



Dropshipping As A Pedagogical Tool For Entrepreneurship Education: A Live Case Study From An Indian B-School

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Abstract

This paper presents a live case study of an experiential entrepreneurship education initiative implemented at a business school in North India, wherein MBA students were assigned to conceptualise, launch, and operate real inventory-less e-commerce ventures using the dropshipping business model. The programme sought to bridge the persistent gap between classroom-based management education and the hands-on competencies demanded by the modern digital economy. The initiative engaged MBA students across two cohorts—first-year and second-year—who worked in cross-functional teams to conduct market research, identify suppliers, build live e-commerce websites, execute digital marketing campaigns, manage customer acquisition, and track financial performance. One team successfully surpassed the defined revenue milestone of INR 25,000, generating INR 34,000 in sales and qualifying for the institutional entrepreneurship finale. The paper documents the programme's design, phased implementation, outcomes, challenges, and key learnings. It contributes to the growing body of literature on experiential learning in business education and argues that inventory-less e-commerce models are uniquely suited as pedagogical tools for entrepreneurship education in resource-constrained environments such as Indian B-Schools.

Keywords: dropshipping, entrepreneurship education, experiential learning, e-commerce, MBA pedagogy, digital marketing, inventory-less business model, Indian B-Schools

Management education in India stands at an inflection point. The proliferation of MBA programmes, coupled with rapid digitisation of commerce, has created a demand for graduates who are not merely theoretically competent but entrepreneurially capable—individuals who can identify market opportunities, build digital ventures, manage uncertainty, and create value under resource constraints. Yet, most Indian business schools continue to rely heavily on lecture-based instruction, case analysis of established companies, and simulated business games that rarely approximate the complexity of real-world entrepreneurship.

This gap between pedagogy and practice has been widely acknowledged in management education literature. Experiential learning theorists have long argued that learning is most effective when students are engaged in concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Despite this consensus, the practical challenge of embedding live

entrepreneurial experiences within formal MBA curricula—particularly in resource-limited institutional settings—has remained largely unresolved.

It is against this backdrop that the Dropshipping Programme documented in this paper was conceived and implemented. The initiative places MBA students at the helm of real, operational e-commerce businesses. Dropshipping, as a business model, requires no physical inventory: entrepreneurs list and sell products online, with orders fulfilled directly by third-party suppliers. The model eliminates the capital barrier typically associated with product-based entrepreneurship, making it uniquely accessible for students operating with minimal financial resources.

This paper documents the design, implementation, and outcomes of the initiative across two academic cohorts and three operational phases, offering insights for institutions seeking to embed authentic entrepreneurial experience within their management programmes. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: Can inventory-less e-commerce—specifically dropshipping—serve as an effective and scalable pedagogical vehicle for entrepreneurship education in Indian B-Schools?

Literature Review

Experiential Learning and Entrepreneurship Education

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides the foundational framework for understanding how direct experience facilitates the development of competencies. ELT posits a four-stage cycle—concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation—through which learners develop knowledge and skills that cannot be acquired through didactic instruction alone. Entrepreneurship, with its inherent emphasis on action, iteration, and real-world problem-solving, is widely regarded as an ideal domain for experiential pedagogy.

Neck and Greene (2011) proposed a practice-based approach to entrepreneurship education that moves beyond the traditional content-centred model. They argued that entrepreneurship education should focus on developing a 'practice'—a way of thinking and acting—rather than merely transferring knowledge about entrepreneurship. This perspective is reflected in the initiative described in this paper, where students were not taught about dropshipping as a concept but were required to execute it as a live business practice.

Fayolle and Gailly (2008) identified entrepreneurial intent, self-efficacy, and attitude toward entrepreneurship as key outcomes of well-designed entrepreneurship education programmes. The live execution context of the programme—involving real customers, real revenue, and real supply chain management—is designed precisely to build these outcomes. The shift from simulation to live business operation is consistent with what Pittaway and Cope (2007) identified as the distinguishing feature of high-impact entrepreneurship pedagogy: consequential action under uncertainty.

