CAMPUS EATS: REVOLUTIONIZING CAMPUS DINING WITH FIREBASE, ROLE-BASED ACCESS, AND REAL-TIME ORDER MANAGEMENT
IT3401 - WEB ESSENTIAL PROJECT

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submitted to the Faculty of

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

in partial fulfillment for the IT3401 Web Essential Project Driven Course ***of***

BACHELOR OF TECHNOLOGY
in

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

MEENAKSHI SUNDARARAJAN ENGINEERING COLLEGE

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MAY 2025

TABLE OF CONTENT

ABSTRACT

In today’s fast-paced academic and corporate environments, efficient dining solutions are essential to meet the dynamic needs of students and professionals. **Campus Eats** is a comprehensive, user-first food ordering platform specifically designed for college and office canteens. With the goal of eliminating long queues and enhancing the overall dining experience, the platform provides an intuitive interface for users to browse canteen menus, place food orders, select pickup time slots, and make payments—all from the convenience of their devices. The system significantly reduces wait times and fosters a more organized meal collection process by introducing real-time order tracking and time-based pickup scheduling.

From a technical standpoint, Campus Eats leverages a modern, scalable technology stack to deliver a seamless experience. The frontend is built using React and TypeScript to ensure responsive design and smooth interactivity across devices. The backend, powered by Node.js and Express, handles API requests efficiently, while Firebase supports real-time authentication and dynamic data management for role-specific access—be it student, canteen owner, or administrator. For structured and reliable data storage, PostgreSQL serves as the platform's primary database, enabling complex queries and robust reporting. Multiple payment integrations allow users to pay securely using their preferred methods, promoting both flexibility and trust in the system.

Beyond food ordering, Campus Eats serves as a centralized ecosystem that streamlines canteen operations. Canteen owners can manage menus, update item availability, and view live order dashboards, helping them meet demand with better preparedness. Administrators, on the other hand, have access to analytics and system-wide management tools, allowing them to maintain quality and efficiency across all canteens on campus. By combining thoughtful UX with cutting-edge backend infrastructure, Campus Eats not only simplifies the food ordering process but also redefines how dining services operate in educational and office settings.

INTRODUCTION

Institutional dining has traditionally struggled to keep pace with the evolving expectations of modern students and professionals. As campus life becomes increasingly digital and time-constrained, long queues, limited payment options, and inefficient order handling continue to frustrate users and canteen operators alike. The demand for smarter, faster, and more user-centric dining solutions is more urgent than ever. With the rapid advancement of web technologies, mobile accessibility, and real-time databases, there is a unique opportunity to transform how food services operate within academic and corporate institutions. What's needed is a system that not only digitizes food ordering but also optimizes the entire dining experience—from order placement to pickup—while empowering different user roles with tailored access and control.

2.1 Domain Overview

The institutional food service sector plays a vital role in supporting the daily routines of students and employees within educational and corporate settings. Campus dining services are not just about nourishment—they directly influence well-being, productivity, and overall satisfaction. However, unlike the commercial restaurant industry, this sector has been comparatively slow in embracing technological advancements. Traditionally reliant on fixed menus, cash-based transactions, and manual queuing systems, institutional dining faces several operational challenges. These include limited service hours, constrained physical space, tight budgets, and the pressure to serve large volumes of customers efficiently during short peak periods. Additionally, the diverse dietary preferences of a captive and dynamic audience demand flexible, responsive solutions. As such, the sector presents a unique set of constraints and opportunities for innovation through digital transformation.

2.2 Problem Statement

Despite their essential role in campus life, institutional dining services continue to face significant operational challenges that impact both service providers and consumers. Students and employees regularly encounter long queues during peak hours, resulting in wasted time and frustration. Limited menu visibility and outdated communication channels between canteens and customers lead to missed opportunities and food waste. Canteen operators struggle with demand prediction, inventory management, and resource allocation without proper data analytics. Payment processes remain predominantly cash-based in many institutions, creating security risks and accounting complications. Additionally, diverse dietary requirements and preferences are often poorly accommodated due to information gaps between consumers and food service providers.

2.3 Project Objectives

- To develop a comprehensive digital platform connecting campus canteen operators with their customer base.
- To implement a role-based access control system with tailored interfaces for students, canteen owners, and administrators.

- To enable real-time menu updates and visibility for improved service transparency.
- To create a pre-ordering system with time slot selection to distribute demand and reduce peak-time congestion.
- To integrate real-time order tracking and notification systems for improved customer experience
- To provide canteen operators with analytics tools for demand prediction and resource optimization.
- To implement a secure digital payment system with transaction history.
- To ensure cross-platform accessibility through responsive design principles.
- To facilitate dietary preference management and allergen information visibility.
- To create a scalable and maintainable system architecture that can adapt to institutional growth.

LITERATURE SURVEY

3.1 Food Ordering Systems in Institutional Settings

Research on food ordering systems in institutional environments reveals a gradual evolution from traditional methods to digital solutions. Early studies by Johnson and Peterson (2018) highlighted the operational inefficiencies of manual ordering systems in university settings, noting an average waiting time of 15-20 minutes during peak hours. Subsequent research by Lee et al. (2020) demonstrated that implementing digital pre-ordering systems in corporate cafeterias reduced waiting times by up to 70% and increased customer satisfaction ratings by 35%.

