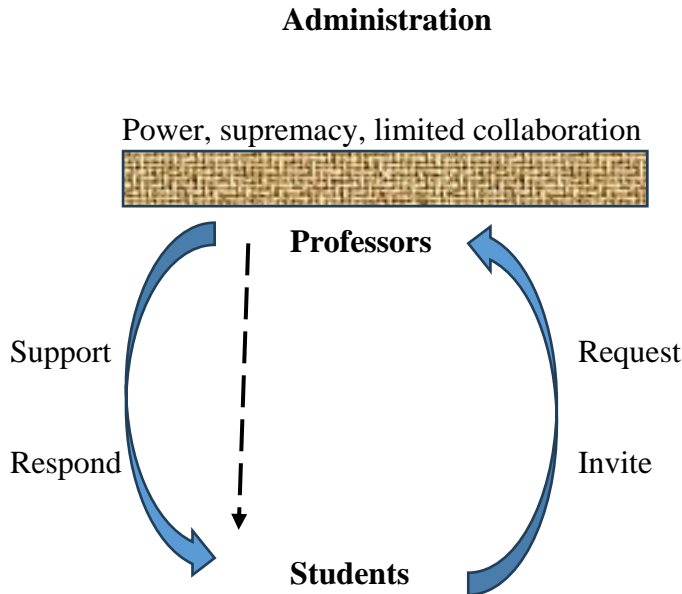
adjectives to illustrate how students perceive the administration of the university for a holistic point of view. I believe this is a way for them to express some of their intriguing concerns. To echo Saldaña (2021), it is essential to recognize that themes are not magical occurrences; rather, they represent researchers' interpretations and constructions. It is so significant that the coding helps to capture this reality.

Moreover, the facilitation and offer platform gave participants (graduate students) a unique opportunity to highlight their individual contributions or their contribution as students in their respective units/disciplines to support civic engagement.

Data shows that, generally on the campus of the university Felix Houphouet Boigny, students initiate activities for community engagement or actions, some of their professors join as individual to support their students based on the personal connection, they may have built over the year with that/those particular students. However, there is no explicit trace of the administration taking the lead to enable spaces for students' civic growth and civic capacity development. Indeed, this passage/section contribute to unpack the leadership portrays by the administration of the university along with its students in the effort take actions by leading activities aiming to shake the traditional status quo (ideology). The university is an organization with a particular structure and power structure dominant over years that has been adopted as a norm. Thus, this administration reaction is perceived as the standard norm in this educational institution of higher education but not for the students who believe there exist other best ways of influence that can be beneficial for the social community/atmosphere reigning on the campus. The following figure is an illustration of the descriptive engagement between key entities and students on the campus of university Felix Houphouet Boigny. This through the researcher

interaction with data helps to capture the existing power dynamic introduced through the research participants stories.

**Figure 4.1. Visual Representation of Engagement Level Between Entities**



The hierarchical structure and its effects are real and still present in the system because the administration plays the gatekeeper role when it comes to give approval to students to initiate their activities. There is an atmosphere of isolation that is created within the system between the student and this administration. Indirectly, this reveals the leadership traits portrayed by the administration vis-à-vis students.

Research question 2 (RQ 2) : Comment les étudiants du troisième cycle perçoivent-ils leur rôle dans le soutien à l'engagement civique dans le système d'enseignement supérieur ivoirien ?

RQ 2 English version: How do graduate students perceive their role in advancing civic engagement (Disciplinary or group level)?

For question 2 (Q2), we come up with the following three themes:

**Table 4.3. Main Themes Research Question 2**

Themes	French	English
Theme 1	Engagement volontaire des étudiants	Voluntarily engagement of students
Theme 2	Certains départements sont susceptibles d'assister les étudiants dans la promotion de leur initiative	Some departments are likely to assist students in promoting their initiatives
Theme 3	Besoin crucial du soutien de l'administration pour émanciper l'engagement civique et citoyen.	Crucial need of administrative support for citizenry and civic engagement.

**Theme 1:** Engagement volontaire des étudiants/ Voluntarily engagement of students.

Upon thorough coding and analysis, a distinct category emerged, labeled as "existence de clubs et associations d'étudiants" (existence of student clubs and associations). This finding shed light on a significant aspect of student involvement, revealing that students within their respective academic units actively partake in voluntary actions to promote civic engagement. The identification of such student-driven initiatives suggests a genuine enthusiasm and commitment among the student body towards fostering civic responsibility and community engagement. The existence of these clubs and associations not only highlights the proactive role that students willingly undertake but also implies a grassroots movement within the university community. Additionally, the use words like "associations", "clubs" which shows the existence of students-led organizations within the university. This finding underscores the potential for bottom-up initiatives, driven by the students themselves, to contribute meaningfully to the

promotion and sustenance of civic engagement within the academic setting. Likewise, this finding illustrates that civic engagement has a strong connection to disciplines through voluntary associations and students' groups.

**Theme 2:** Certains départements sont susceptibles d'assister les étudiants dans la promotion de leur initiative/ Some departments are likely to assist students in promoting their initiatives.

The findings, particularly from the law department, reveal a unanimous sentiment among students indicating that some of their professors actively participate in activities organized by students. As a matter of fact, the following statements from two distinct graduate students studying law posited that: (1) “La faculté de droit est très réceptive quand les étudiants font les demandes pour utiliser les salles”/ The law faculty is very receptive when students make requests to use the rooms , (2) “ Généralement la faculté de droit n’initie pas, il faut que les étudiants fassent le premier pas”/ Generally, the law faculty does not initiate; students need to take the first step.

Those statements convey that faculty from the department of law are open for students to use their venues for their initiated activities or programs. They go further to emphasize that faculty of the department of law do not initiate they always wait for students to make the first moves. Students from that discipline unanimously expressed that most of their department's professors join and support student-led initiatives within their disciplines when invited, but the critical aspect highlighted is the necessity for students to take the lead in initiating these activities or events. The statements shared by participants did not show any active support out of the act of presence.



