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ABSTRACT
              Several studies of distance education in Slovenia
(Yugoslavia) have been conducted. Questionnaires and individual
in-depth interviews were the most frequently used tools. In the
studies, the relationship between social isolation and efficiency in
distance education was observed through three sets of variables: (1)
two different concepts of education and learners' perception of
social isolation; (2) types, quality, and quantity of social
relations and impact of social isolation on distance education; and
(3) individual psychological characteristics in relation to the
impact of social isolation on the effectiveness of distance
education. Although the studies are not directly comparable, they
lead to several basic findings (which cannot be generalized). For
example, review of the studies showed that the learners' approach to
education can predetermine their expectations. Learners who feel they
must be taught are more likely to feel deprived of social relations
if they study at a distance, whereas learners who have
self-confidence and believe they can get the knowledge by themselves
function effectively. Learners who lack good social relationships
also may not function effectively in distance education. Finally,
learners with low self-confidence appreciate distance education
because they do not have to perform in front of peers. (KC)

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ZIFF PAPIERE 71

Ana Krajnc

Social isolation and learning effectiveness in distance education
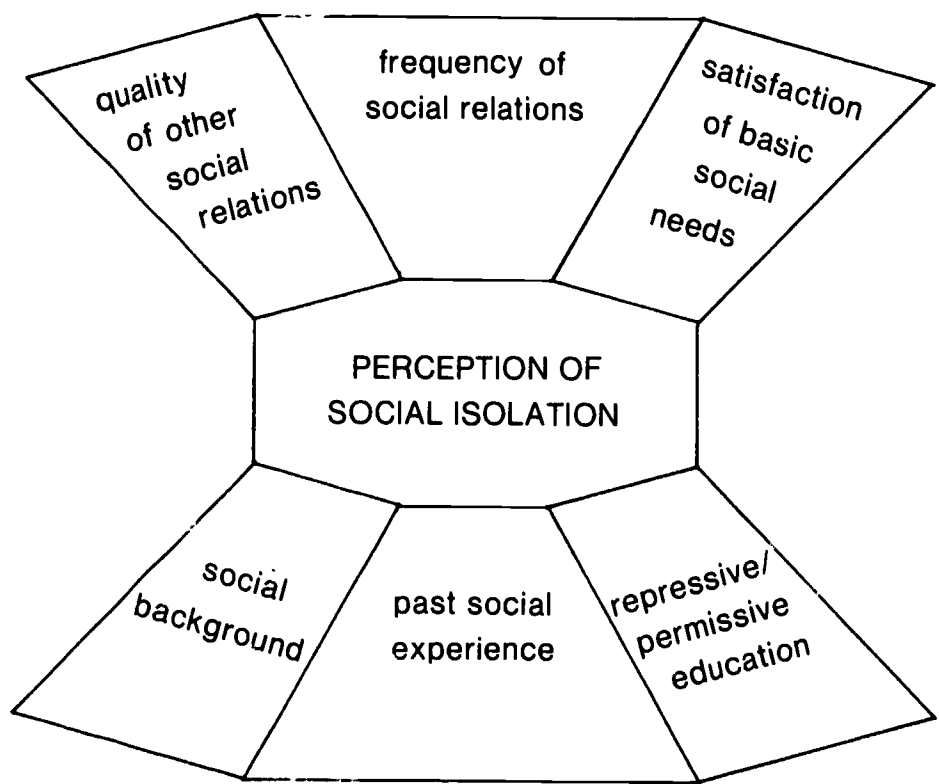
PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL ISOLATION

frequency of social relations

quality of other social relations

satisfaction of basic social needs

social background

past social experience

repressive/ permissive education

Zentrales Institut für Fernstudienforschung

Hagen, Juni 1988

Vorwort des Herausgebers

Schon der Titel dieser Arbeit stellt die im Fernstudium alt-
bekannte Frage. Ana Krajnc präsentiert in dieser Studie eine
Fülle von Beobachtungen und Forschungsergebnissen. Nach der
Lektüre bedürfen für mich zwei wesentliche Punkte der
Erwähnung:

1) Wir brauchen mehr Grundlagenforschung im Bereich des
   Lernens als sozialer Funktion, ganz besonders im
   Fernstudium.

2) Dankbar müssen wir Ana Krajnc sein, daß sie zwei
   Forschungsmethoden versucht hat zu integrieren:
   Bildungsbiografie und klassische Evaluation.

Der nächste Schritt muß also eine Studie sein, die wiederum
beide Methoden integriert und dabei auch die einzelnen Daten
zwecks intersubjektiver Nachprüfbarkeit präsentiert:
Schlußfolgerungen sollten dann übertragbar sein. Vielleicht
erreichen wir ja nie eine Ebene der Generalisierbarkeit von
Ergebnissen so wie wir uns das erträumen, aber wir sollten
zumindest eine gemeinsame Ebene vergleichbarer Fragestellungen
anstreben.

Helmut Fritsch

Editor's note

The title of this paper "Social isolation and learning
effectiveness in distance education" pose one of the old and
central questions that always accompany distance education.
Ana Krajnc presents a lot of observations and evaluation
results. After having read her paper two conclusions come to my
mind:

1) Basic research in the field of learning as a social function
   is still an underdeveloped field in distance education.

2) We have to be grateful to Ana Krajnc that she showed two
   possible ways to reach necessary information:
   educational biographics and evaluative studies.

So the next step must be an elaborated study again integrating
the two methods of observation but clearly presenting the data
so that other researchers can crossevaluaaate and so that the
conclusions will be transferable. Probably we never will reach
the level of generalization of results we are striving to but
we at least should try to find a common level of asking
comparable questions.

Helmut Fritsch

CONTENTS

F O R E W O R D

Education basically represents a social relationship and it has always been an important and interesting question to observe "how people learn in social isolation". It became one of the central issues for distance education. Findings from several studies allow basic conclusions about how people react and what their learning effectiveness is when learning in social isolation. Individual learners react very differently to the lack of social interactions and the fulfilment of basic social needs. The reaction of individuals might be diametrically different, depending on their social situation. Characteristics of individual students are important for the perception of social isolation, which, in the educational process, may not be automatically valued negatively. Some students can bear social isolation and accept it, others even prefer to study this way.

