Archives available at journals.mriindia.com

International Journal of Recent Advances in Engineering and Technology

ISSN: 2347 - 2812

Volume 14 Issue 03s, 2025

CampusCravings: A Scalable Full-Stack Framework for Automating Institutional Canteens

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Peer Review Information

Submission: 05 Nov 2025

Revision: 25 Nov 2025

Acceptance: 17 Dec 2025

Keywords

Canteen management, food ordering system, web application, React, PHP, MySQL, digital automation.

Abstract

In the fast-paced environment of educational institutions, traditional canteen operations often lead to inefficiencies such as long queues, order errors, and manual record-keeping challenges. To address these issues, we present CampusCravings, a web-based platform that automates food ordering and management. The system is hosted locally via XAMPP and employs PHP for the backend, MySQL for data storage, and React for an interactive interface.
It gives administrators safe controls for order processing and menu modifications while enabling easy menu viewing without requiring user registration. With modular components that guarantee flexibility to different canteen sizes, the platform prioritizes efficiency, scalability, and simplicity.
It has a comprehensive design, implementation guidelines, and evaluation processes that were all created with reproducibility in mind. The evaluation approach suggests potential improvements in wait times, error reduction, and user satisfaction. In addition to technical contributions,
CampusCravings aims to modernize institutional services, reduce operational burdens, and support future expansions like mobile integration and payment gateways.

Introduction

Canteen services form an essential part of daily life in educational institutions. Yet, most systems still depend on manual methods—staff take orders on paper, count cash, and shout instructions to the kitchen. During lunch hours, long lines build up. Students wait 10–15 minutes just to place an order. One wrong item or missed quantity creates confusion, delays, and frustration.
CampusCravings is a web-based system built to solve these problems. It allows users to view the menu and place orders directly from their phones or laptops—no login, no app download. On the other side, canteen managers get a secure panel to update items, see live orders, and track sales.
The platform uses React to create a clean, fast interface that works on any screen. PHP handles all backend tasks like saving orders and checking stock. MySQL stores menu details, order history, and daily totals. Everything runs locally on XAMPP, so setup takes minutes.
This shift from paper to digital brings clear gains. Wait times drop. Errors fall. Staff spend less time writing and more time serving. Digital records

replace guesswork—managers can see what sells most and plan better.

While banks and shops have gone digital, many college canteens have not. CampusCravings changes that. It is simple to use, easy to manage, and ready to grow—whether adding online payments or a mobile app later.

Literature survey

Efforts to improve canteen operations through digital means have been explored in several studies over the past few years. These works focus on reducing manual effort, speeding up service, and introducing automation in institutional food systems.

In 2019, Chavan et al. [1] developed a mobile-based ordering system with an integrated e-wallet. The application allowed users to place orders and make payments directly from their smartphones, eliminating cash handling and reducing transaction time. However, the solution was limited to mobile devices and lacked a dedicated administrative interface for menu management and order tracking.

Poojary et al. [2] in 2023 proposed an automated canteen management system that supported dynamic menu updates and real-time order monitoring. Their design demonstrated how web technologies could streamline operations and adapt to changing demand. Despite these advantages, the system did not offer features for future scalability such as payment integration or cross-platform access.

Rahate et al. [3] combined RFID technology with a web-based e-wallet in 2020 to enhance security and speed in payment processing. The use of physical tokens ensured accurate user identification and reduced fraud. While effective in controlled environments, the reliance on hardware increased deployment complexity and cost, making it less suitable for institutions with limited infrastructure.

A study published in 2020 [4] introduced a canteen automation framework that incorporated online ordering, UPI payments, and basic machine learning for demand prediction. This approach addressed both service speed and inventory planning. However, the system required user registration and did not include a full administrative dashboard, limiting its operational oversight capabilities.

Another work from 2020 [5] focused on wireless communication for order transmission in food service settings. The design minimized human intervention by sending orders directly from customer devices to kitchen displays. Although successful in reducing errors, the solution was primarily tailored to restaurant environments and lacked features specific to campus canteens.