Likewise, a noteworthy observation from the findings is that the impetus for these collaborative engagements experienced in the three disciplines (economics, languages and law) typically originate from the students themselves. The recurrent theme suggests that students play a pivotal role in catalyzing these collaborations, as they are expected in some disciplines like law to proactively initiate and extend invitations to professors. This dynamic underscores a student-centric approach to civic engagement initiatives, wherein students are not only active participants but also catalysts for the involvement of professors within their respective disciplines, especially in the department of law. In fact, this uncommon reaction of some professors in this particular department raises curiosity. This pattern emphasizes the importance of student-driven initiatives as the catalyst for broader faculty involvement in promoting civic engagement within some departments. This approach centered on participation and collaboration can serve as a spark to revitalize or leverage faculty across the university.

Though these efforts exist in some disciplines or units, they are aggregated of efforts dislocated one from each other. There is a need to bridge those intergenerational gaps and promote collaboration among disciplines for prominent collective impacts across the university regarding the promotion/ advancement of civic engagement.

**Theme 3 :** Besoin crucial du soutien de l'administration pour émanciper l'engagement civique et citoyen. / Crucial need of administrative support for citizenry and civic engagement.

The expressed sentiment among students underscores a compelling demand for the administration to play an empowering role in sustaining civic engagement initiatives which are led by students. It shows that students felt no assistance of the administration in student-led activities or initiatives. This unique perspective posits that, in addition to conventional support

structures, empowering students becomes a key strategy for the administration to foster and advance civic engagement within the university community.

The essence of this demand suggests that students perceive their active involvement in civic engagement can be fostered by an implication of the administration providing them with the necessary tools, resources, and encouragement. Empowerment, in this context, implies a proactive stance from the administration to equip students with the autonomy, knowledge, and institutional support needed to initiate and sustain meaningful civic engagement activities within the community.

For the students as well as the central administration, embracing this approach entails not only responding to students' requests for support but also actively seeking ways to enable and amplify their efforts. This might involve creating structured frameworks, providing financial resources, and establishing channels for collaboration between students and administrators across the university. By meeting this demand for empowerment, the administration can establish a symbiotic relationship with students, fostering a culture of active citizenship and community engagement within the academic environment.

Participants during the main debriefing session, we had at the end of second session admitted that they have experienced something unique that made them filled connected with other students in the same university, learned from their unique experience and they look forward to such initiative that is eye-opening to know and understand that the challenge in one unit within the university might be similar in another unit. An in-depth exploration of such statement from participants.

In summarizing the findings by research question, these insights unveil the complexities surrounding participants' perceptions of civic engagement and the potential gaps in formal education dedicated to this crucial aspect of civic engagement.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the research findings underscore the crucial imperative for active involvement from all parties and stakeholders within the University Felix Houphouet Boigny to foster the advancement of civic engagement initiatives. The sustainability and progression of these initiatives are contingent upon embracing the recommendations put forth by the research participants.

Furthermore, the results suggest a pronounced eagerness among participants to take meaningful actions, aligning with the fundamental characteristics of Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR). As advocated by Torre and Fine (2021), CPAR bridges the gap between research and action, and the findings affirm the deep connections participants felt throughout the process.

Their active engagement underscores a commitment to enacting change. Through the use of CPAR inquiry, participants felt educated and ready to create a collective action toward social change. In this particular context, CPAR revealed avenues for culturally relevant leadership components specific to this research context which are solidarity to one another, cultural humility by learning new perspectives from peers and adopt them. Also, by using CPAR, participants were educated about the necessity and how to design a social just process that contribute to build socially just systems. Diving into the culturally component perspective of using CPAR in the Ivorian context is educating participants about social justice. An illustration is

how during the focus group facilitation we (researcher and participants) were in a co-creation process for knowledge development.

Moreover, the application of social change leadership principles, as articulated by Ospina (2010), revealed an agency for moving beyond *reframing* to *leveraging collective power*. In fact, the shared experiences of students come out as one voice to denounce the absence of efforts from the administration and anticipate on possible actions that they can take to continue their (students) initiatives in the system. This suggests that fostering social change requires not only a reevaluation of existing paradigms but also a strategic harnessing of collective influence. In essence, the culmination of these findings propels us beyond mere observations into a realm of actionable insights. The chapter not only identifies key areas for improvement within the University Felix Houphouet Boigny, but also highlights the potential for transformative change through collaborative, participatory efforts. As we move forward, the resonating call is for proactive engagement and shared responsibility to realize the envisioned advancements in civic engagement within the university by taking a first step of institutionalizing civic engagement education.

## **Chapter 5 - Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

Under the auspice of Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR), this study aims to analyze graduate students' perceptions of civic engagement within the Ivorian higher education system with a particular focus on participation, collaboration, and action. Employing a qualitative approach through focus group facilitation, this study sought to address two pivotal research questions guiding the investigation.

#### Research Questions:

1. How do graduate students perceive the role of the Ivorian higher education system in advancing or supporting civic engagement (institutional level)?
2. How do graduate students perceive the role of their academic units or disciplines in supporting civic engagement (institutional level)?

Through focus group facilitation and qualitative data analysis approach, two main research questions guided the study and data collection process. After collecting the data and conducting the analysis; the data presented insights about the guiding primary research questions. The coding strategies chosen for analysis were In Vivo Coding and thematic data coding. In Vivo Coding was selected to introduce the genuine voices of the participants, aiming to amplify their unique lived experiences within the context of the Ivorian higher education system. Indeed, In Vivo is a best fit for this research regarding the methodological inquiry (CPAR) to introduce the original voices of the participants and sharing the stories of their unique lived experiences in this research. In this line, Saldaña (2021) posited that:

In Vivo coding is particularly useful in educational ethnographies with youth. The child and adolescent voices are often marginalized, and coding with their actual words enhances and deepens an adult's understanding of their discourses, culture and worldviews. In Vivo Coding is also quite applicable to action, participatory and practitioner research (p.138).

The statement above consolidates the choice of coding method that is a good fit for this study inquiry.