Dropshipping as a Business Model

Dropshipping is a retail fulfilment method in which a merchant accepts customer orders but does not maintain physical inventory. Instead, upon receiving an order, the merchant purchases the product from a third-party supplier, who ships it directly to the customer. The merchant's margin is the difference between the retail price and the supplier's cost. The model has gained significant traction globally, particularly with the growth of platforms such as Shopify, WooCommerce, and supplier networks such as AliExpress and Roposo in India.

The key advantages of dropshipping for student entrepreneurs include zero or minimal inventory investment, low startup capital requirements, flexibility in product selection, and the ability to test multiple market niches without financial risk. The primary challenges include supplier dependency, low profit margins, difficulty in building brand trust, and intense competition in popular product categories. These characteristics make dropshipping a rich pedagogical context—one that exposes students to real business challenges without catastrophic financial consequences (Brear & Barnes, 2008).

E-Commerce Education in Indian B-Schools

Despite India's status as one of the world's fastest-growing e-commerce markets—with the sector projected to reach USD 350 billion by 2030 (NASSCOM, 2023)—the integration of e-commerce entrepreneurship into MBA curricula remains nascent. Most programmes offer elective courses on digital marketing or e-business strategy, but few embed live e-commerce operations within their core learning architecture. The initiative described in this paper represents an early and documented example of this integration in the Indian B-School context, addressing what Mitra and Manimala (2021) identified as a systemic underinvestment in applied entrepreneurship education in Indian management institutions.

Programme Design and Methodology **Conceptualisation and Leadership**

The Dropshipping Programme was ideated by the Dean of Training and Development at the participating institution, with the central objective of creating a structured pathway for MBA students to experience inventory-less entrepreneurship in a live, supported environment. The programme was designed to operate as a hybrid initiative—combining online mentorship, offline workshops, and fully independent business operations—thereby mirroring the realities of modern digital entrepreneurship.

The programme was developed and implemented by a core faculty team led by a designated team lead, with additional faculty mentors supporting daily operations. Academic oversight was provided by the institution's Director. Lead mentorship was provided by an industry practitioner with expertise in building scalable dropshipping brands, whose real-world strategic guidance complemented the academic framework provided by the faculty team.

Participant Structure

The programme engaged 100 MBA students divided into 10 teams of 10 members each. Five teams were assigned to build product-based (dropshipping) start-ups, while five teams were directed toward service-based entrepreneurship, enabling a comparative study of business model challenges and outcomes. The programme was designed for both first-year and second-year MBA cohorts, with differentiated timelines and learning objectives for each (see Table 1).

Research Design

This paper adopts a qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2014), drawing on programme documentation, milestone reports, team performance data, and participant observations collected across three operational phases. The case study approach is appropriate given the exploratory and contextually embedded nature of the inquiry. Data triangulation was achieved through multiple sources: structured milestone reports, website analytics, financial performance records, team status reports, and direct observation of student presentations.

The programme documentation included formal milestone reviews at each phase transition, mentor session notes, and a structured Phase III progress report capturing team-level outcomes, challenges, and recommended interventions. Participant observation was conducted by the faculty team across all phases, with the programme ideator maintaining a reflective practice log throughout the initiative.

Programme Implementation

Phase I: Foundation and Market Research (October–December 2025)

The programme commenced with an inaugural session that brought together faculty, students, and industry experts for a structured introduction to the dropshipping model. A fireside chat between the industry lead mentor and the programme's Dean addressed practical challenges and growth strategies in e-commerce entrepreneurship, setting the tone for the programme's action-orientation.

Team formation was conducted through an online session facilitated by the lead mentor, during which teams were established, market categories were assigned, and initial goal-setting exercises were undertaken. This phase culminated in teams conducting both primary research—surveys, peer interactions, and social media polls—and secondary research through trend analysis on e-commerce platforms to identify high-demand, low-competition product niches.

A significant field activity during this phase was the participation of student teams in the India International Trade Fair 2025 at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. This exposure enabled teams to interact directly with manufacturers, assess product quality, and identify potential domestic suppliers—a critical step in supplier identification and business planning that no classroom simulation could have provided.