This text had been prepared for my presentation at ZIFF, FernUniversität, in Hagen, February 1988. I am thankful to Prof. Dr. Börje Holmberg, who stimulated me to reflect and summarise several findings. I would also like to thank other colleagues at ZIFF and other research centres, who enabled me to discuss the problems of distance studies and to learn a great deal.

Ljubljana, Mai 1988

Prof. Dr. Ana Krajnc

INTRODUCTION

Social isolation in distance education has been frequently treated by researchers and has always been an attractive subject of studies, because it was seen as an inevitable companion of correspondence education or distance education. Typical of most of these studies was that social isolation was almost always observed and interpreted as a negative influence on education and learning. Nothing good or positive was ever expected to result from it.

Even though the possibly positive, favourable effects on learning had been neglected, it became clear that not all distance students react in the same way to the necessity to learn in isolation. The effects range from high to rather low independence of other characteristics of the learning situation, the characteristics of the distant learners and their social relations.

Learning in distance education is a highly individualized process. Therefore only small groups of correspondence students and others learning in social isolation have been selected and studied separately. Conclusions made on the basis of the average performance results of different sub-groups would not necessarily raise the validity. Therefore numerous small-scale studies and observations were made in the eighties to help the researchers in Jugoslavia to draw more valid conclusions and make new discoveries about distance education.

After the introduction of the educational reform of the regular school system (between 1976 and 1980) in Slovenia correspondence education and distance studies became even more attractive to many people as these types of learning were expected partly to become a substitute for the school system. In this complementary function, distance education was expected, because of the economic crisis, to diminish

the proportion of students in regular schools. The compensatory function of adult education was meant to be brought about primarily by means of distance education.

Some observations were made on the basis of the data collected in a study of Educational Biographies made by the author between 1982 and 1985. The progress of each person treated was carefully followed. Specific biographical data, together with the influences of the environment, which were included in the research, explained several variables in the educational process (continuation of education, selection of educational programs, other initial and accompanying decisions and the effectiveness of learning).

In their educational biographies, independent learners tended to interpret the influences of the environment very subjectively. In some cases their perception and reactions were completely unexpected and difficult to foresee. Individuals reacted to the same event or change in their environment in different, opposing ways. The individual responses were treated separately. Later they were compared and several general tendencies were identified.

The evaluation of effectiveness was based on concrete results (evaluation of papers, examinations, frequency of contacts with the educational institution etc.). This was possible where the students were in the process of obtaining formal education. Several studies of smaller groups, however, concentrated on the learners` attitudes and primarily recorded the reactions and individual perceptions of the educational process.

Social isolation differed from sample to sample. It was
measured by frequency of:

- contacts with other students,
- contacts with individual tutors,
- group consultations,
- attendance at short seminars,
- possibility to discuss personal learning problems with a
  relative or friend.

Specially treated were the learners who learned in complete
isolation, because of handicaps, for geographical reasons,
or simply because of the type of distance education
program. This set of independent learners studying on their
own without a chance to communicate about their learning
process with anybody, reported on their education in
complete social isolation. Most of our distanc´ education
programs are mixed models. They make use of several forms
of face-to-face education and combine them with distance
education. Sometimes this is done for practical reasons,
for example, when necessary educational materials are not
available. When social isolation is a reflection of a given
situation, a necessity rather than choice, the reactions of
the students cannot be predicted and will show, when
examined, a great diversity.

The responses of the students who consciously chose to
study at a distance, in social isolation, differed greatly
from those who did not have any objective possibility to
attend face-to-face adult education programs (geographical
distance, living far from educational institutions,
responsibility for young family, working shifts were the
most frequent reasons preventing them from attending
"evening schools") and therefore did not study at a
distance by choice. In the latter group the perception of
educational experience in distance study tended to be
negative and their readiness to adapt to specific methods
of learning was relatively low. This clearly demonstrates

the unwillingness of those participants to learn outside
the group. They expected adult education to be very similar
to the school type of learning.

The findings of several researchers (Z. Jelenc,
M. Matijevic, and S. Pongrac) were compared and summarized
and are included in the considerations on which this paper
is based.

In international literature the problem of social isolation
in distance education is frequently treated from various
points of view, revealing a variety of reactions of
distance students. For this reason continued studies are
required, again and again in new specific settings.

Various Concepts of Education and Participants` Perception of Social Isolation

The usual general statements about distance education
rarely do justice to its real value. It is very common that
distance or correspondence education is not supposed to
have the same value as the face-to-face forms of adult
education. Such an evaluation is not typical only of
individual countries, it can be found almost anywhere in
the world. What is the cause of such suspicious attitudes
towards distance education in spite of good learning
results?

Statements of this kind show that in our social and
cultural environment distance education is undervalued for
two basic reasons. First, the general image of education is
still the traditional formal classroom learning with a
teacher. Therefore adult education in general is usually
compared to school education. The closer it resembles
school in its approach to learning, the better it is
considered to be. Such social stereotypes require just the
opposite of what one should expect of high-quality adult

education and independent learning. This stereotypical view
of adult education as schooling automatically influences
even adult educators, or as Malcolm Knowles says, students
make those educators abandon their modern, contemporary
understanding of adult education so that they resort to
conservative "face-to-face learning with the teacher"[1]
This view generates many negative attitudes which in a
particular social climate and social surrounding influence
individual learning in social isolation, which is the case
in distance education. The prejudices of the environment
influence the expectation of the students.

Secondly, the basic approach to learning (either at schools
or in adult education) is that somebody must teach the
learner, and that students are not capable of learning by
themselves. The students then basically lack confidence
that they can learn and discover knowledge by themselves.
The hierarchical social relations where the students are
subordinated to the will and decisions of the teachers are
absent in independent learning and indirect educational
communications (between tutors and students or the authors
of educational aids and users), which are characteristic of
distance education. Therefore, in this conservative concept
of education, an essential part of "proper education" is
felt to be missing in distance studies. Only very slowly
has the belief been growing that students can gain
knowledge by themselves and that the help needed can occur
in the form of guidance, coordination of influences and
selection of educational means.