In this chapter I will discuss and share the synthesis of the research findings regarding the enunciated research questions, participatory action research inquiry and a contribution to the broad scholarship of civic engagement in higher education. Also, this chapter encompasses the summary, discussion of findings and its implication in scholarship and directions to future research agenda.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study analyzed the perceptions of civic engagement among graduate students in three distinct departments or disciplinary units (economics, languages, and law) within the Ivorian higher education system. The thematic analysis conducted in response to the primary research questions (RQ 1 & RQ 2) has resulted in the identification of six main themes by the end of the analysis. But, four main themes among the them retain the attention while giving the summation of the findings. These themes, representing the convergence of codes and insights derived from the data, are organized into two overarching thematic categories corresponding to each research question. The key thematic categories that have emerged are presented in the table below classified as themes in French and in English.

**Table 5.1. Sample of Themes in French and English**

<b>Themes in French</b>	<b>Themes in English</b>
RQ1	RQ 1
Une présence symbolique et passive	A passive and symbolic presence
Une participation d'étudiants engagés	A participation of engaged students
RQ2	RQ 2
Engagement volontaire des étudiants	Voluntarily engagement of students
Besoin crucial du soutien de l'administration pour émanciper l'engagement civique te citoyen	Crucial need of administrative support for citizenry and civic engagement

Given that both data collection and analysis for this study were conducted in French, the table above provides a translation into English for the main themes identified during the analysis. In the section below, I will delve into each main theme, offering concise interpretations and highlighting their alignment with the primary research questions.

Starting with the themes related to RQ 1, those themes reflect the potential perceptions of graduate students based on their experiences within the University Félix Houphouët Boigny for more than three years. With:

1. Une présence symbolique et passive/ A passive and symbolic presence

The findings illustrate a presence of the administration and its staff in the system, but they fall short in taking significant actions or initiatives to facilitate students' civic engagement and civic education. Furthermore, there is a lack of public or formal decisions encouraging policies or initiatives to reinforce and promote student civic engagement across the university. To the mind of the students, the administration is a direct representation of government in terms of decision and action because they receive direct orders from the Ministry of Higher Education.

This deficiency suggests a void in relational leadership within the organizational leadership component of the university.

Despite the seemingly uncertain atmosphere for civic engagement advancement, certain students, particularly in specific departments/disciplines (economics, languages and law), initiate activities that contribute to civic engagement as a collective effort for the public good. This raises questions about the leadership approach of the university as an institution when it comes to instigating social change.

These considerations may lead to exploring alternatives to alter conditions that could empower students in actively contributing to the advancement of civic engagement within the university.

## 2. Une participation d'étudiants engagés/ Engaged Students' Participation

Findings reveal that some students within the university take the initiative to engage in activities that, during the focus group facilitation's collective sense-making process, were presented as civic engagement activities or initiatives effecting change within the system, albeit within specific disciplines and on a small scale. However, there is still a need for support from the general administration by promoting policies for advancing students' civic education.

Moving on to the themes identified under Research Question 2 (RQ 2):

### 1. Engagement volontaire des étudiants/ Voluntarily engagement of students

Graduate students within their disciplines voluntarily commit to addressing issues specific to their fields and units. This shows that graduate students on a lower scale respond to their civic responsibility by taking initiatives or actions that address issues of public interests within the university and beyond. However, they still lack the support of the general administration through actionable policies and procedures to foster their actions. Hence, for the graduate



students (research participants) there is an urgent need for the administration involvement to move forward their civic engagement initiatives.

For the second main theme:

2. **Besoin crucial du soutien de l'administration pour émanciper l'engagement civique et citoyen/ Crucial need of administrative support for citizenry and civic engagement**

Findings reveal a crucial need for administrative support to empower citizenry and civic engagement within the university. Graduate students express the necessity for supportive policies and procedures from the administration to enhance and emancipate their civic engagement efforts. Those efforts will alleviate the existing power dynamic between the administration which is on top of the hierarchical structure and the (graduate students) who are at the bottom.

### **Learned Lessons**

The methodological inquiry employed for data collection and subsequent findings yielded a set of valuable lessons concerning leadership for change and civic engagement within the Ivorian higher education system. These lessons can be articulated as follows:

1. **Presence of civic engagement activities/initiatives within some disciplines:** Notably, there exists a presence of civic engagement activities within specific disciplines from the observations of the research participants. This discovery emphasizes the heterogeneity of engagement across various academic domains. Recognizing and acknowledging these existing initiatives is pivotal for comprehending the diverse landscape of civic engagement within the university. It also underscores the potential for cultivating and expanding such initiatives across disciplines.
2. **Collaboration is needed to allow students to foster actions or initiatives for collective impact:** The findings underscore the imperative need for collaboration to empower

students in fostering actions or initiatives that can collectively impact the university. This highlights the significance of breaking down silos and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. By working collectively, students can amplify their efforts, leading to a more profound and sustainable impact on civic engagement within the higher education system. This collaborative approach serves as a catalyst for a more inclusive and comprehensive engagement strategy.

- 3. Necessity to institutionalize civic engagement education in the Ivorian higher education system:** Findings show that the administration of the university is not committed and involved in civic initiatives across the university. Therefore, it becomes urgent for the government to facilitate policies that will encourage the advancement of civic engagement education across the university with a strong involvement and presence of the administration. There is also a need to educate the administration and professors about civic engagement so that they adopt it and tailor it to the Ivorian context. Possible ways to go about it are suggested in the recommendations.

In summary, these lessons offer insights into the existing dynamics of leadership and civic engagement within the Ivorian higher education system. They provide a foundation for devising strategic interventions that can contribute to a more inclusive, dynamic, and effective approach to fostering civic engagement and leadership for positive change within the academic setting.

## **Discussion**

In this section, I will delve into the main themes identified under (RQ 1) and 2 (RQ 2), providing a synthesis of the findings to extract valuable insights. The absence of crucial enablers for social change leadership within the Félix Houphouët Boigny University system emerges as a significant barrier to the advancement of civic engagement in this institution. Participants,

engaging in a process of co-construction, emphasize the pivotal role of university administration in establishing a robust environment conducive to encouraging and supporting student-led initiatives as an effort to advance civic engagement.

