

Social Networks of Students with Physical Disabilities in Higher Education: Evidence from the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Gondar. (Study-3)

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INTRODUCTION

- While Ethiopia has committed to disability inclusion through policy, implementation remains limited.
- Evidence shows that social networks are critical functions in shaping students' access to support, belonging, and mental health, and navigating campus. However, students with physical disabilities face isolation due to structural and attitudinal barriers.

Overarching Aim

- The PhD dissertation aimed to understand social networks of students with physical disabilities at higher education using a multiple-methods approach.

METHODS

Study 1: Scoping Review

Aim: Understand the scope and nature of research on social networks and their functions for students with physical disabilities in higher education.

Study design: Based on the Joanna Briggs Institute Methodology for scoping review (JBI).

Study 2: Social Network Analysis

Aim: Explored the social network Structure and functions of students with physical disabilities at the University of Gondar.

Study design: Qualitative social network analysis approach using semi-structured interviews and a participatory mapping approach

Study 3: Qualitative Descriptive

Aim: understanding how a disability focused scholars program shaped social networks.

Context: By 2025, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Gondar supported 285 undergraduate and 160 graduate students with disabilities, and the support is ongoing.

Study Design: qualitative descriptive.

- One-time face-to-face audio-recorded interview with 13 Scholars conducted.
- Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis

Contact

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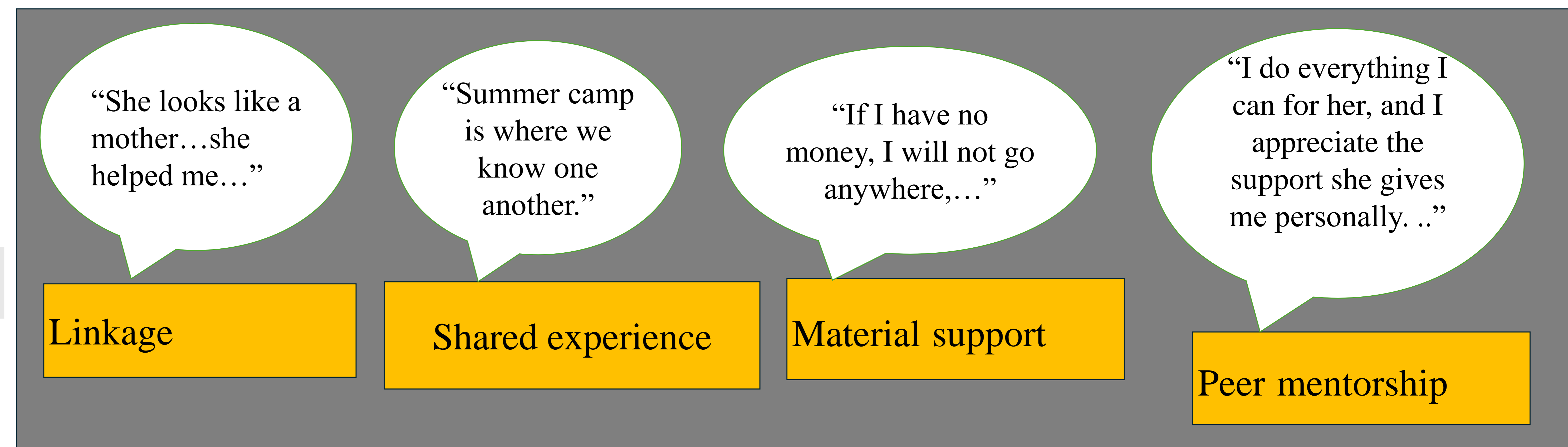
References



FINDINGS (Study-3)