In the evaluation of distance education two basically
contradicting approaches and concepts tend to appear: one,
in which education means teaching others and is primarily
subject-oriented, and the other, in which everything
concentrates on helping students to discover knowledge, the
student-oriented concept. Even Rowntree's dictionary in its
definition of teaching methods reflects what most people

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1) Knowles, Malcolm: Andragogy in Action

mean when they speak of educational method, identifying it with the management of face-to-face teaching encounters.[2] It does not even suggest that there may be gradations in teacher domination within face-to-face work, neither does it consider the fact that teaching is organised in different ways in different educational institutions, such as correspondence education centres or distance studies institutes.

In the expected hierarchical social relation between the adult educator and the students, the learners are kept in a dependent social position and are taken care of. In this situation students feel helpless and their natural reaction is constantly to expect help to come from outside, from other persons (the adult educator). Seeing themselves as dependent and "addicted" to teachers the students automatically exclude from their behaviour and psychological reactions a set of mechanisms which would allow them primarily to use their own abilities and would make them function independently.

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2) Rowntree, D.: A Dictionary of Education

Two concepts of education and social isolation:

Concept I	Concept II
- Education is teaching	- Education means helping others to learn
- Educator's activities: lecturing, explaining	- Educator's activities: guiding, coordinating, directing
- Educator makes decisions	- Student is helped to make his/her own decisions
- Students are dependent	- Students are independent
- Predominant communication is face-to-face communication, direct communication	- Predominant communication is indirect, at a distance, by educational aids
- Students expect social contact and miss them when not available	- Students do not expect and, as a consequence, do not miss social contacts
- Highly developed need for direct social relations	- Low expectation of direct social relations
- Social isolation disturbs learning	- Social isolation is sufficiently mastered

Two concepts of education and the amount of need for
direct social contacts:

Concept I   **Concept II**
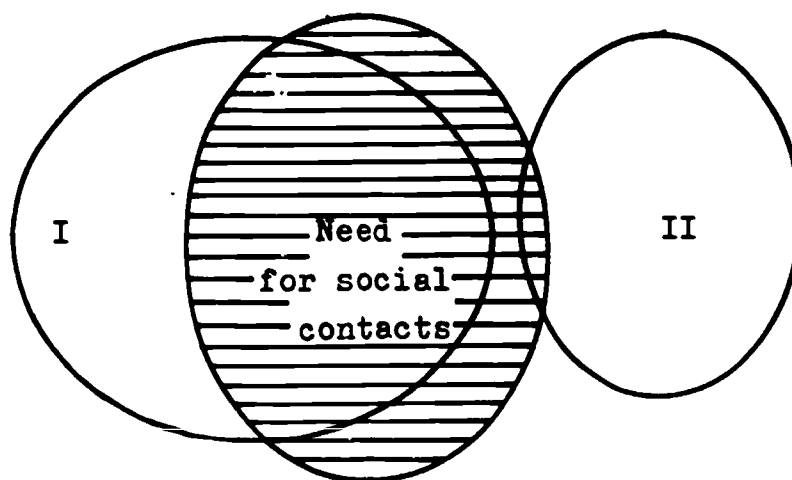
Although most of the studies were on the attitudinal level
(groups expressed their expectation and reactions towards
learning in social isolation), the same responses were
found through observations of direct behaviour and
reactions in specific cases, where the persons were forced
to learn in extreme isolation. This applies to handicapped
persons who chose to learn even when no outside help and
support were available and managed to learn efficiently
(foreign languages, drawing, astronomy, geography) in total
social isolation in a completely independent way. In spite
of social isolation they later never complained about or
felt deprived by social isolation. They took it as a
natural part of the total situation and as a good way of
learning. Interviews with these "isolated learners" have
even revealed several positive sides of independent

individual learning. One of these positive effects of
learning in social isolation reported in the interviews is
that they have felt rewarded not only by the knowledge and
skills gained but also by the efficient techniques and
methods independently discovered. They also felt creative
and enjoyed the freedom to shape their learning, because no
outside help in learning was expected. They felt to be in
command of the learning situation, which inspired them with
self-confidence rarely experienced elsewhere in their
lives. They felt more impeded by their physical immobility,
dependence on medicine and other forms of therapeutic
treatment in their lives generally than in the learning
situation.

Here it is possible to draw some basic conclusions: the
effects of learning in social isolation are relative and
differ greatly. They depend a great deal on students`
expectations and their basic understanding of education.
If students expect direct social relations, then they will
miss them; if not, they will not miss them to the same
extent. If they believe "that somebody must teach them"
(the conservative concept of adult education), then they
are hampered by social isolation. On the other hand, when
their initial expectation and idea of learning is
independent and self-directed learning, their learning will
continue to be efficient even in social isolation. In
extreme cases isolated individual learning may even be
psychologically rewarding.

Positive results of education in social isolation have also
been reported by some researchers from China. At the
international symposium for adult education in Shanghai
Wang Yongxian presented distance studies of architecture at
the University of Tajgi. The graduates doing organized
distance studies for several years developed specific
positive characteristics and abilities which have not been

observed in the population of graduates in regular studies.
Distance-education graduates appear to be much more goal-
oriented, determined in their decisions and activities,
ready for critical analyses and for taking initiative, with
a great sense of responsibility. These abilities enable
them to take on management jobs and leading posts
immediately after the diploma, whereas the graduates from
regular studies mature for such positions only after a
decade of practical work in jobs taken after the diploma.[3]

When the neccessary amount of social relations is not
present in the educational process (correspondence
education, distance studies), the students try harder to
establish them individually, both formally and informally.
Through such repeated attempts they become socially more
independent, self-confident, and their sociability
increases.

Regular students, on the other hand, are protected by their
daily organisation of studies which is taken care of by
others (the teachers and managerial staff). They gain very
little, or no direct experience in establishing and
sustaining the social relations needed. Others do this for
them and part of their personal development is delayed to
the time when they take on their first jobs.

Learning in social isolation through distance study has
more rarely been observed from a positive point of view,
than from the point of view of its negative consequences.
For this reason planners in distance studies most
frequently try to eliminate social isolation from education
to the greatest possible degree. So far there are no
positive data on the optimal proportion of social isolation
in any one model of adult education.