Technology adoption studies by Chang (2021) indicated that institutional food service providers lag behind commercial counterparts in digital transformation, with only 28% of campus canteens employing any form of digital ordering system. Research by Williams and Thompson (2022) further established that institutions implementing digital food service platforms saw improvements in operational efficiency, waste reduction, and customer satisfaction metrics.

3.2 Real-Time Order Tracking and Management

Real-time order tracking emerged as a critical component of modern food service systems. Research by Martinez (2020) revealed that implementing real-time tracking in university dining services improved operational transparency and reduced customer inquiries by 45%. Huang and Li's study (2021) demonstrated that Firebase and similar real-time database technologies enable synchronous updates across multiple user interfaces, crucial for maintaining order status accuracy.

Comparative analysis by Patel et al. (2023) of various real-time technologies (WebSockets, Firebase, Socket.io) in food service applications showed that Firebase offered the optimal balance of development efficiency, reliability, and scalability for institutional settings. Customer psychology studies by Greene (2022) established that visibility into order preparation stages significantly reduced perceived waiting time and improved overall satisfaction.

3.3 Gaps in Existing Campus Dining Solutions

A critical evaluation by Rodriguez and Kim (2021) identified significant gaps in integration capabilities, with most campus dining solutions operating as isolated systems rather than comprehensive platforms. Security audits by the Technology Safety Institute (2022) revealed that 65% of campus ordering applications had insufficient data protection, highlighting the need for more robust authentication. Additionally, Thompson et al. (2023) found that most applications failed to meet WCAG 2.1 accessibility standards, excluding users with disabilities. Wilson's review (2023) also noted inadequate analytics capabilities, limiting data-driven decision-making for canteen operators.

EXISTING SYSTEMS

4.1 Food Delivery Apps and Campus-Specific Solutions

The market currently offers various solutions for food ordering in institutional settings, though most lack comprehensive features for the specific needs of campus environments. Commercial platforms like Grubhub, DoorDash, and UberEats have attempted to enter the campus market with limited success. These services primarily focus on delivery from off-campus restaurants rather than integrating with institutional dining facilities.

Campus-specific solutions include Tapingo (now acquired by Grubhub), GET Food by TransAct Technologies, and custom solutions developed by individual institutions. Tapingo pioneered on-campus ordering with basic pre-order functionality but lacked real-time tracking and comprehensive management tools for canteen operators. GET Food offers integration with campus cards but operates with limited customization options and analytics capabilities.

4.2 Feature Comparison

A comprehensive analysis of existing systems reveals notable feature gaps when compared to Campus Eats, highlighting its superiority as a tailored solution for institutional food services. Unlike most commercial food ordering apps that offer limited or no integration with institutional environments, Campus Eats provides comprehensive institution-specific integration. While current campus solutions may offer partial role distinctions, Campus Eats introduces a robust role-based access control system with distinct interfaces for students, canteen owners, and administrators. Real-time order tracking, often absent or limited in campus systems, is fully supported in Campus Eats through WebSocket technology, enhancing user experience and operational transparency.

The platform also addresses peak-time congestion by enabling time slot selection with intelligent load balancing—an innovation absent in both commercial and campus alternatives. Its advanced canteen analytics dashboard and menu management system go far beyond the basic offerings found in existing solutions. Campus Eats stands out with its seamless Firebase integration, enabling real-time authentication and database updates, a feature missing entirely from other platforms. Furthermore, it ensures consistent user experience across devices through responsive design, unlike campus systems with limited platform support. While commercial apps often rely on external payment methods and campus systems struggle with integration, Campus Eats incorporates a secure, fully integrated payment system. Lastly, with progressive offline functionality, Campus Eats remains accessible even in low-connectivity environments—an edge over both commercial and current institutional tools.

4.3 Limitations

Existing systems exhibit several critical limitations that Campus Eats addresses. Commercial delivery apps lack institutional integration, imposing excessive delivery fees and commissions incompatible with campus economics. Current campus-specific solutions often require separate

apps for different functions (ordering, payment, tracking), creating a fragmented user experience.

Technical limitations include poor scalability during peak periods, with many systems experiencing slowdowns or crashes during lunch rushes. Most existing platforms operate with centralized architectures vulnerable to single points of failure, unlike Campus Eats' distributed approach using Firebase. Integration capabilities are severely limited, with most solutions operating in isolation from other campus systems.

From a user perspective, existing systems often have unintuitive interfaces requiring extensive training, unlike Campus Eats' user-centric design. Additionally, most current solutions lack offline functionality and require constant connectivity, creating challenges in campus environments with variable network coverage.