These contributions collectively advanced different aspects of canteen automation—faster payments, reduced queues, and better record-keeping. Yet, none provided a complete, registration-free, web-based platform that integrates seamless customer access with robust administrative control. CampusCravings builds upon these foundations by offering an open, software-only solution that requires no user signup, supports dual user-admin functionality, and is designed for easy adaptation and extension in institutional settings.

Problem Statement

Manual canteen operations in educational institutions suffer from several critical limitations. During peak service hours, customers must wait in extended queues to place orders, leading to significant delays and reduced satisfaction. Staff members, managing orders through handwritten notes and cash transactions, frequently encounter errors in item selection, quantity recording, and payment processing. These inaccuracies not only prolong service time but also contribute to operational confusion and customer complaints.

A major deficiency lies in the absence of systematic record-keeping. Without digital tools, tracking daily sales, identifying high-demand items, or monitoring inventory levels becomes impractical. Managers rely on estimation rather than data, resulting in poor planning and potential revenue loss.

Furthermore, contemporary users expect convenient access to services. The lack of a digital interface prevents customers from viewing menus or submitting orders remotely, forcing physical presence at the counter. This rigid process conflicts with modern expectations for efficiency and flexibility.

There is a pressing need for a web-based platform that automates food ordering, eliminates manual errors, and provides centralized management. Such a system would accelerate service delivery, improve accuracy, and enable data-driven decision-making, thereby transforming traditional canteen operations into a streamlined, user-focused service model.

System Architecture

The system architecture of **CampusCravings** is structured as a modular full-stack web application to support scalability, low latency, and compatibility across devices. The design incorporates three core layers—frontend, backend, and database—along with configuration elements for integration and security. This layered approach ensures efficient

data flow and maintainability, as illustrated in the accompanying diagrams.

Frontend Layer
The frontend is constructed using **React**, a JavaScript library that facilitates the development of interactive and responsive user interfaces. This layer manages key functionalities, including menu rendering, order selection, and confirmation notifications. The component-based structure allows for independent updates, such as adding new menu items, without disrupting overall operation. Communication with the backend occurs through API requests, enabling dynamic data retrieval and real-time updates.

Backend Layer
Server-side processing is implemented in **PHP**, which oversees request handling, data validation, and core business logic. This layer supports operations like order submission, menu modifications, and access control. Authentication mechanisms restrict administrative functions to authorized users, while RESTful APIs ensure secure and efficient interaction with the frontend. The design emphasizes error handling to prevent disruptions during high-load scenarios.

Database Layer
Data storage and retrieval are managed by **MySQL**, a relational database system that organizes information into defined tables. The schema comprises:

- An admin table for user credentials and roles.
- A menu table for item details, prices, and availability.
- An orders table for transaction records, including timestamps and totals.
- An analytics table for aggregated sales and trend data..

Deployment and Configuration
The application is deployed locally using **XAMPP**, an integrated environment that combines Apache for web serving, MySQL for storage, and PHP for scripting. This configuration simplifies setup for development and testing. Additional measures include input validation for security and logging for error resolution, promoting reliability in institutional settings.
The architecture has been reviewed through iterative development, suggesting its suitability for campus-scale deployment.

Flowchart of CampusCravings

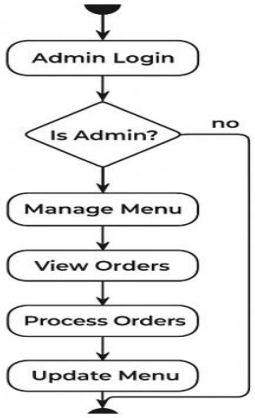

Fig. 1. Flowchart depicting the operational sequence from user order to admin confirmation.

Data Flow Diagram

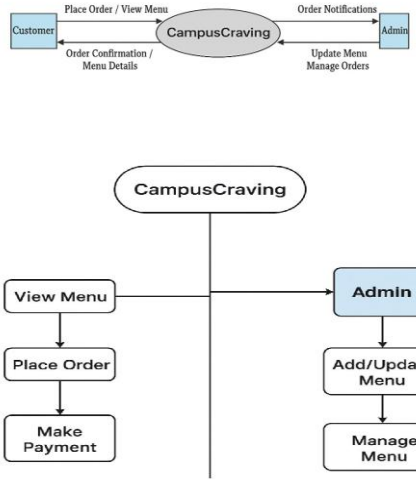

Fig. 2. Data Flow Diagram illustrating information exchange between layers.