### **Participation and connections among administration, staff, professor and students**

Considering the contextual implications of the findings, it becomes apparent that the university's leadership culture diverges from a *relational leadership approach* (Uhl Bien, 2012; Priest et al., 2017). Despite the evidence of collaboration between key stakeholders, including professors and administrative staff, and graduate students, there exists a prevailing dynamic of hesitancy in the sense that some of the professors and staff who are part of the administration feel connect with the initiatives of students but due to their position in the system they remain reluctant to actively support the students in their efforts. This hinders the effective *leveraging of collective power* for relational leadership, resulting in isolated actions per disciplines that fail to instigate sustainable change within the system.

### **Students' participation and immersion in extracurricular activities**

Exploring the status of student-led activities or initiatives, the study reveals persistent barriers, primarily related to power dynamics and the disconnect among administration, staff, professors, and students. The application of social change leadership principles, as articulated by Ospina (2010), underscores the need for a strategic shift from *reframing to harnessing collective influence*. This approach is crucial for fostering civic engagement initiatives that transcend existing disciplinary boundaries and create meaningful, sustainable change.

Examining students' participation in extracurricular activities, the study identifies a gap in the language for change and conversation to drive transformative efforts. Ivorian graduate students, unable to categorize their commitment, highlight a potential avenue for exploration within the

broader context of social change leadership. There is a need for instilling social change leadership principles to empower the students and foster their efforts or initiatives within the university Félix Houphouët Boigny because social change alters conditions to improve human welfare. Additionally, the Social Change leadership Theory focuses on the *what*, *how* and *why* of leadership (Watt, 2009). Watt (2009) advocated that “The theory has three fundamental principles: creating change, collaboration and civic engagement” (p.55).

In addressing the overarching question of how these findings connect or contradict existing scholarship, it is evident that the study contributes to the broader scholarship on civic engagement in higher education. By summarizing key findings, engaging in a comprehensive discussion, and outlining directions for future research agendas, the synthesis presented here enriches the academic discourse. It sheds light on the unique perspectives of graduate students in the Ivorian context, offering both valuable insights and potential areas for further exploration within the evolving landscape of civic engagement in higher education.

### **Implications**

Implication for Scholarly Advancement:

Theoretical Enrichment: This research contributes to the academic literature by shedding light on the role higher education institutions could play in fostering civic engagement, particularly in the context of Cote d'Ivoire. Scholars interested in civic education and its implementation within higher education systems can benefit from the insights provided in this study that utilize CPAR to bring insights on collaboration, social justice and co-creation of knowledge.

Methodological Insights: The methodological inquiry employed in this research, including the analysis of graduate students' perceptions, offers a valuable approach for studying

civic engagement education within higher education systems. Researchers investigating similar topics can draw upon the methods CPAR utilized in this study to further explore the dynamics of civic education in different contexts, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Utilizing CPAR inquiry for this research in the Ivorian context introduces a strength of CPAR as a tool in facilitating mindset change (a tool for mindset change.) By employing CPAR, participants accustomed to an environment where leadership is often associated with hierarchical structures and positions were able to embrace a collaborative mindset. This shift enabled them to recognize the collective power they possess to effect social change.

**Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Given the interdisciplinary nature of civic engagement education, this research underscores the importance of collaboration between various academic departments. Scholars from diverse fields such as economics, languages, and law even beyond can collaborate to develop comprehensive approaches to promote civic education within higher education institutions.

**Implications for the Ivorian Context:**

**Policy Considerations:** The findings of this research highlight the need for policymakers (government, the administration of the university) in Cote d'Ivoire to prioritize civic engagement education within the higher education system. Developing clear policies and initiatives to integrate civic education into academic curricula can help cultivate a culture of civic responsibility among students and contribute to the country's democratic development.

**Institutional Reforms:** Higher education institutions in Cote d'Ivoire can use the insights from this study to enact institutional reforms aimed at enhancing civic engagement among

students. Establishing support structures within departments and providing resources for student-led initiatives can facilitate the promotion of civic education within the academic environment.

Student Empowerment: Recognizing the potential of students as agents of change, universities in Cote d'Ivoire can empower students to take active roles in promoting civic engagement on campus and beyond. Encouraging student-led initiatives and providing platforms for student participation in civic activities can foster a sense of civic responsibility and leadership among the youth population. Thus, in the next section, I build on the findings to offer recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

In light of the insights gained from the study and the acknowledged challenges and opportunities within the Ivorian higher education system, the following recommendations are put forth to advance civic engagement at the institutional and disciplinary levels. These recommendations underscore the crucial roles of both the administration and the marginalized student voices in fostering meaningful change.

1. Empower administrative leadership for civic engagement: Encourage the administration to embrace a more dynamic and participatory leadership style that fosters civic engagement. This involves moving beyond traditional management structures and adopting relational leadership principles. Provide training and resources to administrators to enable them to create an environment conducive to student-led initiatives and civic engagement. This shift is essential for breaking away from the existing static framework and promoting a culture of collaboration and active involvement.
2. Amplify student voices and involvement: Recognize the marginalized voices of students within the system and actively involve them in decision-making processes. Establish

platforms for open dialogue between students and administration, ensuring that students play a central role in shaping policies and initiatives related to civic engagement. This inclusivity promotes a sense of ownership and empowerment among students, encouraging them to actively contribute to the advancement of civic engagement within the university.

3. Establish interdisciplinary civic engagement programs: Develop and implement programs at the disciplinary and unit levels that specifically aim to advance civic engagement efforts across the entire campus. Encourage collaboration among different academic disciplines to create interdisciplinary initiatives that address societal challenges collectively. These programs can serve as platforms for students to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts and contribute to the betterment of society. Foster a culture where civic engagement is integrated into the curriculum, making it a core component of the educational experience.
4. Develop programming to advance civic engagement across the university. This requires the act of institutionalizing civic engagement by adopting formal policies that will encourage administration staff to be educated in civic engagement approaches that resonate with the current context of the university and move progressively to make it as a key component to the civic mission of universities across the country.
5. Create avenues for the development of civic education curricula and syllabi across disciplines: Considering the meaning-making of civic engagement and the discourse/language used to describe civic engagement in the Ivorian context, to develop accurate materials and approaches relevant to the context through programming, curricula and syllabi that use language and ideas that resonate with key stakeholders of the system.