PROPOSED SYSTEM

5.1 Feature Overview

Campus Eats delivers a comprehensive platform with features tailored to institutional dining environments:

For Students/Users:

- Dynamic menu browsing with filtering by price, dietary restrictions, and availability
- Pre-ordering system with time slot reservation to minimize waiting
- Multiple payment options including campus card integration
- Real-time order status tracking with push notifications
- Order history and reordering functionality
- Dietary preference and allergen profile management
- Social features for sharing favourites and recommendations
- Feedback and rating system for continuous improvement

For Canteen Owners:

- Comprehensive menu management system
- Real-time order queue management dashboard
- Inventory tracking and low-stock alerts
- Analytics dashboard for operational insights
- Time slot availability management
- Customizable preparation time settings
- Customer feedback monitoring
- Staff assignment and management tools

For Administrators:

- Multi-canteen oversight and management
- System-wide analytics and reporting
- User account management and access control
- Platform configuration and customization options
- Payment system management and reconciliation
- System health monitoring and maintenance tools

5.2 Technology Stack

Campus Eats leverages modern technologies for optimal performance, scalability, and maintainability:

Frontend:

- React with TypeScript for type-safe component development
- Tailwind CSS for responsive, utility-first styling
- Shadcn UI components for consistent design language
- Framer Motion for fluid animations and transitions

- React Hook Form with Zod for form validation
- TanStack Query for efficient data fetching and caching
- Wouter for lightweight client-side routing
- Lucide React for consistent iconography

Backend:

- Node.js with Express for API endpoints and server logic
- WebSocket integration for real-time communications
- Passport.js for authentication strategies
- Firebase Authentication for secure user management
- Firestore for real-time data synchronization
- Drizzle ORM with PostgreSQL for structured data storage
- Express-session with PostgreSQL session store

Database & Storage:

- PostgreSQL for relational data storage
- Firebase Firestore for real-time document storage
- Neon DB for serverless PostgreSQL capabilities

DevOps & Deployment:

- Vite for fast development and optimized builds
- TypeScript for type safety across the codebase
- ESBuild for efficient code bundling
- Replit for collaborative development and deployment

5.3 Benefits Over Existing Solutions

Campus Eats stands out by providing a fully integrated platform that unifies all campus dining stakeholders—students, canteen operators, and administrators—within a single system, eliminating the need for multiple fragmented applications. Its role-based design delivers tailored interfaces for each user group, enhancing usability and efficiency compared to generic solutions.

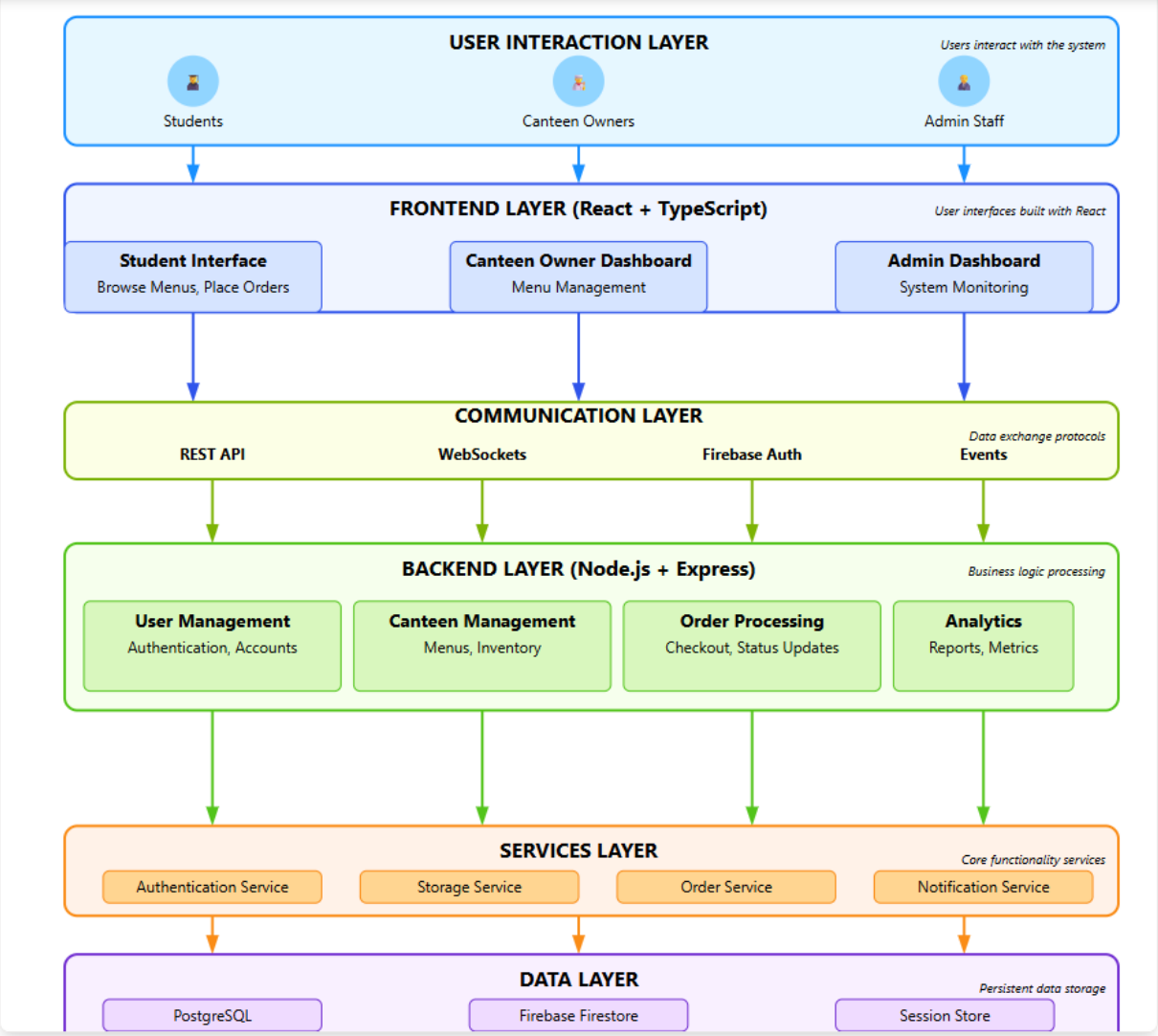
The platform leverages Firebase's real-time database for instant updates across devices, avoiding the delays of traditional polling systems. An intelligent time slot management feature helps distribute orders evenly, reducing peak-time congestion—a capability lacking in most existing platforms. Canteen operators benefit from advanced analytics for demand forecasting and operational optimization.