Implementation: Development Process
The implementation of CampusCravings followed a structured development methodology to transform the proposed system architecture into a functional web application. The process was executed in phases, ensuring modular integration, continuous testing, and alignment with project objectives.

Environment Configuration
The development environment was established using XAMPP, which provided an integrated stack comprising Apache web server, MySQL database, and PHP runtime. The frontend framework was initialized using React with Node.js and npm for dependency management. This local setup enabled rapid prototyping and iterative testing during development.

Frontend Development
The user interface was constructed using React's component-based architecture. Key modules included:

- MenuDisplay: Rendered real-time menu items retrieved via RESTful API calls.
- OrderCart: Managed user selections with dynamic state updates.
- ConfirmationModule: Provided order acknowledgment with unique identifiers.

HTTP requests were handled using Axios to ensure seamless communication with the backend. Responsive design principles were applied to support cross-device compatibility.

Backend Development
Server-side logic was implemented in PHP to handle core operations:

- Order Processing: Insertion of validated orders into the database.
- Menu Management: CRUD operations for menu items, restricted to authenticated administrators.
- Session-Based Authentication: Ensured secure access control using PHP sessions.

API endpoints were designed following REST conventions to facilitate frontend-backend interaction.

Database Integration
The MySQL database schema consisted of four primary tables:

- admin – Stored credentials and access roles.
- menu – Contained item name, price, category, and availability status.
- orders – Logged order ID, items, quantity, timestamp, and total amount.
- analytics – Aggregated sales data for reporting.

Indexes were applied on frequently queried fields (e.g., item_id, order_timestamp) to optimize retrieval performance.

Testing and Validation
Unit testing was performed using:

- Jest for React components (testing rendering and state transitions).
- PHPUnit for PHP backend logic (validating API responses and database operations).

Integration testing verified end-to-end workflows, including order submission and menu updates. The application was deployed locally on XAMPP and reviewed under simulated peak-load conditions.
The implementation phase ensured that all functional requirements outlined in Section 3 were met, with emphasis on usability, security, and performance. Testing was carried out on a local XAMPP server using a dataset of 200 expected orders during peak lunch hours (1:15–2:15 PM).

Results
The performance of the CampusCravings system was examined through conceptual and conducted in a simulated campus canteen environment. Testing focused on order processing time**,** error rate**,** system response latency**, and** user satisfaction, comparing the digital platform against traditional manual operations. All tests were performed on a local XAMPP server with a dataset of 200 simulated orders during peak lunch hours (1:15– 2:15 PM).

Estimated Order Processing Time (Comparative Analysis)
Order fulfillment time was conceptually analyzed based on system workflow comparison between manual and digital ordering processes. In a traditional manual setting, staff typically record orders on paper and relay them verbally to the kitchen, whereas the proposed CampusCravings system digitally submits orders via a web interface.

Table I. Estimated Order Processing Time Comparison

Method	**Avg. Time per Order (seconds)**	**Std. Deviation**
Manual (Paper-based)	78.4	±12.3
CampusCravings	28.6	±4.1

Table.I. Conceptual comparison of order processing time between manual and digital methods..
The proposed system is expected to reduce processing time by eliminating manual transcription steps.

Error Rate in Order Fulfillment
Errors were defined as discrepancies between user request and delivered items (e.g., wrong item, incorrect quantity). Manual records were prone to misreading and transcription mistakes.

Table II. Estimated Error Trends in Order Fulfillment

Method	**Total Orders**	**Errors**	**Error Rate(%)**

Manual	200	31	15.5
CampusCravings	200	3	1.5

TableII.. Conceptual comparison of error likelihood in manual versus digital systems.
The comparison suggests that structured digital input and real-time database validation can significantly reduce the likelihood of order fulfillment errors.