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3) Duke, C.: Adult education: International perspectives
   from China

Other Social Relations and Learning in Social Isolation

Students' reactions to specific conditions of distance
education depend on their overall social situation. In the
cases observed distance education never occured without any
social contacts.[4]

The extent of supplementary face-to-face forms of education
varies. The students may work in informal study circles of
three or four, where they meet and discuss the issues, they
have consultations organized at the seat of Correspondence
Schools and in centres all over the country, or they attend
short seminars where lecturers give additional explanations
on a subject.

All these forms are considered to be supplementary. Their
aim is to improve the effectiveness of learning and
reinforce the contact between the institution and the
student. They are not compulsory. Students are free to
attend them or not. The population of students can be
devided into several categories:

- students who regularly make use of supplementary forms of
  education,

- students who would like to attend supplementary forms,
  but are not able to,

- students who do not attend additional forms and do not
  want to,

- students who attend additional forms occasionally when
  they are able to or when they feel they need additional
  help.

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4) Main distance education centers in Yugoslavia: Center
   for Correspondence Education (Center Zadopisno
   Izobrazevanje Univerzum), Ljubljana; Birotehnika,
   Zagreb; various distance studies organized at the
   universities.

The reaction to social isolation in distance education
observed in individual groups shows significant
differences. The first group, who have regular access to
face-to-face education are relatively neutral in their
statements concerning the need for social contacts with
teachers and other students. They show noticeable
differences of opinion, especially if they belong to
various programs.

The reactions of the third group are similar to those of
the first group. The students in this group develop
relatively neutral attitudes to social isolation. In
general they feel comfortable when studying on their own
using various educational means and more so if they feel
they are progressing. Self-evaluation tests are very
important for this group, and they would wish to have more
than they can get at present.

The second group experiences a relatively high level of
frustration; the participants complain about the negative
effects of learning in social isolation. They feel that
learning is very difficult or virtually impossible without
social relations. They are very critical of educational
institutions and many of them are about to drop out of
their study programs. Some of them report a feeling of
helplessness and criticise existing learning opportunities.
Their personal motivation for education encounters too many
obstacles and the formal education desired seems to be out
of their reach.

The fourth group is the most unpredictable. Their opinion
varies with time. Sometimes the students report they have
no problems studying by themselves, but after a while the
need to meet others develops. This happens especially when
the program is difficult and they do not make much progress

in learning, when they feel they cannot understand the content and look for help. In some cases where the units of distance courses are too large (they may include several books and manuals), the students try to obtain face-to-face help and attend short courses, which help them to structure the program they have to master.

Additional face-to-face forms in distance education play an important part in the process of teaching students and providing them with the necessary knowledge. They compensate for the insufficient educational aids (course units, books, audio cassettes, films). Their secondary role appears to be educational motivation support and the creation of a positive social learning climate.[5]

Why do some students need more social contacts than others? The reasons are very complex. A combination of the data from various groups enables researchers to draw some conclusions and find explanations which need to be further developed.

How the students feel about social isolation in distance education and how it effects them depends to a great extent on the social environment in which they live. Those who are basically isolated, who live mainly alone or work in isolation in their jobs, tend to compensate it with social relations in educational programs. Their motivation for education is partly to meet people, to make new friends, to be with people. To students with such a social deficit it is more difficult to adjust to the distance-education model than to others.

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5) Pongrac, S.: Communications in correspondence education

The amount of social contact needed by distance-education
students also depends on the quality of social relations
which they have managed to establish and not only on their
quantity or the frequency of social contact. "People need
people, they need each other, they use each other, but they
may not misuse each other. If they do so, the basic social
needs are satisfied only by one partner and the other is
deprived. Such social relations can never last long,
because those who are deprived must find their
satisfactions elsewhere."[6]

The students who feel deprived in their usual social
relations are more critical and see more problems in
studying socially isolated than those who find their
social relations in family and work satisfactory. Only
persistently negative experience in relations with other
people will make individuals completely withdraw from
learning together with others in groups. However this
tendency is not common, on the contrary, it is rarely found
and represents an extreme reaction to social reality.

The study of educational biographies showed that students
educated in an extremely repressive way prefer to learn in
social isolation and by themselves to compensate for
earlier lack of independence.

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6) Brajsa, P.: Management as interpersonal process, p. 42

Social relations of individuals and their
perception of social isolation in distance
education.[7)]

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 ┌──────────────┐          ┌──────────────┐          ┌──────────────┐
 │ quality      │          │ frequency    │          │ satisfact.   │
 │ of other     │          │ of social    │          │ of basic     │
 │ social       │          │ relations    │          │ social       │
 │ relations    │          │              │          │ needs        │
 └──────────────┘          └──────────────┘          └──────────────┘


            ┌──────────────────────────────┐
            │ PERCEPTION OF                │
            │ SOCIAL ISOLATION             │
            └──────────────────────────────┘


 ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
 │ social       │        │ past         │        │ repressive/  │
 │ background   │        │ social       │        │ permissive   │
 │              │        │ experience   │        │ education    │
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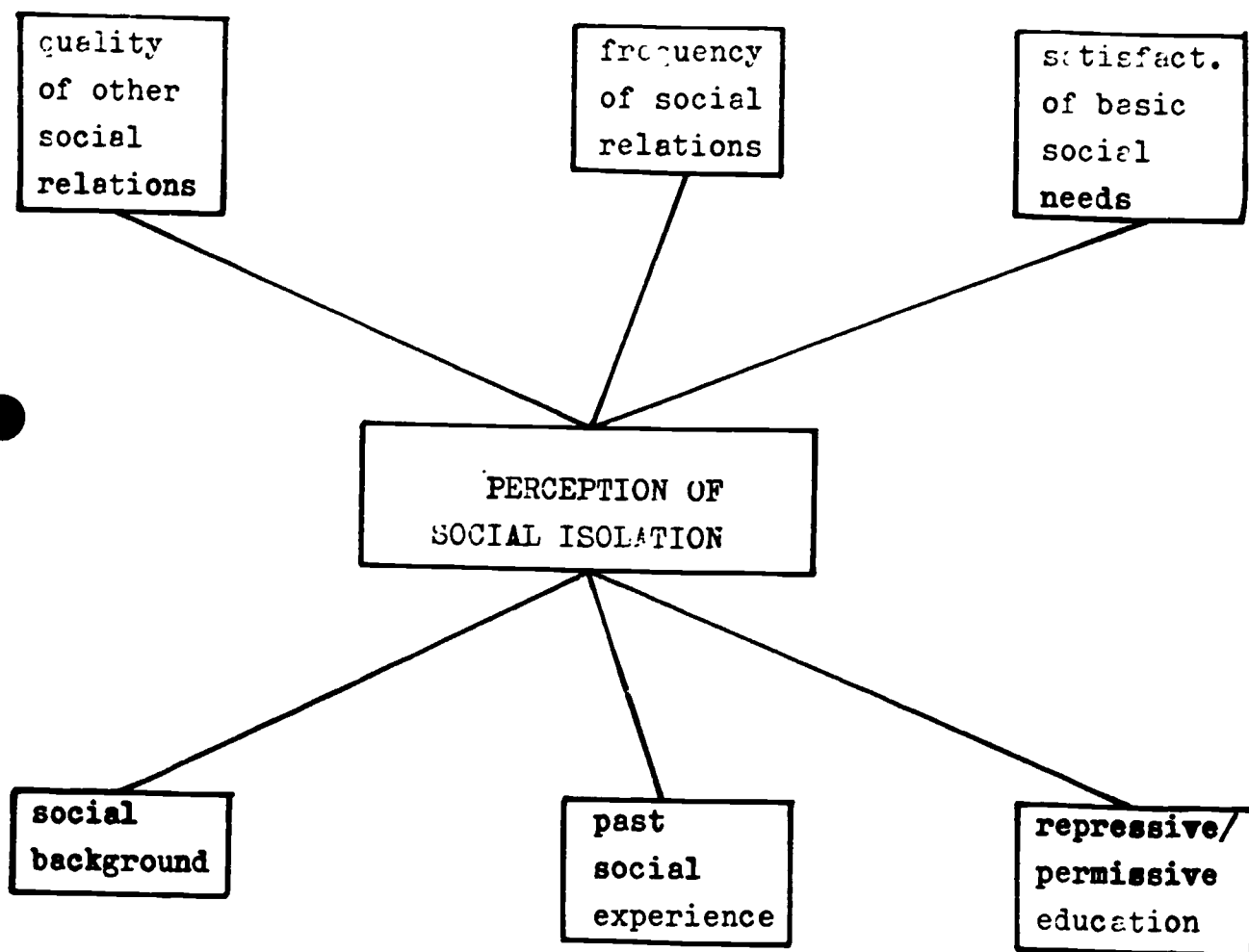
7) Krajnc, A.: Educational biographies of independent
   learners

Well-developed social relations of students with their
partners, friends or relatives diminish the negative
perception of social isolation. The respondents who have
managed to develop at least one deep emotional relation
with another person experience learning in social isolation
as less problematic and do not complain about it.

If the primary social needs of a person have been at least
partly satisfied through social contacts of various types
he/she does not eagerly try to find more social contacts.
The educational process develops alongside other social
relations which the person has established in his or her
social surrounding.

In his psychodynamic theory P. Brajsa stresses how much
past experience (of previous social relations) shape
present reactions of a person. They sometimes make
individual behaviour appear ridiculous and illogical.[8] If
a student in correspondence education reports about his
traumatic experience of education in social isolation, this
is not necessarily related to the present set of his social
relations; it may be an expression of his past social
experience.

Similar findings are reported by Berne in his transactional
analyses.[9] An individual can exist only for a limited
period in social isolation. Not all activities lead to
satisfaction of basic social needs. One social group may,
however, compensate for the deficiency of others in
providing security, the feeling of social belonging, self-
esteem, self-actualisation. Education in social isolation
is likely to be constantly deficient in providing
satisfaction of these needs. They must be given
compensation elsewhere.

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8) Brajsa, P.: General psychodynamics of selfgovernment
   behaviour
9) Ibid. p. 124

If in the social background of an individual the social
relations are relatively limited, social isolation is felt
to be negative. This will quickly result in reduced
learning motivation and an overall decrease in educational
effectiveness. In the opposite cases, a positive
correlation exists.

Characteristics of Individual Students and Social Isolation in Distance Education

The findings of several small-scale studies allow us to
determine a third set of variables related to the reactions
of students to social isolation in education. The programs
on the average consisted of correspondence-education aids
(60 %), audio-visual aids (17 %), and face-to-face
additional forms (13 %). Individual expectations ("what
they will find in education", "how they will learn") were
different, and their reactions to the reality of distance
education varied significantly. For the purposes of this
study several psychological characteristics were measured.
The correlations were not very high, but the data revealed
some tendencies of coincidence.[10]

Individual characteristics, which affect acceptance of
social isolation:

SOCIAL ISOLATION CHARACTERISTICS	INDIVIDUAL
(perception of and reactions to)	- self confidence - motivation for education - independence in learning - independence in other activities - sociability - extrovert/introvert behaviour - adaptability

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10) Krajnc, A.: The evaluation of education; Pongrac, S.:
   Communications in correspondence education

Although the students knew they would learn in social
isolation by themselves after a certain period, the length
of which depended on the length of the program, they became
disturbed by this fact. This happened more quickly and with
a greater negative impact (delaying examinations, end of
communications with tutors and educational institutions by
mail, smaller amounts of knowledge obtained, or finally
dropping out of the program) to students with specific
characteristics.

Self-confident students report about problems which they
met in distance education, but they expect to be able to
overcome them; they do not see them as fatal although they
"feel that" another way of studying might be better. They
use several possible solutions to solve the problem of
social isolation (friendly relations with experts in the
field, meeting people and making friends with those in
similar or completely different programs, frequent
communications with relatives about their studies - they
communicate all details to the partner, brother, sister,
parents etc.).