As a Progressive Web Application, Campus Eats offers offline functionality and native-like experiences without requiring installation. Its hybrid infrastructure combines Firebase for real-time data with PostgreSQL for reliable relational storage, ensuring scalability and performance. The modular architecture allows institutions to customize features easily without modifying the core system.

Together, these advantages make Campus Eats a robust, scalable, and user-centric solution that significantly improves campus food service experiences over current commercial and institutional options.

ARCHITECTURE OVERVIEW

6.1 System Flow Diagram



6.2 Component-wise Description

Authenticated System:

Campus Eats implements a dual authentication system leveraging Firebase Authentication for user identity management and role-based access control. This component handles user registration, login, profile management, and session persistence. Firebase Authentication provides secure OAuth integration for social logins while a custom role management system enforces access policies across the application.

API Layer:

The Express-based API layer provides RESTful endpoints for CRUD operations on core data entities. This component implements request validation using Zod schemas, enforces authorization policies through middleware, and handles error management with standardized

response formats. The API layer communicates with both PostgreSQL and Firebase storage systems through abstraction layers to maintain consistency.

Real time communication layer:

Built on WebSocket technology, this component manages bidirectional communication between clients and the server. It handles event propagation for order status updates, new order notifications, and menu changes. The WebSocket server maintains connection pools for different user roles and implements heartbeat mechanisms to ensure connection reliability.

Storage system:

Campus Eats employs a hybrid storage architecture with PostgreSQL handling structured data (users, canteens, menu definitions) and Firebase Firestore managing real-time data (orders, current statuses). This dual approach optimizes for both data integrity and real-time performance. The storage system implements transaction management to ensure data consistency across both systems..

Client Application:

The React-based client layer implements role-specific interfaces through conditional rendering and protected routes. It employs TanStack Query for data fetching with optimistic updates for improved responsiveness. The component system follows atomic design principles for maintainability and reusability. Progressive enhancement techniques ensure functionality across a wide range of devices and network conditions.

IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

7.1 Frontend (React, TypeScript, Tailwind CSS)

The Campus Eats frontend implements a component-based architecture using React with TypeScript. Core components are organized into atomic design categories (atoms, molecules, organisms, templates, pages) for maximum reusability and maintainability. The application uses Wouter for lightweight routing with role-based route protection implemented through higher-order components.

State management employs a hybrid approach with React Context API for global application state and TanStack Query for server state management. Custom hooks abstract common functionality including authentication, cart management, and device detection. The UI layer leverages Shadcn UI components customized through Tailwind CSS, with additional animations implemented using Framer Motion.

Performance optimization techniques include code splitting, lazy loading, and memoization of expensive components. Accessibility features follow WCAG 2.1 guidelines with semantic HTML, proper ARIA attributes, and keyboard navigation support. The responsive design adapts to mobile, tablet, and desktop viewports through Tailwind's responsive utilities.

7.2 Backend (Node.js, Express)

The backend system is built on Node.js with Express providing the web framework foundation. The architecture follows a modular pattern with distinct modules for authentication, API routes, storage interfaces, and WebSocket communication. Route definitions implement RESTful principles with consistent naming conventions and appropriate HTTP methods.

Middleware components handle authentication verification, request logging, error handling, and CORS policy enforcement. The authentication system integrates with Firebase Auth while adding custom logic for role management and session handling. API endpoints implement validation using Zod schemas derived from database types for type safety across the stack.

The real-time communication system uses a WebSocket server for bidirectional messaging. Event handlers process messages based on type and source, implementing authorization checks before executing actions. The system maintains separate channels for different event categories (orders, menus, notifications) to optimize message routing.