6. Foster Community-Engaged scholarships: Encourage and support community-engaged scholarships that focus on civic engagement education in higher education. Provide resources, funding, and recognition for faculty and students engaged in research and projects that contribute to the broader community. This not only enhances the scholarly efforts within the institution but also strengthens the connection between academic pursuits and societal needs.
7. Global collaboration and knowledge exchanges: facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange with institutions in North America and Europe that have demonstrated success in community-engaged scholarship and civic engagement education. Establish partnerships that allow for the sharing of best practices, experiences, and innovative approaches. This global perspective can enrich the understanding of civic engagement and inspire new strategies for implementation within the Ivorian higher education system.
8. Promote civic engagement friendly ecosystem with the university and instill the same approach progressively across the higher education system. This consists of establishing civic engagement clubs, suggest service-learning curriculum and reinforce students' participation in extra-curricular activities that foster their civic responsibilities. This initiative can start by inviting professors and administration staff who are curious and open to students' initiatives/activities to join those to learn more about what their students are doing. Also, assign some responsibilities to some of them by serving as advisors in students' civic engagement clubs.
9. Suggest civic engagement guides and approached to develop curricula and extra curricula activities for the graduate students from the three disciplinary units which partake in this study during the pilot phase and later expand to other disciplines progressively. Utilize it



as a pilot project to set the stage with the Ministry of Higher Education so that it can support the initiative on a larger scale, even country wide.

In conclusion, these recommendations aim to lay the groundwork for a more inclusive, collaborative, and proactive approach to civic engagement within the Ivorian higher education system. By focusing on administrative leadership, student involvement, interdisciplinary programs, community-engaged scholarships, and global collaboration, the hope is to propel the scholarly efforts in civic engagement education not only in Cote d'Ivoire but also beyond, contributing to a broader global conversation on the role of higher education in fostering meaningful societal change.

### **Future Research**

The study provides a valuable insight into the experiences of graduate students in the Ivorian higher education system concerning civic engagement. Building on this foundation, the future research agenda is delineated in phases, each aimed at extending the impact and applicability of this study:

#### **Phase One:** Translate key chapters for broader accessibility

- Translate into French key chapters of the dissertation to make the research accessible to a broader audience in Francophone areas. This initiative is crucial for ensuring that the insights and findings of the study can reach a wider readership, transcending linguistic barriers and facilitating a more inclusive understanding of the research outcomes.

#### **Phase Two and Three:** Action-Oriented collaboration

- Leverage action-oriented collaboration between the researcher and participants to undertake tangible actions within the higher education system, starting from the campus of the University Félix Houphouet Boigny. This dynamic approach aims to translate

research findings into practical initiatives that can bring about positive change within the institutional context. It involves active involvement and cooperation between the researcher and relevant stakeholders to implement meaningful interventions.

### **Future Research Agenda in the Ivorian and African Context:**

#### **1. Students and Youth:**

- Explore the implications of the research findings for practical application in real-world settings or through academic studies. Address the challenges and nuances of conducting similar research in different cultural contexts, comparing experiences between Cote d'Ivoire and the United States. Share insights into the challenges faced during the research process and emphasize the value of contributing to a broader task force that addresses issues over generations. Engage with the Young African Leadership Initiative (YALI) network to present findings and contribute to the design of a guide for youth leadership and civic engagement education. Provide support to the co-founded organization in Cote d'Ivoire (LEAD+AFRICA) as a guiding resource.

#### **In the United States and Beyond:**

#### **2. Community of Practitioners:**

- Join a community of scholar-practitioners whose work advances community engagement and leadership. Participate in graduate student presentation series under the Graduate Student Council (GSC) at K-State to share research findings. Engage with diverse communities of practitioners, including advocates, policymakers from civil society, and non-profit organizations. By actively participating in these communities, the researcher can contribute to the ongoing discourse on civic engagement and leadership, fostering collaborative efforts and knowledge exchange.

In essence, this multifaceted future research agenda aims to extend the impact of the study by making it accessible, translating insights into actionable initiatives, and engaging with diverse communities in both the Ivorian and global contexts. It reflects a commitment to not only generating knowledge but also actively contributing to positive societal change through continued research and collaboration.

### **Researcher's Reflection**

Embarking on this dissertation journey within the qualitative research paradigm has been both a profound learning experience and a testament to resilience. Over the course of three intense years, I have experienced the intricate landscape of academic inquiry, encountering numerous challenges and triumphs along the way.

The qualitative research paradigm, with its emphasis on understanding the nuances of human experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017) provided a rich tapestry for exploration. As I delved into the complexities of civic engagement in higher education, especially in Côte d'Ivoire, I found myself navigating through layers of meaning, engaging in dialogues with research participants, and grappling with the challenges of data interpretation by holding on to my subjectivity. This piece of the interpretation was an interesting one with the dynamic of navigating in two languages (French and English).

Yet, amidst the inevitable ups and downs of academic inquiry, there emerged a profound sense of growth and transformation. Each obstacle encountered and every breakthrough achieved served as a catalyst for personal and professional development. The journey to the culmination of this research has not only deepened my understanding of the subject matter but has also honed my research skills and fortified my resilience in the face of adversity.

As I near the conclusion of this chapter, I am filled with a sense of anticipation for the exciting possibilities that lie ahead. Beyond the confines of this dissertation, another journey begins; one characterized by new opportunities, fresh perspectives, and continued growth. The experiences gained throughout this research endeavor have equipped me with the skills and attitudes necessary to navigate the complexities of collaborative work in an increasingly interconnected world.

In particular, the experience gained here has strengthened my ability to work and collaborate with individuals from diverse backgrounds and across different time zones. The challenges posed by coordinating schedules and accommodating varying perspectives have instilled in me a deep appreciation for the value of flexibility, adaptability, and open-mindedness in collaborative endeavors.

As I reflect on the culmination of this journey and the commencement of the next, I am reminded of the transformative power of scholarly inquiry. Beyond the acquisition of knowledge, it is the journey itself—the moments of struggle, the flashes of insight, and the bonds forged along the way—that truly shapes and enriches the researcher's experience.