Phase II: Store Setup, Product Launch, and Operations (January–April 2026)

Phase II marked the transition from planning to execution. Teams completed the following operational milestones: registration and setup of live e-commerce stores on Shopify and independent domain-based websites, payment gateway integration, product listing and catalogue creation, and the launch of initial Meta advertising campaigns on Facebook and Instagram.

Marketing efforts were extended beyond paid digital advertising to personal networks, peer ecosystems, and organic social media channels, enabling teams to generate initial traction and validate early-stage demand. Supply chain operations were managed primarily through the Roposo platform, which served as the primary product sourcing and supplier network.

A key milestone in this phase was the definition of a revenue benchmark of INR 25,000 as the qualifier for participation in the institutional entrepreneurship finale—Pitchstrong. This benchmark served both as a performance incentive and as a tangible measure of market validation, replicating the role that investor milestones play in actual startup ecosystems.

Phase III: Scaling, Validation, and Investor Readiness (February 2026–Present)

Phase III focused on performance review, analytical capability building, and preparation for the Pitchstrong Finale. Teams were required to demonstrate not only revenue generation but also strategic clarity, including the development of a Lean Canvas Model, financial forecasts covering revenue, cost, and profitability projections, and a defined fund utilisation strategy.

This phase was also characterised by a significant operational challenge: the discontinuation of services by the supplier platform Roposo disrupted the backend operations of two teams, rendering

their websites non-operational. This real-world disruption, while challenging, provided students with an authentic experience of supply chain risk—a learning outcome that no simulation could replicate. The incident became an in-programme case study in business continuity planning and vendor risk management.

Outcomes and Findings

Team Performance Overview

Table 2 presents the current performance status of the six dropshipping teams as documented in the Phase III progress report. The data reflects revenue generated, operational status, and qualification for the institutional entrepreneurship finale.

Team 1D—operating under the brand name Joshify—stands out as the programme's early success story. By strategically combining a high-demand consumable product (dry fruits) with a differentiated offering (customised gift products), the team achieved INR 34,000 in revenue, surpassing the INR 25,000 milestone and qualifying for the Pitchstrong Finale. This outcome demonstrates the viability of student-run dropshipping ventures as genuine market participants, not merely educational simulations. The remaining teams continued operations with varying levels of market traction, each navigating distinct challenges related to product selection, digital marketing conversion, and supplier management.

Key Learning Outcomes

Across all teams and phases, four dominant areas of competency development were observed through faculty observation records and milestone documentation.

Supply chain risk management.

Students directly experienced the consequences of over-dependence on a single supplier platform when Roposo discontinued its services. This forced teams to evaluate alternative suppliers, renegotiate terms, and develop resilient operational strategies—competencies that are difficult to develop through classroom instruction alone.

Strategic agility.

Teams that succeeded were those able to interpret market feedback rapidly and adapt their product offerings and messaging accordingly. The iterative, real-time nature of the learning environment accelerated the development of strategic agility that mirrors the lean startup methodology.

Digital marketing analytics.

Running live Meta advertising campaigns and measuring conversion rates gave students direct exposure to customer journey analytics, cost-per-click optimisation, and the gap between traffic generation and actual sales conversion—a distinction rarely made visible in classroom-based marketing instruction.

Financial planning under constraint.

Managing platform subscription costs, advertising budgets, and supplier payments within the constraints of limited student resources developed practical financial literacy that is qualitatively different from case-study-based financial analysis.

Challenges Encountered

The programme encountered several substantive challenges worth documenting both for their pedagogical value and for the benefit of institutions seeking to replicate this model. First, Shopify's subscription and operational costs created financial pressure for early-stage student ventures operating with limited capital, highlighting the importance of platform selection in resource-constrained entrepreneurship. Second, despite successfully driving traffic through digital advertising, several teams experienced low conversion rates, exposing the gap between marketing capability and sales execution. Third, new, unbranded stores faced significant challenges in building first-buyer trust, particularly in competitive product categories. Fourth, the discontinuation of the Roposo platform mid-programme disrupted two teams' operations entirely, underscoring the critical importance of supplier diversification. Fifth, several teams needed to pivot their product offerings after observing weak market engagement—an iterative process that, while disorienting for students, mirrors the authentic experience of early-stage entrepreneurship.