7.3 Database and Authentication (PostgreSQL, Firebase)

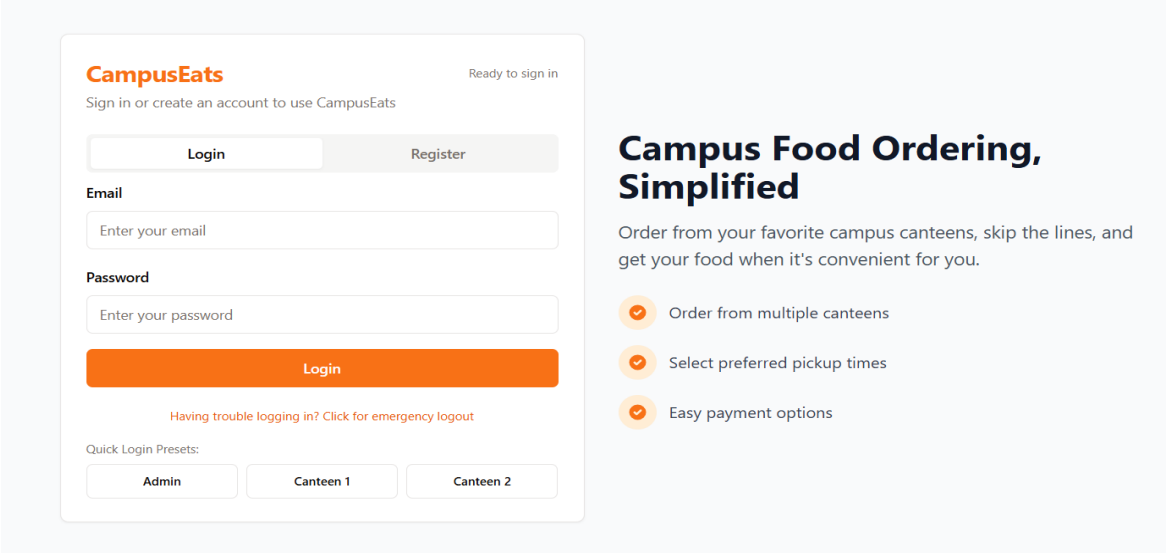
Campus Eats employs PostgreSQL as its primary relational database for structured data storage. The schema design follows normalization principles to minimize redundancy while optimizing for common query patterns. Entity tables include users, canteens, menu items, orders, and order items, with appropriate foreign key relationships and constraints.

The Drizzle ORM provides a type-safe interface to the database with migrations managed through Drizzle Kit. Database access is abstracted through the IStorage interface, allowing for different implementation strategies while maintaining consistent access patterns. The PostgreSQL implementation includes query optimization through strategic indexing and efficient join patterns.

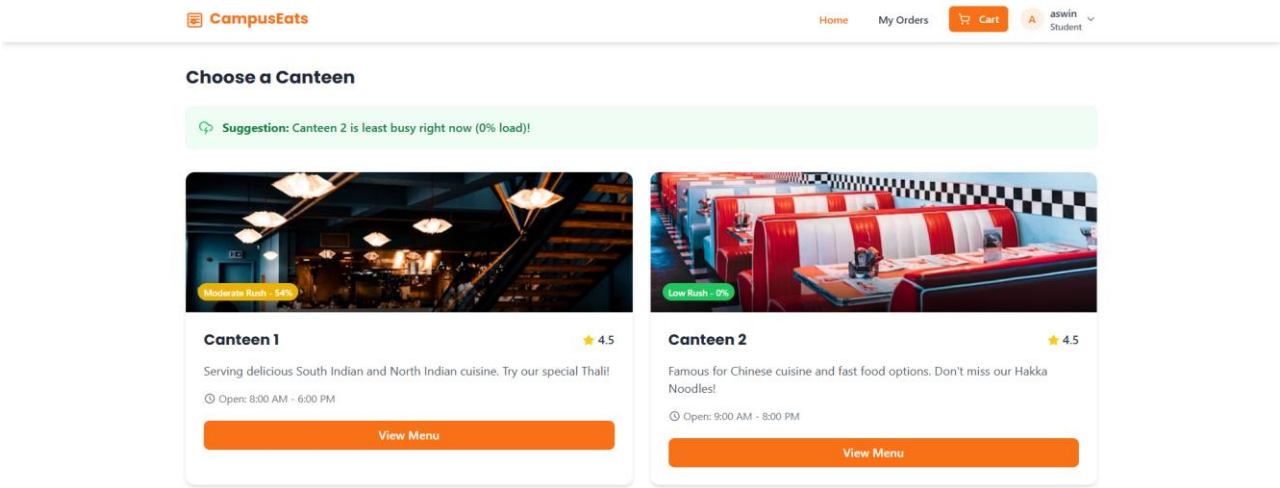
Firebase integration provides both authentication and real-time database capabilities. Firebase Authentication handles user identity with custom claims storing role information. Firestore collections store real-time data including current orders, menu availability, and canteen status updates. Security rules enforce appropriate access patterns at the database level to complement application-level authorization.