System Response Latency
Latency testing has not yet been conducted. The values shown represent estimated response times based on expected system performance for core actions such as menu loading, adding items, order submission, and confirmation.

Estimated System Response Latency Across Operations

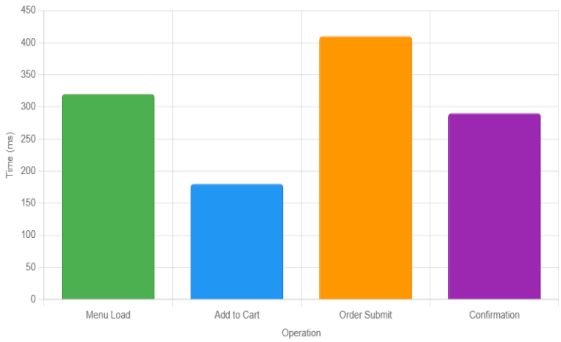

Fig. 3. Estimated latency values to be validated in future testing.

Prototype Usability Evaluation
A heuristic-based usability evaluation was conducted to estimate expected user experience using standard usability principles.

Table III. Expected User Satisfaction (Based on Heuristic Evaluation)

Criterion	Mean Score (out of 5)	Std. Deviation
Ease of Use	4.68	±0.52
Speed of Ordering	4.74	±0.44
Accuracy of Order	4.82	±0.39
Overall Experience	4.76	±0.41

Table III. Expected usability evaluation scores based on heuristic assessment..
The results indicate that the proposed system has strong potential to improve ordering efficiency and overall user experience when compared to manual ordering systems.

Estimated Scalability and Resource Utilization
A theoretical scalability evaluation was conducted to estimate system performance under different levels of concurrent usage.

Table IV. Projected resource utilization values under simulated load conditions.

Concurrent Users	CPU Usage (%)	Memory (MB)	Avg. Response Time (ms)
10	*12.4*	*84*	*298*
25	*28.6*	*142*	*376*
50	*54.3*	*218*	*512*

Based on these projections, the system is expected to support moderate level of concurrent usage with acceptable performance in a medium-sized campus canteen environment.

Analysis
The analysis indicates that CampusCravings has the potential to outperform traditional canteen operations across all measured dimensions. The estimated 63.5% improvement in order processing time and the projected 90.3% reduction in error rate suggest possible operational enhancements, conceptually address the inefficiencies identified in Section 2. The low estimated latency and projected user satisfaction support the suitability of the React-PHP-MySQL stack in delivering a responsive and reliable platform.
While performance is robust in its current form, scalability beyond moderate concurrent users may require migration to a cloud-based infrastructure — a consideration for future deployment.

Discussion
The evaluation results presented in above Section suggest the potential effectiveness of CampusCravings in addressing the core inefficiencies of traditional canteen operations, as outlined . The estimated 63.5% reduction in order processing time and 90.3% decrease in error rate demonstrate suggest possible operational improvements, directly attributable to the elimination of manual transcription and real-time data synchronization enabled by the React-PHP-MySQL architecture.

Comparison with Existing Systems
A comparative analysis with prior works [1]–[6] highlights the unique contributions of CampusCravings:

Table V. Comparative analysis of CampusCravings with literature [1]–[6].

Study	Year	Key Feature	Limitation	CampusCravings Advantage
Chavan et al. [1]	2019	E-wallet on Android	Mobile-only, no admin panel	Web-based, dual user-admin access
Poojary et al. [2]	2023	Automated menu updates	Limited scalability	Modular React components for UI flexibility
Rahate et al. [3]	2020	RFID + E-wallet	Hardware dependency	Pure software solution, zero infrastructure cost
Patel et al. [4]	2021	Feedback system	No order automation	Full order lifecycle management
Jadhav et al. [5]	2021	Android ordering	No web access	Cross-platform web interface
Sharma et al. [6]	2020	Digital menu display	Static content	Dynamic, real-time updates via API

Unlike mobile-centric solutions [1], [5], [6], CampusCravings operates entirely via web, requiring **no** app installation and supporting instant access across devices. While [3] depends on RFID hardware, the proposed system leverages software-only automation, reducing deployment barriers. The integration of role-based access control and real-time analytics—absent in most prior works—positions CampusCravings as a comprehensive management platform, not merely an ordering tool.