In closing, I am grateful for the opportunity to have embarked on this scholarly odyssey, and I look forward to the adventures that await on the horizon.

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## Appendix A- IRB



TO: Brandon Kliwer  
School of Leadership Studies  
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number IRB-11948

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair  
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 12/15/2023

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "An Analysis of the Graduate Students Perceptions of Civic Engagement in Higher Education in Côte d'Ivoire."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 12/07/2023

EXPIRATION DATE: 12/06/2026

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to subjects

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 12/15/2023 12:48 PM ET

# Appendix B- Focus Group Facilitation Guide

## Focus Group Facilitation Guide for the Study

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Time/Date:

**Note:** This study draws from critical participatory action research (CPAR). Consequently, this guide has been crafted with the purpose of engaging in meaningful dialogue with the research participants (graduate students in economics, languages and laws) that shared information will speak to the community and policymakers. This is one of the essentials of critical participatory inquiry as introduced by Fine & Torre (2021). Likewise, the questions and prompts are framed in a distinctive manner to encourage participants (graduate students from the same university) to openly share their perceptions that would be a sum of their shared stories and experiences related to civic engagement. This, in turn, will shed light on the Ivorian higher education system's role in promoting civic engagement and how these graduate students perceive their academic disciplines or groups in advancing civic engagement within the higher education system.

Below, you will find the processes and questions set for the two rounds of facilitation during this study. These focus groups, structured in line with CPAR principles, offer graduate students the opportunity of enhancing their capacity and become aware of how best to support civic engagement at their department and university level, and also create collaboration power to influence policy making for the advancement of civic engagement in the higher education system.

Please note that while the list below outlines the initial questions and lines of inquiry established at the outset of the research process, the researcher acknowledges that follow-up questions may arise during the course of the facilitation.

### Questions and Focus Group Facilitation Process:

#### Round 1

##### Part 1: Introductions

1. Confirmation of Informed Consent signature, and discussions allowing for questions and clarifications about the IRB protocol.
2. Remind participants steps taken to ensure confidentiality, and their participation is voluntary, allowing them to withdraw at any time without penalty. Complete IRB consent form.

**1. Part 2: Questions aligned with Research Question 1: How do graduate students perceive Ivorian Higher education role in supporting civic engagement at the institutional level?**

1. How has the higher education institution supported civic engagement?
2. What are your perceptions on how Ivorian higher education defines successful civic engagement? What areas do you suggest could be improved?
3. How do you see your department or institution contributing to promoting civic engagement for students?
4. What suggestions or recommendations would you provide to enhance the institutional support for civic engagement within Ivorian Higher Education? Please consider your experiences and insights.

**Round 2**

**Part 1: Introductions**

1. Reminder of informed consent signed in the first interview.
2. Remind participants steps taken to ensure confidentiality, and their participation is voluntary, allowing them to withdraw at any time without penalty.

**Part 2: Questions aligned with Research Question 2 (How do graduate students perceive their group or discipline's role in support of civic engagement in the Ivorian higher education system?)**

1. Could you describe specific instances or actions where you believe your department or discipline has contributed to civic engagement within the Ivorian higher education system?
2. Could you share any specific examples of successful civic engagement activities that took on a group or disciplinary character?
3. In your opinion, what barriers or challenges do graduate students in your unit or discipline face when attempting to support civic engagement in the Ivorian higher education system?
4. What steps could be taken to better support the civic engagement of your unit or discipline?

**Part 3: Debriefing statement to be read aloud at the conclusion of the focus group facilitations.**

We sincerely appreciate your participation in this study, which seeks to investigate the perceptions held by graduate students regarding the Ivorian higher education system's support for civic engagement at the institutional level. Additionally, we aim to understand how these graduate students perceive the contribution of their specific department or discipline in promoting civic engagement within the broader higher education framework. Your valuable insights will greatly contribute to the depth and quality of this research.

As the study moves forward, I may periodically be contacting you regarding questions or clarifications related to some of the information you shared with me throughout this study. Overall, I am hoping to represent your words as accurately as possible. I also intend to keep your contributions anonymous and use a pseudonym to protect your identity in any publications that come from this research. Please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

Once again, we want to express our profound gratitude for your participation and emphasize that the information and data you provide will be instrumental in advancing this research for the betterment of both students and citizens, not only in our nation but also on a broader scale.

You are welcome to contact me or the individuals listed on your consent form at any time if you have questions or concerns. Thank you!

## French version

### Guide d'animation des focus group pour l'étude

Nom: \_\_\_\_\_

Lieu: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/heure:

**Note:** Cette étude s'inspire de la recherche participative critique (RPC). Par conséquent, ce guide a été élaboré dans le but d'engager un dialogue significatif avec les participants à la recherche (étudiants diplômés du troisième cycle en économie, langues et droits) afin que les informations partagées puissent être communiquées à la communauté et aux décideurs politiques. Il s'agit là de l'un des éléments essentiels de l'enquête participative critique telle qu'elle est présentée par Fine & Torre (2021). De même, les questions et les incitations sont formulées de manière à encourager les participants (étudiants diplômés de la même université) à partager ouvertement leurs perceptions, qui seront la somme de leurs histoires et expériences communes liées à l'engagement civique. Ceci, à son tour, mettra en lumière le rôle du système d'enseignement supérieur dans la promotion de l'engagement civique et la façon dont ces étudiants diplômés perçoivent leurs disciplines ou groupes académiques dans la promotion de l'engagement civique dans le cadre de l'enseignement supérieur.

Vous trouverez ci-dessous les processus et les questions définis pour les deux cycles de facilitation de cette étude. Ces groupes de discussion, structurés selon les principes du CPAR, offrent aux étudiants diplômés la possibilité de renforcer leurs capacités et de prendre conscience de la meilleure façon de soutenir l'engagement civique au niveau de leur département et de leur université, ainsi que de créer un pouvoir de collaboration afin d'influencer l'élaboration des politiques pour la promotion de l'engagement civique dans le système de l'enseignement supérieur.