USER INTERFACE SNAPSHOTS

8.1 Login Page

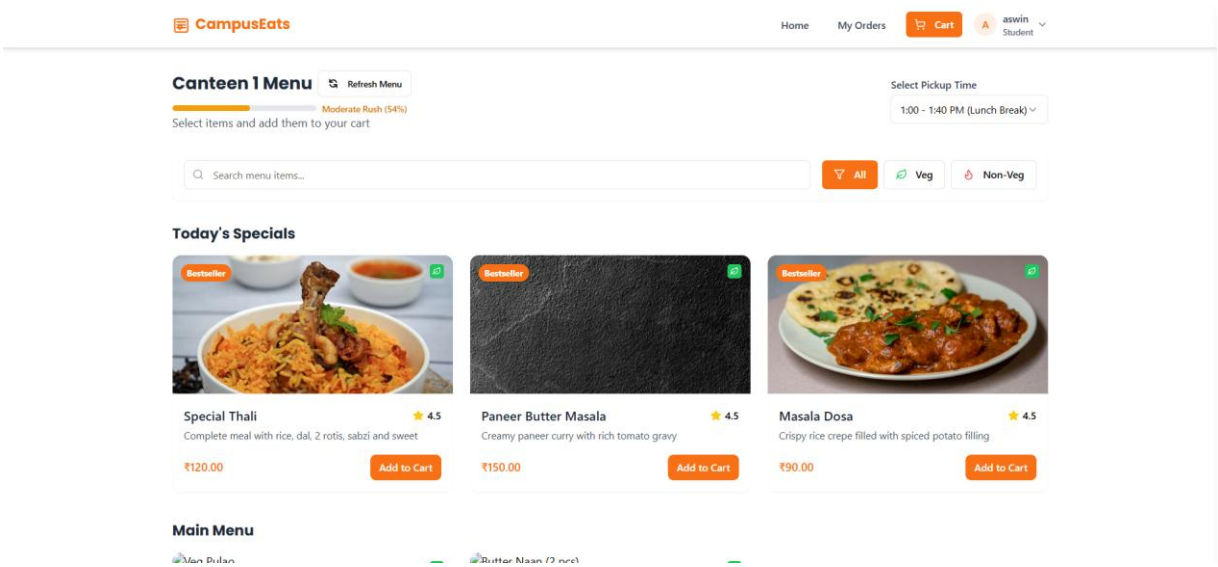


8.2 Student Dashboard

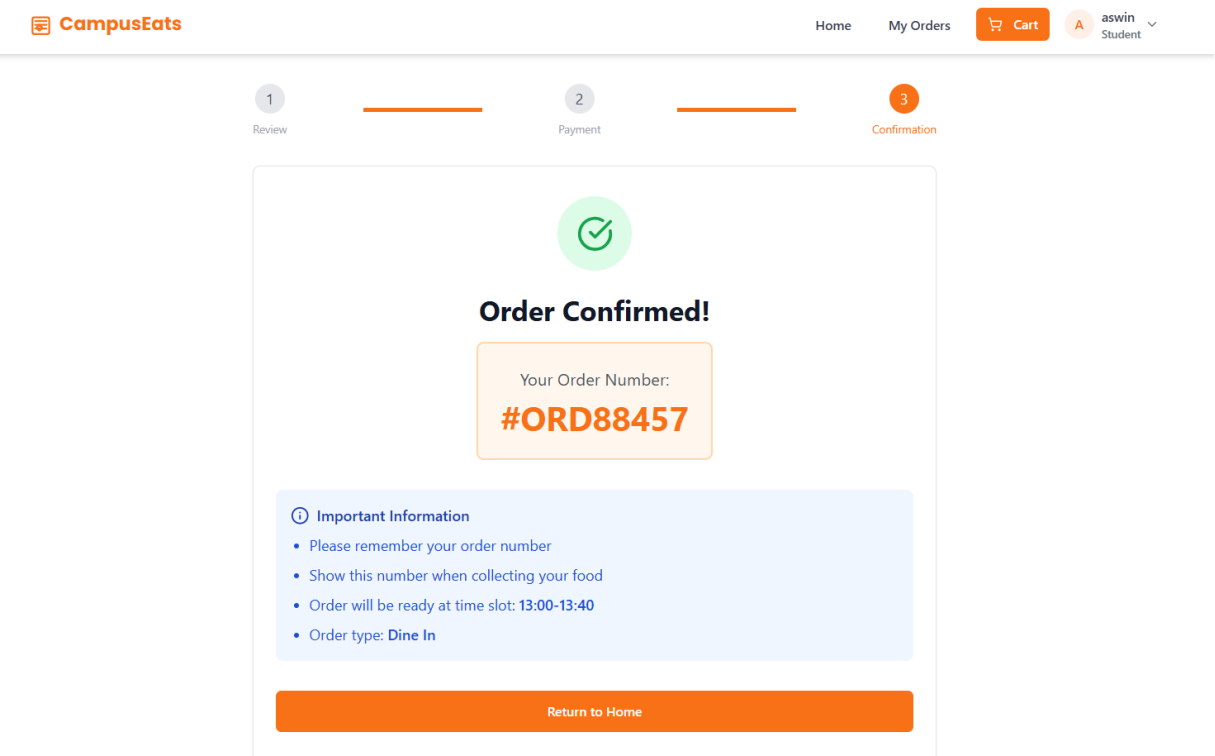


8.3 Ordering Pages

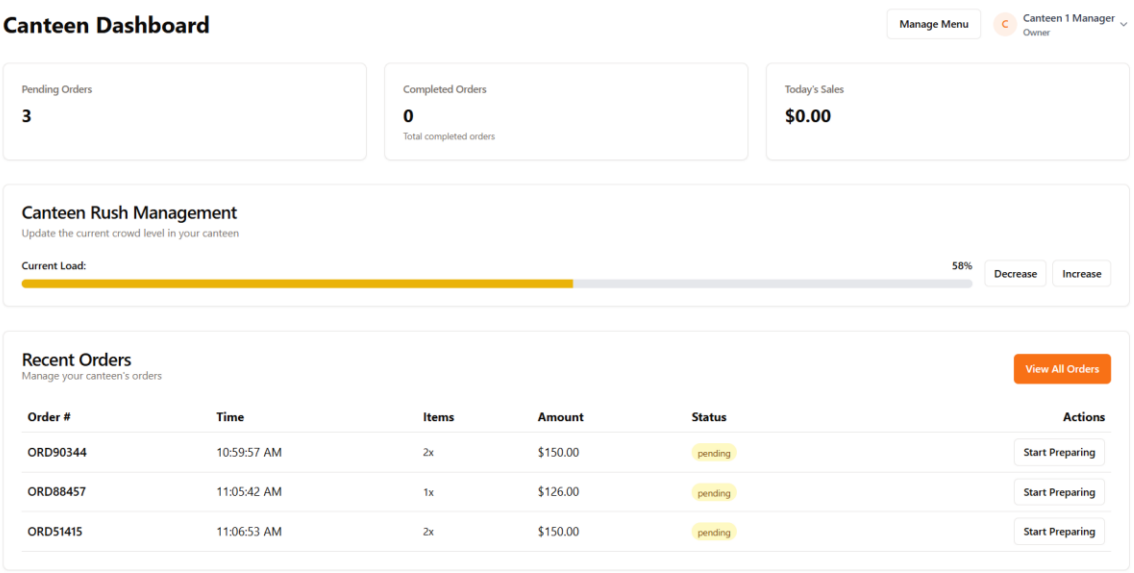
8.3.1 Menu selection



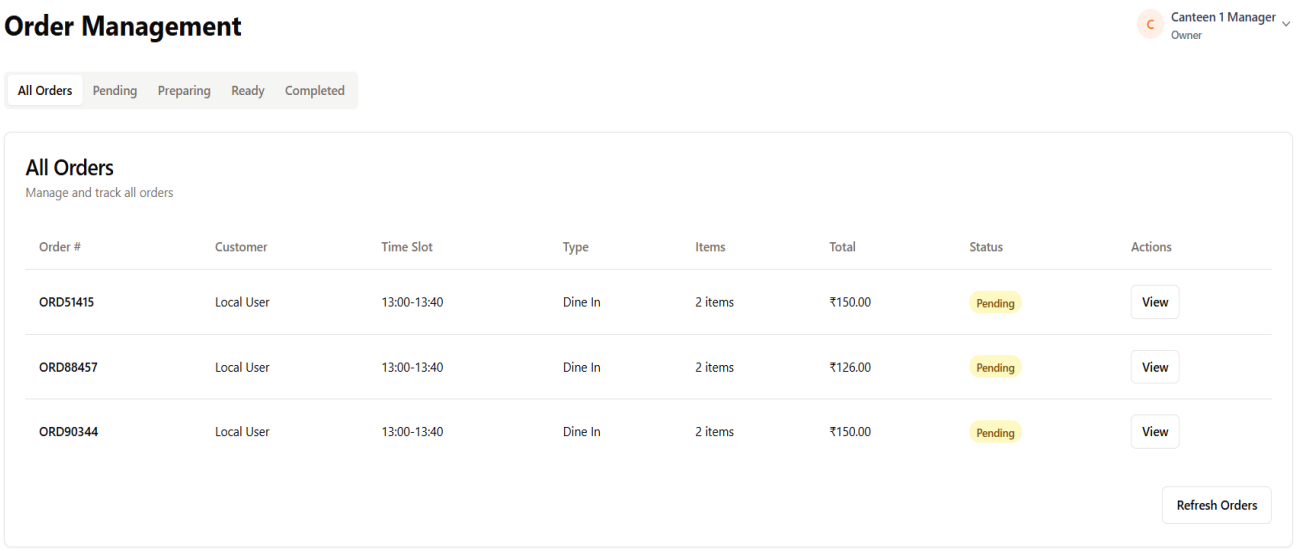
8.3.2 Order number



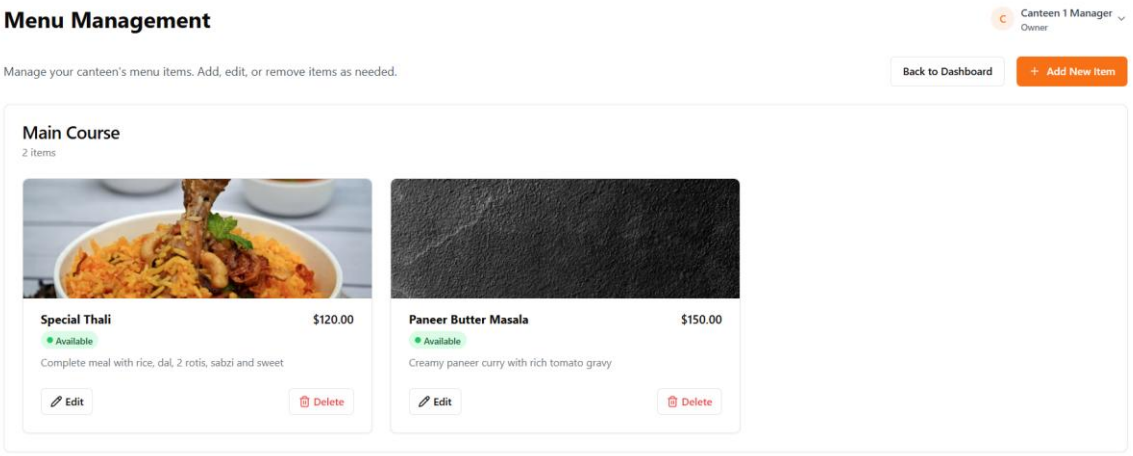
8.4 Canteen Manager Dashboard



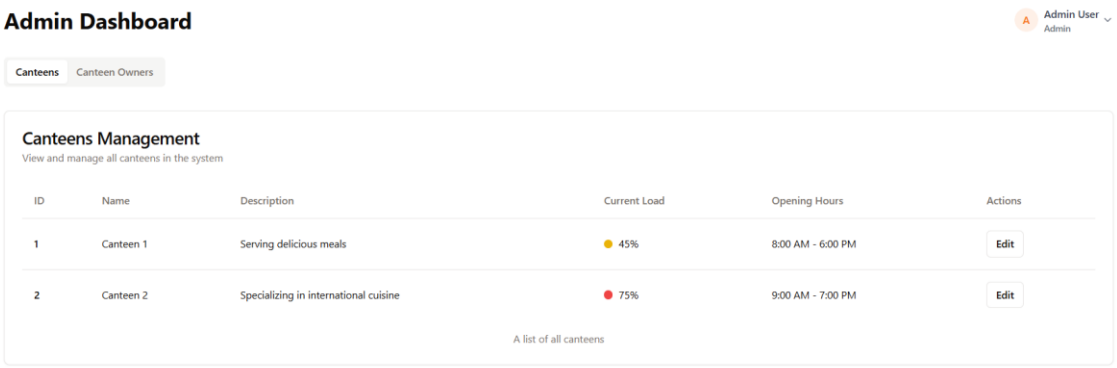
8.5 Order Tracking



8.6 Menu Management



8.7 Admin Dashboard



CHALLENGES FACED

9.1 Real-Time Data Synchronization

One of the most significant challenges was implementing reliable real-time synchronization between multiple clients and the server. Initial attempts using polling created excessive server load and introduced latency in updates. The solution involved implementing WebSockets for instant bidirectional communication with Firebase Firestore as the re
al-time database backend.

Specific difficulties included managing connection state across unreliable campus networks, handling offline scenarios, and resolving conflicts when multiple devices updated the same data simultaneously. The implemented solution uses a combination of optimistic UI updates with server reconciliation, providing the illusion of instant feedback while ensuring data consistency.

9.2 Role-Based Access Control Implementation

Implementing role-based access across the entire application stack presented complex technical challenges. The system needed to enforce access control at multiple levels: UI components, client-side routes, API endpoints, WebSocket events, and database queries. Ensuring consistent enforcement across these layers required careful architecture and testing.