Persons with lower self-confidence develop more quickly the
feeling of helplessness and personal inability to master
the situation. Their attitudes show rigidity and a fear of
taking risks in all circumstances. This is why their
attempts to compensate for the social isolation in
education are very limited. They go on learning in the old
way with unchanged reactions, and they do not even try to
find compensatory social relations and contacts; so their
readiness to learn and motivation almost completely
disappear after a while.[11]

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11) Krajnc, A.: Educational Biographies

Contrary to what one would expect, there is a general
tendency among adults with lower self-confidence to select
the distance-education model even in situations where they
could learn in the face-to-face manner. They are too shy to
take part in an educational group and to be in the public,
confronted with others when making trials and errors, or
simply showing a lack of knowledge. In these situations
they feel embarrassed and insecure.

Such students prefer distance education to face-to-face
learning, but at the same time they are the first to find
it difficult. The contradiction between their personal
characteristics and their decisions soon shows itself in a
series of conflicts.

The primary motivation (or internal motivation), the
general wish to know and to discover the unknown as the
basic individual inclination is combined with the secondary
motivation (or external motives). Sometimes (or very
frequently) the secondary motives are in a given situation
stronger than the primary motivation. People wish to get
education because they want to improve their working
conditions, or they want to earn more money, or they
compete with others in their surronding, or they simply
want to fill their free time. Some motives are very
specific, still they can fit into a category. One of the
categories which may appear among learners is "to find new
friends and to be with other people, to meet people". This
"social motivation for education" may occur as a
predominant motive.

The student cannot know in advance how he/she will find learning at a distance, but it is possible at the time of enrolment to prevent a negative experience from actually occurring, as the counselling staff can advise the students so that they may find the most suitable decision. The potential students are not likely to discover by themselves what dangers they have to face and what might make them unefficient in distance study. Not all who wish are really ready to learn at a distance.

Two other prerequisites for effective learning at a distance are the ability of the student to learn independently and his general personal independence. This is so, because he will have to make decisions by himself and be able to organize all his micro activities. School education does not correlate directly with the ability for independent learning. People have been used for many years to the teacher teaching them and carrying all responsibility for the results of their learning, at least in our social and cultural surrounding. The years spent a school do not help to develop the abilities for independent learning. There exists a closer correlation between those abilities and the level of cultural and social development of the social surroundings in which the student has grown up and now lives. The development of habits and skills needed to engage in various cultural acitivities (attending concerts, theatres, exhibitions, reading books and newspapers, critically watching television etc.) foster the development of the ability for independent learning. Through cultural and social activities a person develops the mechanisms for acquiring knowledge without a teacher.

If the students have not developed this routine, they faces
many difficulties in situations where they have neither a
possibility to ask for help or advice, nor anybody else to
decide for them. The troubles in learning accumulate
quickly and seem to reach the point where they become
unbearable. In distance education the students have to rely
mainly on their own skills and abilities of independently
exploring and discovering knowledge. To this set of habits
also belong the skills of individual decision making and
the abilities for selection or making the right choices,
aggressive instead of defensive behaviour.[12)

Related to the already presented characteristics of
distance students are some additional findings, made on the
basis of observations of the hierarchial structure of work
organisation at the students' place of work.[13) The
students who enrol in correspondence educational programs
because they want to obtain formal secondary education
usually have very low positions at work. They have to
follow regulations, rules and other orders of their bosses,
the low managerial staff. Managers make daily decisions and
they are used to following them. In this division of social
roles a set of conditioned responses is linked with the
behaviour of dependency, and the inclination towards
subordination becomes evident. The correspondence students
in secondary school education programs show how the
behaviour of dependence is transferred from the working
situation to their educational process. In order to learn
they need a teacher, and they need a lot of help to develop
new skills for more independent behaviour in the process of
learning. No matter how difficult this change might be for

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12) Krajnc, A.: Educational Biographies
13) Pongrac, S.: Communication in correspondence education

them, some correspondence students are forced to undergo it, because they have no other choice if they are not able to do part-time face-to-face studies for some reasons (such as family responsibilities, geographical distance, question of time, absence of face-to-face educational programs, to name only the most frequent).[14] More than 30 % of them work in shifts, and they are not free to learn at a particular time of the day. Distance education is for them the only chance to obtain the necessary formal education and they do it in spite of the great difficulties they are faced with in the process of learning.

Troubles expressed by distance students on the lowest educational level:[15]

- do not understand certain parts of the subject-matter

- the explanations are missing in course units

- the rhythm set by the educational model is too fast

- not enough time for preparation for examinations

- not sufficient written material

- lack of possibility for attending short face-to-face seminars

- difficulties in adjusting to the general organisational structure (examination terms, frequency of course units, days for consultations)

- the organisation does not allow for individualised studies

- to distinguish between the essential and the less essential in course units

- loneliness and social isolation (very few of their acquaintances study, nobody to talk to)

- too much to learn in one unit

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14) Krajnc, A.: Method of correspondence education, p. 47
15) Ibid.

All the complaints stated derive from the personal inclination to be dependent on another person for guidance in learning, help in learning and decision-making. Changing from the dependent social position at work to the independent one in the learning process causes a lot of trouble and frustration especially during the initial period. Distance students on a lower educational level need more individual psychological counselling and help to develop to independent learners. To a certain extent help in this process is provided through social roles in the family, where partners or parents foster more self-dependent behaviour, image of independence and individual responsibility. In our social and cultural surroundings man is through his social role in the family better prepared for independent, self-governing behaviour than woman. The positive transfer of independent behaviour from family to distance study is more likely to occur in male groups than in female groups, because women, in spite of their great family responsibilities, tend to adopt subordinate behaviour.[16]

Presence or absence of independency in other adult activities can support or hinder learning in social isolation. Independency in learning is closely connected with independency in other adult activities.

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16) This is one of the reasons why women in our country do not want to be engaged in politics, public life, management

Sociability in interaction with extrovert and introvert
behaviour affect the relation between social isolation and
effectiveness of learning. Most of the data referred to
were collected among potential participants in distance
education programs and those groups already involved in
adult education who have some experience of their own.[17]
A generalisation of these findings is not possible, as in
different social and cultural environments there exist
diffferent criteria for what is sociable behaviour and what
constitutes an introvert or extrovert person.

Still, the studies show how social isolation can either
facilitate or hinder learning, making it more or less
efficient. Counsellors and tutors can help to solve
individual difficulties in distance learning in an adequate
manner and prevent low effectiveness. This is what
distance-education institutions always try to do at the
preparatory stage. If detailed studies are made, a battery
of diagnostic tests to be used in initial counselling can
be prepared. In this way it is possible to advise the
students who are likely to fail not to engage in distance
study. Not all who want to take part in distance education
are really capable of doing it effectively.