Veillez noter que si la liste ci-dessous présente les questions initiales et les axes d'enquête établis au début du processus de recherche, elle n'est pas exhaustive.

## **Procédure d'animation des groupes et questions :**

### **Phase 1**

#### **Partie 1 : Introductions**

1. Confirmation de la signature du consentement éclairé et discussions permettant de poser des questions et d'apporter des éclaircissements sur le protocole de l'IRB.
2. Rappeler aux participants les mesures prises pour garantir la confidentialité et que leur participation est volontaire, ce qui leur permet de se retirer à tout moment sans pénalité. Remplir le formulaire de consentement IRB.

#### **Part 2 : Questions : Questions alignées sur la question de recherche 1 : Comment les étudiants diplômés perçoivent-ils le rôle de l'enseignement supérieur ivoirien dans le soutien à l'engagement civique ? (Au niveau institutionnel)**

1. Comment l'établissements d'enseignement supérieur a-t-il soutenu l'engagement civique ?
2. Quelles sont vos perceptions sur la façon dont l'enseignement supérieur ivoirien définit un engagement civique réussi ? Quels sont les domaines qui, selon vous, pourraient être améliorés ?
3. Comment voyez-vous votre département ou votre institution contribuer à la promotion de l'engagement civique des étudiants ?
4. Quelles suggestions ou recommandations feriez-vous pour améliorer le soutien institutionnel à l'engagement civique dans l'enseignement supérieur ivoirien ? Merci de tenir compte de vos expériences et de vos réflexions.

### **Phase 2**

#### **Part 1: Introductions**

1. Rappel du consentement éclairé signé lors du premier entretien
2. Rappeler aux participants les mesures prises pour assurer la confidentialité, et que leur participation est volontaire, ce qui leur permet de se retirer à tout moment sans pénalité.

**Part 2: Questions: Questions alignées sur la question de recherche 2 (Comment les étudiants du troisième cycle perçoivent-ils leur rôle dans le soutien à l'engagement civique dans le système d'enseignement supérieur ivoirien ?)**

1. Pourriez-vous décrire des cas ou des actions spécifiques où vous pensez que votre département ou discipline a contribué à l'engagement civique au sein du système d'enseignement supérieur ivoirien ?
2. Pourriez-vous partager des exemples spécifiques d'activités d'engagement civique réussies qui ont pris un caractère collectif ou disciplinaire ?
3. A votre avis, quels sont les obstacles ou les défis auxquels les étudiants diplômés de votre unité ou discipline sont confrontés lorsqu'ils tentent de soutenir l'engagement civique dans le système d'enseignement supérieur ivoirien ?
4. Quelles mesures pourraient être prises pour mieux soutenir l'engagement civique dans votre unité ou discipline ?

**Partie 3 : Déclaration de compte rendu à lire à haute voix à la fin de l'animation des groupes de discussion**

Nous vous remercions sincèrement de votre participation à cette étude, qui vise à étudier les perceptions des étudiants de troisième cycle concernant le soutien du système d'enseignement supérieur ivoirien à l'engagement civique au niveau institutionnel. En outre, nous cherchons à comprendre comment ces étudiants perçoivent la contribution de leur département ou discipline spécifique à la promotion de l'engagement civique dans le cadre plus large de l'enseignement supérieur. Vos précieux commentaires contribueront grandement à la profondeur et à la qualité de cette recherche.

Au fur et à mesure que l'étude progresse, il se peut que je vous contacte périodiquement pour vous poser des questions ou vous demander des éclaircissements sur certaines des informations que vous avez partagées avec moi tout au long de cette étude. D'une manière générale, j'espère



restituer vos propos aussi fidèlement que possible. J'ai également l'intention de préserver l'anonymat de vos contributions et d'utiliser un pseudonyme pour protéger votre identité dans toute publication issue de cette recherche. Sachez que vous pouvez vous retirer de l'étude à tout moment, sans pénalité.

Une fois encore, nous tenons à vous exprimer notre profonde gratitude pour votre participation et à souligner que les informations et les données que vous fournirez contribueront à faire progresser cette recherche pour le bien des étudiants et des citoyens, non seulement dans notre pays, mais aussi à plus grande échelle.

Si vous avez des questions ou des inquiétudes, n'hésitez pas à me contacter ou à contacter les personnes dont le nom figure sur votre formulaire de consentement. Je vous remercie de votre attention.

## Appendix C – Informed Consent Form

**KANSAS STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

University Research  
Compliance Office

### Institutional Review Board (IRB) Formulaire Type de Consentement

comply@k-state.edu | 785-532-3224

#### PROJECT TITLE:

An Analysis of the Graduate Students Perceptions of Civic Engagement in Higher Education in Côte d'Ivoire

**PROJECT APPROVAL DATE:**

November 6 2023

**PROJECT EXPIRATION DATE:**

May 2024

**LENGTH OF STUDY:**

6 months

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

Brandon Klierer

**CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):**

N'zoret Innocent Assoman

**CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:**

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**IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:**

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Manhattan KS, 66502

**PROJECT SPONSOR:**

N/A

#### PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of graduate students regarding the role of Ivorian higher education system in supporting civic engagement (institutional level) and to explore how these graduate students perceive their own role in advancing civic engagement (disciplinary/group level) within the higher education system.

**PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:**

For this research project, the main study location will be University Felix Houphouet Boigny in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. I will conduct two semi-structured focus group facilitations via Zoom. Each focus group session will take 75 minutes with 15 participants, meaning 5 participants by department. I will recruit participants for the research from graduate students from three different colleges or departments (economics, languages, and law) within university Felix Houphouet Boigny.

In conducting this research, data will be collected from focus group facilitation.

Additionally, part of the data analysis will be completed at the Staley School of Leadership.

**ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:**

Research participants will benefit of research questions facilitations that will create a space to reflect on their capacity to think collectively and co-create actions to foster changes within their environment (campus).

**RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:**

For this time, we do not anticipate any risks or discomforts. However, we anticipate establishing clear ground rules for the focus group emphasizing mutual respect, active listening, and open-mindedness. Likewise, this study is conducted virtually using internet, therefore, the researcher anticipates to inform participants that there is no way to guarantee absolute confidentiality.

**BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:**

This study will give research participants the opportunity to share their perceptions about civic engagement effort at the institutional level in the Ivorian higher education system and how they are supporting the advancement of civic engagement in the system at a group or disciplinary level.

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:**

This study will involve audio and video recordings, thus recording of participants' images. Nonetheless, recorded data and transcripts will be kept confidential. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms.

Participants' personal identifiable information will not be disclosed in the final product(s). The researcher will utilize pseudonyms when referencing individuals and their contributions. Additionally, the researcher will assure that participants personal identifiable information be removed before any public display of the findings, after removal of the identifiers, the information collected could be used for future research studies or distributed to another researcher for future research studies without additional informed consent.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

**PARTICIPANT  
NAME:**

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**PARTICIPANT  
SIGNATURE:**

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**DATE:**

--

**WITNESS TO  
SIGNATURE: (PROJECT  
STAFF)**

--

**DATE:**

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**TITRE DU PROJET:**

Analyse des perceptions de l'engagement civique dans l'enseignement supérieur par les étudiants de troisième cycle en Côte d'Ivoire

<b>DATE D'APPROBATION DU PROJET:</b>	6 Novembre 2023	<b>DATE D'EXPIRATION DU PROJET:</b>	Mai 2024	<b>DUREE DE L'ETUDE:</b>	6 mois
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**CHERCHEUR PRINCIPAL:** Brandon Kliewer

**CO-CHERCHEUR(S):** N'Zoret Innocent Assoman

**LES CONTACTS EN CAS DE PROBLEMES OU QUESTIONS:** +1 785 477 7 859

**COORDONNEES DU/ LA CHARGE(E) DU CONSEIL DE REVISION INSTITUTIONNEL :**  
Lisa Rubin,  
+1 785 532 3224,  
University Research Compliance Office  
203 Fairchild Hall  
1601 Vattier St.  
Manhattan KS, 66502

**SPONSOR DU PROJET:** N/A

**LE BUT DE LA RECHERCHE :**

L'objectif de cette étude est d'analyser les perceptions des étudiants du troisième cycle (niveau Master et plus) concernant le rôle du système d'enseignement supérieur ivoirien dans le soutien à l'engagement civique (niveau institutionnel) et d'explorer comment ces étudiants perçoivent leur propre rôle dans la promotion de l'engagement civique (niveau disciplinaire/groupe) au sein du système d'enseignement supérieur.

**LES PROCEDURES ET MESURES A UTILISER :**

Pour ce projet de recherche, le lieu principal de l'étude sera l'Université Felix Houphouet Boigny à Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Je conduirai deux groupes de discussion (focus

group) semi-structurés via Zoom. Chaque session de focus group durera 75 minutes avec 15 participants, soit 5 participants par département. Je recruterai les participants de la recherche parmi les étudiants de trois départements différents (économie, langues et droit) au sein de l'université Felix Houphouet Boigny.

Dans le cadre de cette recherche, les données seront collectées à partir de l'animation de groupes de discussion.

En outre, une partie de l'analyse des données sera réalisée à la Staley School of Leadership.

### **LES PROCEDURES OU TRAITEMENT ALTERNATIFS, LE CAS ECHEANT, QUI POURRAIT ETRE AVANTAGEUX POUR LE SUJET/PARTICIPANT :**

Les participants de la recherche bénéficieront d'orientations sur les questions de recherche qui créeront un espace de réflexion sur leur capacité à penser collectivement et à cocréer des actions pour favoriser le changement dans leur environnement (campus).

### **LES RISQUES OU LES DESAGREMENTS PREVUS :**

Pour le moment nous ne prévoyons pas de désagréments ou risques majeurs à l'encontre des participants de cette études. Cependant, nous prévoyons d'établir des règles de base claires pour le groupe de discussion, mettant l'accent sur le respect mutuel, l'écoute active et l'ouverture d'esprit. De même, cette étude étant menée virtuellement sur Internet, le chercheur prévoit d'informer les participants qu'il n'y a aucun moyen de garantir une confidentialité absolue

### **LES AVANTAGES ANTICIPES:**

Cette étude donnera aux participants de la recherche l'occasion de partager leurs perceptions sur l'effort de soutien à l'engagement civique au niveau institutionnel dans le système d'enseignement supérieur ivoirien et sur la façon dont ils soutiennent l'avancement de l'engagement civique dans le système au niveau disciplinaire ou au niveau du groupe.

### **L'ETENDU DE LA CONFIDENTIALITE:**

Cette étude comportera des enregistrements audio et vidéo, et donc des images des participants. Néanmoins, les données enregistrées et les transcriptions resteront confidentielles. Des pseudonymes seront attribués aux participants.

Les informations personnelles identifiables des participants ne seront pas divulguées dans le(s) produit(s) final(aux). Le chercheur utilisera des pseudonymes lorsqu'il fera référence à des personnes et à leurs contributions. En outre, le chercheur veillera à ce que les informations personnelles identifiables des participants soient supprimées avant toute diffusion publique des résultats. Une fois les identifiants supprimés, les informations collectées pourront être utilisées pour de futures études ou distribuées à un autre chercheur pour de futures études sans émission de consentement éclairé supplémentaire.

Conditions de participation : Je comprends que ce projet est une recherche et que ma participation est volontaire. Je comprends également que si je décide de participer à cette étude, je peux retirer mon consentement à tout moment et cesser de participer à tout moment sans explication, pénalité ou perte des avantages ou du statut universitaire auxquels je pourrais avoir droit.

Je certifie que ma signature ci-dessous indique que j'ai lu et compris ce formulaire de consentement et- que j'accepte de participer à cette étude selon les conditions décrites, et que ma signature atteste que j'ai reçu une copie signée et datée de ce formulaire de consentement.

**NOM DU  
PARTICIPANT:**

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**SIGNATURE DU  
PARTICIPANT:**

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**DATE:**

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**TEMOIN DE LA  
SIGNATURE :  
(Personnel du Projet)**

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**DATE:**

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