Discussion

The programme offers several insights for the broader discourse on entrepreneurship education in Indian B-Schools. First, it demonstrates that the inventory-less e-commerce model is well-suited to the resource constraints of student entrepreneurship. The absence of inventory investment eliminates the primary financial barrier to product-based startup experience, enabling students to focus on the genuinely challenging aspects of entrepreneurship: market research, customer acquisition, branding, and financial management.

Second, the programme illustrates the pedagogical value of real failure. The disruption caused by Roposo's service discontinuation, the low conversion rates experienced by multiple teams, and the product-market fit challenges encountered by others are not programme failures—they are the programme's most valuable outcomes. These experiences expose students to the authentic texture of entrepreneurship in ways that no simulation or case study can replicate. This finding is consistent with Cope's (2011) argument that entrepreneurial learning is most intense in moments of crisis and discontinuity.

Third, the programme highlights the importance of mentor-faculty collaboration in experiential learning design. The involvement of an industry practitioner as lead mentor—an experienced e-commerce entrepreneur—provided students with industry-calibrated guidance that complemented the academic framework provided by the faculty team. This hybrid mentorship model echoes the 'pracademic' framework advocated by Schultz et al. (2013), which emphasises the value of bridging practitioner insight with academic scaffolding.

Fourth, the programme raises important questions about institutional support structures for student entrepreneurship. The transition of successful teams from programme participants to independent business operators requires institutional mechanisms for legal compliance support, financial autonomy, and ongoing mentorship. The programme's documented Way Forward plan addresses these needs explicitly, recommending direct financial management by teams and encouraging continued operation beyond the programme's formal timeline.

From a comparative pedagogy perspective, the programme's design aligns closely with the framework proposed by Kuratko (2005), who identified action-based learning, mentorship, and real resource management as the three pillars of effective entrepreneurship education. All three are embedded in this model, suggesting that the programme architecture is theoretically grounded as well as practically effective. The revenue generation achieved by Team Joshify—within a formal academic

programme and without prior entrepreneurial experience—provides empirical support for the efficacy of this approach.

Conclusion

This paper has documented the design, implementation, and outcomes of a live, experiential entrepreneurship initiative that positions inventory-less e-commerce as a pedagogical vehicle for building entrepreneurial competence among MBA students. The programme's core contribution to entrepreneurship education is its insistence on authenticity: real markets, real customers, real revenue, and real failure. In an educational landscape where entrepreneurship is often taught through the safe remove of case studies and simulations, this initiative offers a compelling alternative—one that treats students as actual entrepreneurs rather than aspirant ones.

The success of one team in generating INR 34,000 in revenue and qualifying for the institutional entrepreneurship finale demonstrates that student-run dropshipping ventures can achieve genuine market traction within a formal academic programme. The challenges encountered by other teams are equally instructive, documenting the real barriers to digital entrepreneurship in the Indian context and equipping students with the adaptive capacity to overcome them.

For future iterations of the programme, several enhancements are recommended. Supplier diversification should be institutionalised from the outset, with teams required to identify and qualify multiple suppliers before launch. Platform cost management should be addressed through institutional negotiation with platforms or through the prioritisation of lower-cost alternatives. A structured customer trust-building module—covering brand design, social proof, and review generation—should be incorporated into Phase II. Finally, a formal transition pathway for successful teams—encompassing legal registration support, continued mentorship, and alumni network integration—would strengthen the programme's long-term entrepreneurial impact.

This initiative represents an innovative, replicable, and theoretically grounded model for entrepreneurship education that is particularly well-suited to the Indian B-School context. Future research should expand upon this single-institution case study through multi-institution comparative studies, quantitative measurement of entrepreneurial intent pre- and post-programme, and longitudinal tracking of student entrepreneurs who continue their ventures beyond the programme timeline. Such research would strengthen the evidentiary base for experiential e-commerce pedagogy as a mainstream tool in management education.