Individuals with developed sociability have relatively good
success in distance learning. If this sociability is
extremely low, the individual finds it difficult to
establish social contacts and new social relations; if it
is extremely high, social contacts are so plentiful and
easy that the person constantly creates a flow of
constantly new social relations and contacts, leaving old

17) Krajnc, A.: Types of learners and independent learning

ones for new ones. People with low sociability
automatically give preference to distance education,
because they feel that this type of learning can help them
to avoid the unpleasant experiences of trying to establish
new social contacts and meet new people. Such people
automatically select distance education and not face-to-
face programs even though they are inefficient in
compensating for the existing lack of social relations
elsewhere (at work or in friendships). Social stimulation
thus remains at a very low level. Soon they feel a deficit
in the satisfaction of social needs, which diminishes the
effects of education and produces a feeling of discomfort.

Level of sociability and efficiency in distance
learning:[18)]

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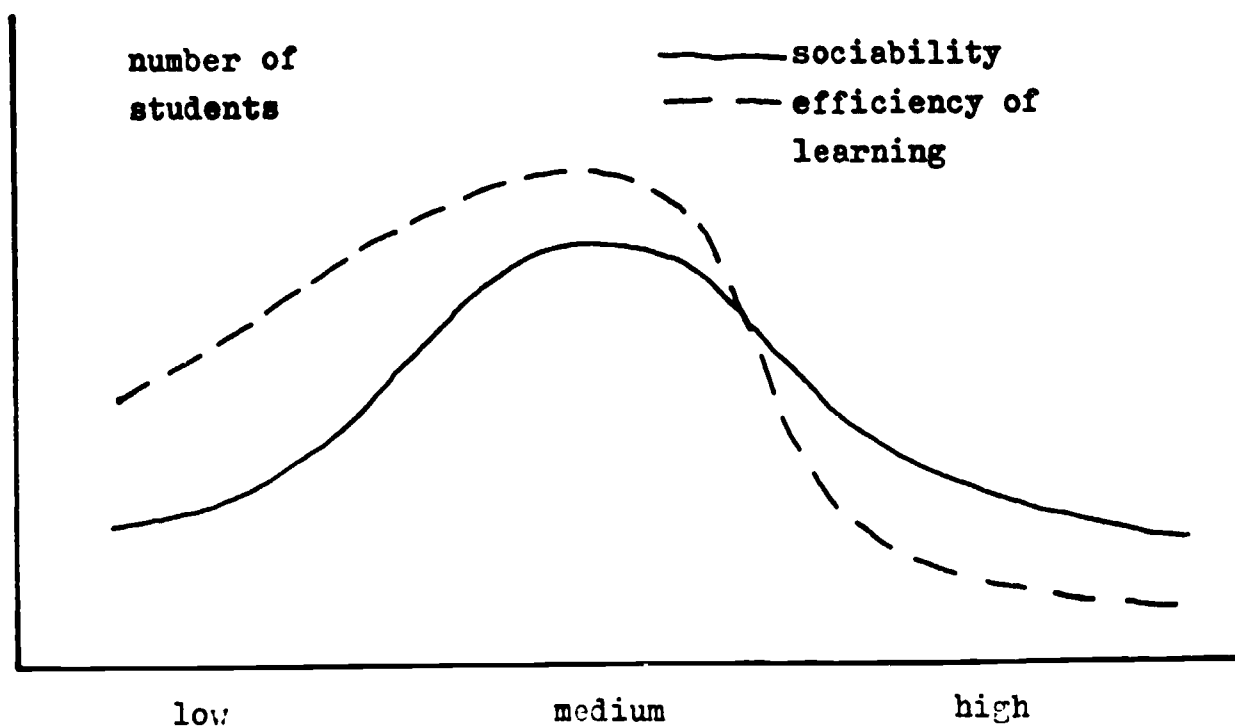
18) The schematic presentation of sociability and
efficiency of learning in distance education is based
on the findings of the study by A. Krajnc: `Types of
learners and independent learning` and the study
`Educational biographies`, by the same author

The behaviour and reactions of people with low sociability
are somewhat different from their expectations. In cases of
extremely low sociability the problems start soon after
they start learning.

The participants with fairly satisfactory social relations
and contacts enjoy the benefit of individualized learning
in distance education longer and are efficient enough to
get the necessary reward from their own progress in
learning. This category of people are not "lonely" or
asocial; their individual needs are well-expressed, but
they are too shy to protect them in public, in
confrontation with other participants of a social group.
When entering social relations, they prefer pairs or
triads, but are less ready to enter larger social groups.
They tend to have close social relations, generally
avoiding superficial contacts.

Sometimes they develop and even depend on symbiotic social
relations, in which they satisfy most of their social needs
(social security, belonging to a social group, self-
confirmation). Generally they manage to maintain a
satisfactory social life.

Subjects with extremely high demand for sociability usually
discover soon that distance education is not the adequate
way of learning for them. They do not feel well if they are
not in constant social interaction. The lack of social
contacts and social relations gives rise to a feeling of
deprivation. It is more important for them to be among
people (in a learning group, face-to-face consultation
etc.) than it is to have an objective possibility to learn

something new individually in an organised way. Many of
their social relations, which they keep establishing, soon
die off so that new social contacts must be introduced as a
substitute. High sociability is their mode of living and is
repeated in all the social situations and activities these
subjects carry through. Educational activities are no
exception. Learning in educational groups and with a tutor
is for them more suitable than distance education.

There is also a correlation between the degree of
sociability and extrovert/introvert characteristics in
distance learners. The subjects with an introvert
inclination, whom we call "observers", show a relatively
passive attitude towards other people. They stand aside and
watch from a distance, but they feel happier if they do not
have to interact directly with social groups or other
individuals. In many respects they are withdrawn from
social reality, although they profit from it. Their
attitudes show that they feel comfortable in distance
education. When their sociability is high enough, it finds
an indirect expression in their personal interests. Various
means and materials are applied for indirect communication,
but in principle these people tend to do everything by
themselves.