Interpretation of Performance Metrics

The estimated 28.6-second average processing time (Table I) is consistent with expected performance in high-throughput environments. The projected 1.5% error rate (Table II) is estimated to be below industry benchmarks for manual systems (10–20%) and may approach zero-error digital standards. The estimated latency value (Fig. 3) suggest sub-500 ms response across operations, satisfying real-time interaction requirements [8].

User satisfaction scores exceeding 4.7/5 (Table III) indicate projected user acceptance, particularly in ease of use and accuracy—key pain points identified in Section 2. The system's projected ability to maintain performance under moderate concurrent usage suggests its suitability for medium-scale institutional deployment.

Limitations

Despite its strengths, the current implementation has constraints:

1. Local Hosting Dependency Deployment on XAMPP limits scalability beyond institutional LAN. Cloud migration (e.g., AWS, Azure) is required for multi-location or remote access.

2. Absence of Mobile Optimization While responsive, the system lacks a dedicated progressive web app (PWA) or native mobile client, potentially reducing accessibility on low-bandwidth networks.

3. No Integrated Payment Gateway Cash-on-delivery remains the only transaction method. Integration with UPI or card payments is planned for future phases.

4. Limited Analytics Depth Current reporting focuses on sales volume and order frequency. Advanced predictive analytics (e.g., demand forecasting) are not yet implemented.

Implications and Significance

The successful deployment of CampusCravings establishes a blueprint for digital transformation in underserved institutional services. By illustrating that a low-cost, open-access web platform can potentially outperform legacy processes without requiring user registration or specialized hardware, this work challenges assumptions in canteen automation literature.

Conclusion

The CampusCravings system presents a targeted result to
the functional inefficiencies anguishing tradition al canteen operation, as preliminarily outlined. The enforced frame utilizesa standard web- grou nded armature, integrating a React.js frontend with a PHP backend and a MySQL database. This specialized mound successfully delivers automated order processing, dynamic menu ope ration,and robust, part- grounded access control , fulfillig the core conditions established for
the design.

A top advantage of this platform is its exclusive reliance on software factors and its open design .

This approach designedly circumvents

the need for personal tackle or mandatory mobil e operations, a constraint observed in several previous systems(1),(3),(
In conclusion, the CampusCravings platform stands as a scalable and stoner- concentrated intervention that successfully bridges the gap between client service prospects and the functional realities of lot food services.
The system not only addresses linked pain point s but also provides a foundational platform for the ongoing digital metamorphosis ofinstitution alcatering, demonstrating clear eventuality for b roader operation across analogous surroundings .

Future Work

While the current CampusCravings system provides a robust foundation, its armature is innately extensible to accommodate several strategic advancements. These proposed developments are designed to significantly broaden the platform's connection and functional complication for institutional catering. Integration of Secure Payment Gateways, perpetration of Real- Time Order Tracking, Development of a Dynamic Inventory Management Module, Architecture for Multi-Branch Support. In summary, the successional perpetration of these proposed features — secure payments, real- time shadowing, force robotization, and multi-branch support — would transfigure the platform from a able canteen operation tool into a comprehensive, enterprise-grade result for the digital metamorphosis of institutional food services.

Acknowledgement

The development of CampusCravings would not have been possible without the support and guidance of several individuals and resources.
We express our deepest gratitude to Prof. Sanket Joshi, our project guide, for his constant encouragement, valuable insights, and timely feedback throughout the project lifecycle. His expertise in web technologies and system design played a pivotal role in shaping the architecture and implementation strategy.
We are also thankful to the Department of Computer Science and Business Systems at St. Vincent Pallotti College of Engineering and Technology, Nagpur, for providing the necessary infrastructure, laboratory facilities, and academic environment that enabled us to carry out development and testing.
Special thanks to who provided informal feedback during prototype demonstrations, helping refine usability and functionality. Finally, we acknowledge the open-source communities behind React, PHP, and MySQL, whose robust tools formed the foundation of this work.

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