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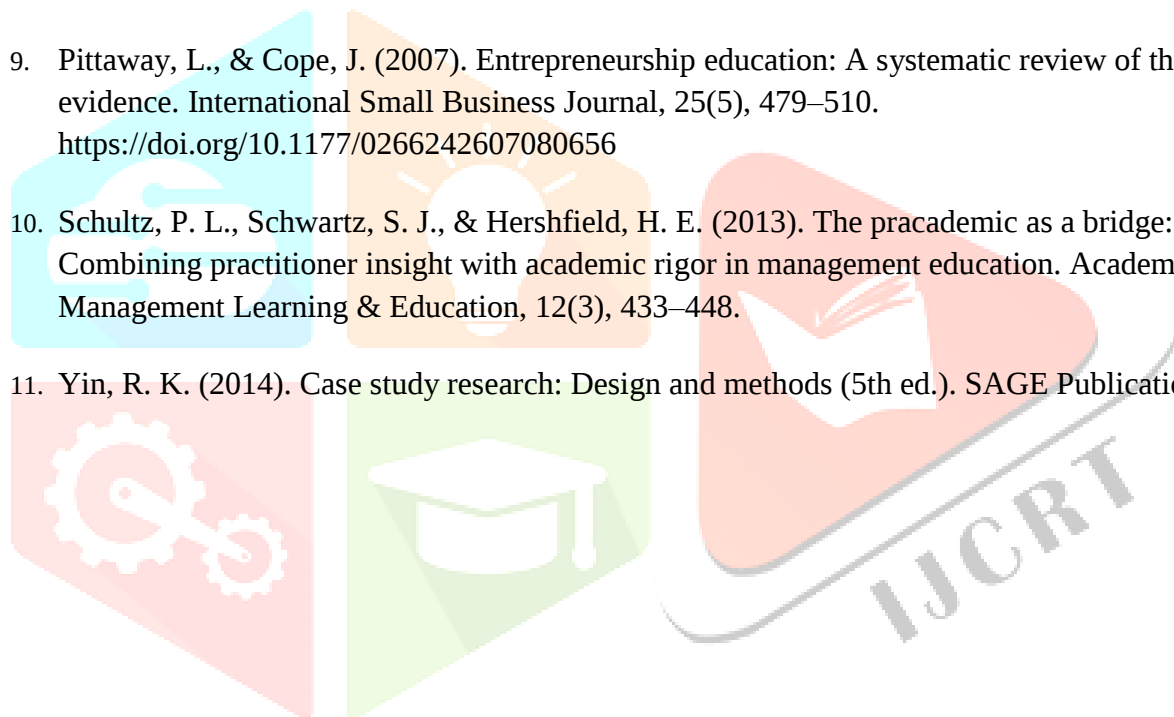


Table 1 Programme Structure by Student Cohort

Parameter	MBA 1st Year	MBA 2nd Year
Programme duration	12 months	5 months (pilot)
Number of phases	6 phases	3 phases
Timeline	October 2025–September 2026	October 2025–April 2026
Primary focus	Full entrepreneurship cycle	High-impact pilot execution
Team structure	10 teams of 10 students each	Selected student teams

Note. Cohort structure was designed to allow differentiated learning objectives and timelines for first-year and second-year MBA students.

Table 2 Dropshipping Team Performance Overview — Phase III

Team	Brand Name	Product Focus	Revenue (INR)	Status
1A	Tradegen	—	In Progress	Operational
1B	Purnasa	—	In Progress	Operational
1C	Pixfold / Decorify	Home decor and gifts	In Progress	Operational
1D	Joshify	Dry fruits and customised products	34,000	Milestone Achieved — Qualified for Pitchstrong
2A	—	—	In Progress	Operational
2B	—	—	In Progress	Operational

Note. Revenue milestone for Pitchstrong qualification was set at INR 25,000. Team 1D (Joshify) is the only team to have met this threshold at the time of writing.