In extrovert learners self-confirmation requires contacts with others. Personal progress in learning is perceived as success only if it is reflected in other people's opinion, their reactions and behaviour toward the learner. All the basic patterns of behaviour of extrovert learners are oriented towards other people. They constantly seek social contacts and social relations and in this sense they behave as dependents. They never feel comfortable if they do not exercise social contacts, without which they think life is impossible.

For the above described sub-group of learners it is impossible to compensate elsewhere for the lack of social contacts in distance education as their life style dictates functioning "in front of others" or in "relation to others". An activity becomes for them meaningful only when other people react to it or, at least, notice it. A great deal of energy of extrovert subjects is devoted to social relations. They never seem to have enough social contacts and therefore are not able to compensate for learning in social isolation elsewhere (among friends, in family, at work, or in public life generally). They do not belong to the efficient group of distance learners, or rather, they are efficient only for a relatively short time.

S U M M A R Y

In the last decade distance education has gained in
Slovenia in importance. One reason is that the formal
school system became much more repressive and selective
after the educational reform (1976 - 1981) than it had
been. On the one hand it excluded far greater numbers of
potential students than the previous school system did, on
the other hand the repressive patterns of regular education
became unacceptable to many potential students. For both
reasons and also because of the pressure of the economic
crisis, the younger generation, their parents and adults
looked for alternative solutions, other possibilities to
obtain the necessary education. Distance education appeared
to be one of them.

Education basically represents a social relationship and
depends on communication among people, especially in its
intensive form of face-to-face education. In several
studies by a number of authors (S. Pongrac, M. Matijewic,
M. Novak, M. Span, Z. Jelenc), on which we rely for the
conclusions presented in this paper, a variety of distance
education models for various educational levels, practised
in small groups were observed. The results are not directly
comparable, but they lead to several basic findings and
show several trends. From a methodological point of view we
are aware that there are limitations in the degree to which
the findings can be generalised, given distance education
is a very complex process and greatly depends on macro- and
micro-social, cultural and economic variables. Therefore
some of the relations among the variables might be
different in different socio-cultural environments. In a
few cases the relations between the variables were studied
on the basis of practical observations of independent
learning and through educational biographies, the aim of
which was to study efficiency of individual informal

methods of learning. Our research into distance education
must be seen as a mosaic of relatively small samples (20 to
50 respondents), which allow us to take into account all
the special conditions and differences. This is true
especially of the studies examining social, psychological
and educational variables. The studies of the general
organisation of distance education should, on the contrary,
be based on larger samples (S. Pongrac).

An additional remark concerning the methodology should be
made in connection with the instruments employed.
Questionnaires and individual in-depth interviews were the
most frequently used tools. The studies remained on the
attitudinal level, even though data were collected about
the social relations and psychological characteristics.
Several independent variables (level of education, age,
sex, subjects, duration of studies, number of examinations
or other forms of evaluation of knowledge) were examined on
the basis of quantitative data and secondary analyses of
available materials.

The relation between social isolation and efficiency in distance education was observed through the following three sets of variables:

- two different concepts of education and learners`
  perception of
  social isolation

- types, quality and quantity of social relations and
  impact of social isolation on distance education

- individual psychological characteristics in relation to
  the impact of social isolation on the effectiveness of
  distance education.

The basic approach of the learners to education, their understanding of the concept of education, can predetermine their expectations. On the one hand there are learners who believe that "they must be taught, and that the lecturer must take the responsibility for it", on the other hand we come across a concept according to which "the educator only guides and coordinates the learner`s activities and helps him to learn by himself". The learners adhering to the first (conservative) concept of education are more likely to feel deprived of social relations if they study at a distance and vice versa. If the learners have confidence in themselves and believe that they can get at the neccessary knowledge by themselves, then they function effectively learning even in social isolation, where they receive help in various forms "from a distance".

How much the social contacts and face-to-face experience are missed in distance education to a certain extent also depends on the overall situation of a learner, i.e. his connectedness with other social groups to which he belongs and with his general social environment. The learners who

are not effective in family social relations, at work and
with friends, are even more sensitive to the social
relations in education, when they have to learn in
isolation for a considerable length of time. Social
isolation in the process of distance education can be
compensated for by satisfactory social relations elsewhere.
The complementary function of social relations which help
to satisfy the basic personal social needs is evident.

The individual psychological characteristics of learners
and their influence on the relation between social
isolation and the effectiveness of distance education were
the third set of variables studied. Self-confidence, types
of motivation for education, independence in learning and
independence in other life situations, sociability,
introvert/extrovert tendencies and adaptability were
observed.

To sum up, learners with low self-confidence appreciate
education in social isolation, because being confronted
with an educational group is a great additional burden and
demand on these learners. The primary motivation permits
learners to find their own means and combinations in the
learning process and always gives them new neccessary
energy for more learning even when they learn in isolation.
Secondary motives on the other hand (better income, better
conditions for work, competition with other people etc.)
function negatively in education in social isolation.

Dependency in learning is closely connected with dependency
in other activities in every day life. Low independency
asks for more person-to-person help, and learners quickly
feel deprived of the necessary help from others (lecturers,
teachers, tutors). They do not feel comfortable if they
have to make decisions by themselves in the process of
learning. Sociability can correct this tension to

a certain extent and can delay the onset of poor
examination results, withdrawal from examinations and the
drop out stage. Both extreme subgroups of learners (those
with extremely low sociability and those with extremely
high sociability) do not function favourably in distance
education in social isolation. In both groups the results
are relatively poor. The first subgroup does not have any
chance to compensate for social contacts in other life
situations because they are too rare. For the second group
social relations and frequent social contacts represent the
basic style of life; therefore they cannot do without them
in any segment of their life including adult education.

Adaptability and rigidity on the other hand dit not prove
to exert any important impact on the relationship between
isolation and effectiveness of distance education. A higher
level of adaptability of particular persons evidenced in
their educational biographies appeared to act in support of
the changed situation and social environment; it also
helped to change their study method more quickly and with
less reported trouble. But apart from that, the category of
adaptability in our studies was too broad to allow us to
define its role in the educational process, although it is
likely to be a constituent part.

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