**Introduction**

**Distance education** or **distance learning** is a field of education that focuses on teaching methods and technology with the aim of delivering teaching, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting such as a classroom. It has been described as "a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both."

Distance education dates to at least as early as 1728, when "an advertisement in the Boston Gazette, 'Caleb Phillips, Teacher of the new method of Short Hand" was seeking students for lessons to be sent weekly.

Modern distance education initially relied on the development of postal services in the 19th century and has been practiced at least since Isaac Pitman taught shorthand in Great Britain via correspondence in the 1840s.

The history of Distance Education in India is not very old. It is a post-independence phenomenon. The Education Commission of (1964-66) pointed out that, "the present system of education will need radical changes if it is to meet the purpose of modern democratic and socialist changes in objectives. Besides, the knowledge explosion and the consequent demand for acquiring new skills and knowledge is placing pressure on the educational system to accommodate more and more." The non-formal, correspondence / distance education or open learning was, therefore, thought of as a viable alternative.

**Management education in India**

Management education in India has grown phenomenally, both in terms of institutions imparting such education as well as number of students taking such course. The number of institutions offering management programmes in the country has increased from 4 in 1960 to about 1500 in 2011. In future, this trend is likely to be continued because of various reasons like:

1. Growth in Industrial activities along with increased shift of industries to be "manager-oriented". The manager-workers ratio is already high in high
tech industries as well as it is also increasing in some of the old technologies.

2. The technological challenges has shifted the emphasis in executive requirement, from only experience to qualification and training.

The above factors has created more and better prospects for people having management qualifications. The degree and diploma holders in ‘management’ stream are getting better career opportunities along with fairly high pay packages from the start of their career.

With this background, the educational policy makers have formulated the future strategy. The objectives of such strategy are:

1. To broaden the concept of management education and to recognize the need for management education by taking care of ‘functional’ and ‘level specific approaches’.

2. To increase the avenues of higher quality management education through the use of reputed institutions active in distance mode of learning.

Going for management education is always beneficial and continuing it after joining job is an added advantage. But continuing education through traditional campus method can be a really difficult task because you will have to attend regular classes which would be impossible when you are working. This is where Distance Learning management programs comes into picture. These courses are largely promoted these days because they are really advantageous.

Distance Learning management education provides the benefit of continuing education without attending regular classes. Such courses provide flexibility in time, pace and location which means you can continue with your education at any time, at your own pace and at the convenience of your home. A management qualification on a employee’s resume will prove to be an added advantage and salary will rise like a skyrocket.

Distance Learning management programs provide education in two ways: 1) scheduled classes, and 2) learn-as-you-go. In scheduled classes method a student meets online through chatroom, newsgroup or online messaging services on a specified day at a particular time. This method allows interacting with the teacher
and other students and thus, providing a traditional classroom feeling. In learn-as-you-go method provides the freedom and convenience of studying according to a person’s schedule.

In a globalised society like that of today, the need for quality based management education has been on a constant rise. As companies become more competitive in a changing world scenario and new fields emerge, the demand for professionally qualified managers and technocrats become even more important for a developing country like India where government policies are aimed at attracting more and more corporates to set up their ventures to meet the ever increasing demands of the vast population of the country. However, it is really not very encouraging that higher education has been able to reach only 19% of our population. Whether we blame this low percentage of percolation of higher education due to family obligations or other external factors, the bare minimal figures inflict much pain since more than half of India’s population is based in the age group of 18-35 years who are in need of professional qualifications so that they are easily accepted by industry and business. In this context, Distance Education has been able to come to rescue and bridge much of the gap in reaching out to the population not touched by the institutions engaged in regular mode of education.

Distance learning education is profoundly different from conventional class room education. This form of education has grown in stature in the past few years, leading to a large number of distance or open universities being set up in different parts of the country.

One of the most important factors that attract more number of distance learners is that the distance courses are self-paced and more flexible with time schedules convenient to the learner. A student can plan how to progress his or her study. Daily activities can be arranged in a way as to complete the program quickly or at a pace convenient to the student. The advantage of opting distance learning is that it also permits students to simply do the assignments in their free time and send them to the concerned university or institution. They do not need to travel a distant place where the distance education university or institute is located.

Distance Education Council (DEC), Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India oversees and regulates the growth of distance learning system in India. It was established under
the Indira Gandhi Open University Act, 1985. At present, it is operating from the campus of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and it is headed by the Vice-Chancellor of IGNOU. In Future, DEC will be a more powerful and dynamic statutory body and, as a result, distance education system will also become more vibrant.

Large number of Open Universities have started providing education through distance mode in variety of subjects. Despite these large number of such Universities and Institutions, there may still be need to open such more Universities and Institutions to provide quality management education to vast number of those who cannot either afford regular education or those who are working professionals aspiring to acquire higher professional qualifications to rise in their career. As distance education continues to grow better and stronger, future technologies will seamlessly integrate distance and education making the whole process even better and easier. With new era of greater importance and acceptance of education, nations are realizing its significance in driving out illiteracy and arming future generations with the required professional expertise to improve infrastructural, industrial and business environment and generate greater wealth for them. With the mission of imparting education to one and all without any barriers, we are now looking to a future of well-informed and well-trained professionals who can take on the mantle for a brighter tomorrow and make the world better informed and happier place to live with the spread of education.

Scope and Limitations :-

Scope of research project :- This research project shall cover in-depth study of various Major Open Universities as well as leading Indian institutes offering Management Education through Distance Learning mode.

Limitations of subject research project :- The Research work shall be done primarily for Open Universities or Institutes of India, who are providing Management Education and shall not cover Universities or Institutes offering Distance Education in other streams like Computer, Arts, Science etc. However, while studying growth of Distance Education sector in India, their due reference will be made.
Utility of the research project :-

This research project is designed to be a lifeline for practitioners, researchers, and analysts and others who are just starting to look at Distance Education methodology and understand its efficacy. So that, this audience can avoid drowning in the sea of Distance Learning research. This research project shall try to modulate the din surrounding the field, exploring some of the key issues that occupy those who are committed to exploring how Distance mode of learning can best be used for management education.