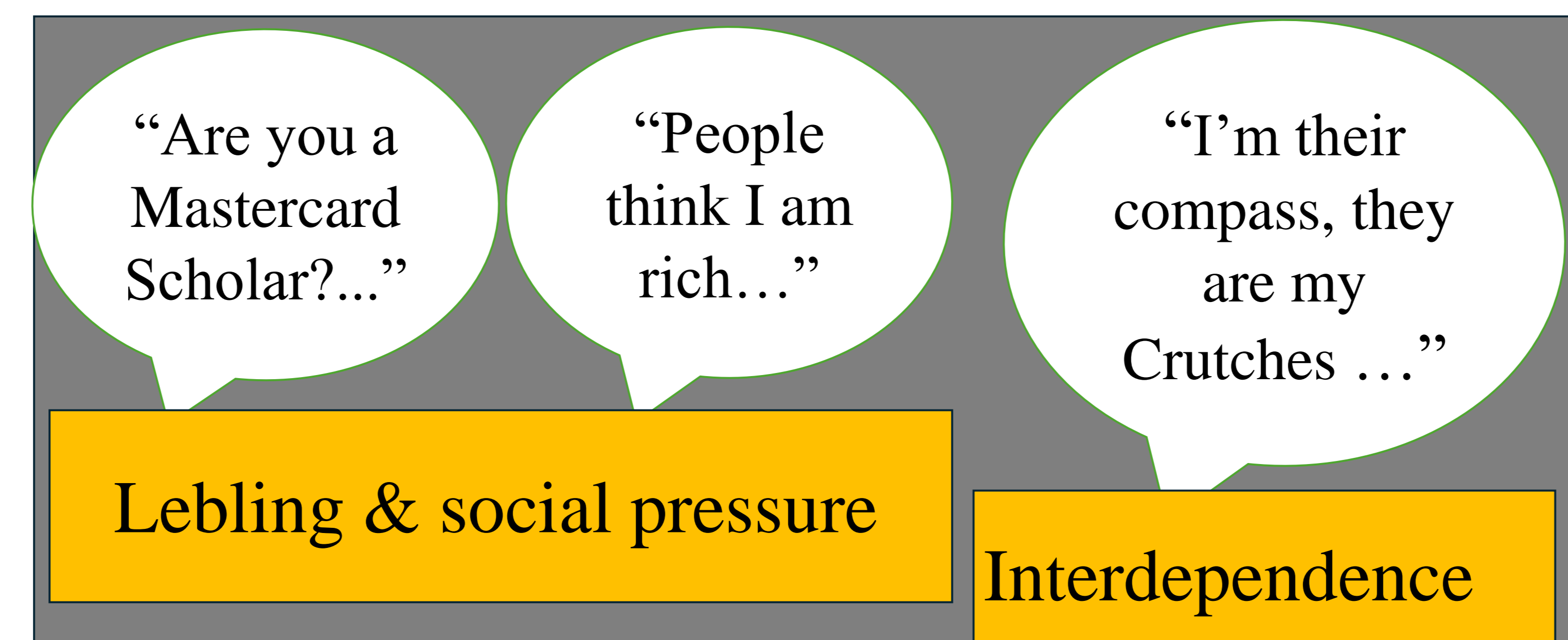
Research Question: How did the Scholars Program influence participants' networks?

THEME 1: PROGRAM MECHANISMS THAT SHAPED NETWORKS



Outcome: Networks helped participants to navigate the campus, participate in academic/social activities, and minimize attitudinal and social isolation.

THEME 2: UNINTENDED RESULTS



- Impact:** limit integration & belonging to other groups [e.g, non-scholars, students without disabilities]

TAKEAWAY MESSAGES

- Summer camps provide valuable opportunities for scholars to build networks. Institutions should invest in this and similar initiatives to create an inclusive, positive space where students with disabilities can create connections.
- Financial support is essential for reducing barriers to network-building. However, it can come with unintended negative consequences that should be understood and mitigated wherever possible.
- Inclusive university support is needed beyond program support to build networks and integration. Institutions should strengthen disability service offices and raise awareness to mitigate attitudinal barriers on campus.

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