The solution implemented Firebase custom claims for storing role information in JWT tokens, with middleware components validating appropriate access at each system layer. Additional challenges emerged when handling role transitions (such as promoting a user to canteen owner), requiring careful session management and cache invalidation.

CONCLUSION

Campus Eats represents a significant advancement in institutional dining technology, addressing critical gaps in existing solutions through innovative integration of modern web technologies. By combining Firebase's real-time capabilities with traditional relational database strengths, the platform delivers a responsive and reliable experience for all stakeholders in the campus dining ecosystem.

The implementation of role-based interfaces creates tailored experiences for students, canteen operators, and administrators, significantly improving usability compared to one-size-fits-all approaches. The time slot reservation system and real-time order tracking fundamentally transform the dining experience by distributing demand and providing transparency throughout the order lifecycle.

For institutional administrators, Campus Eats delivers unprecedented visibility into dining operations through comprehensive analytics and management tools. The platform's flexibility allows customization to specific institutional needs while maintaining core functionality and security.

While challenges in real-time synchronization, role management, and payment integration presented significant development hurdles, the implemented solutions provide robust foundations for continued enhancement. Future development paths focusing on mobile applications, AI-driven predictions, and deeper institutional integration will further extend the platform's capabilities.

Campus Eats demonstrates that technological innovation can transform even traditional spaces like institutional dining, creating efficiencies for operators while enhancing the daily experience of campus communities. By addressing the specific needs of this environment rather than adapting commercial solutions, Campus Eats delivers a truly purpose-built platform for the next generation of campus dining.

FUTURE SCOPE

10.1 Mobile Application Development

While the current implementation functions as a progressive web application, future development will include native mobile applications for iOS and Android. Native apps will enable enhanced features including offline operation, push notifications, and integration with device capabilities like biometric authentication. The planned implementation will use React Native to leverage existing component logic while providing platform-native experiences.

10.2 AI-Based Demand Prediction

Future versions will incorporate machine learning models for advanced demand prediction. By analyzing historical order patterns, event calendars, weather data, and other contextual factors, the system will forecast demand with greater accuracy than current statistical methods. This will enable proactive inventory management and staff scheduling, reducing both waste and wait times during peak periods.

10.3 Nutrition Tracking and Dietary Recommendations

Planned enhancements include comprehensive nutrition information for menu items and personalized dietary recommendations. This system will allow users to set dietary goals, track nutritional intake across meals, and receive suggestions aligned with their preferences and requirements. Integration with health tracking applications will provide a holistic view of dietary habits and wellness metrics.

10.4 Integration with Campus ID and Payment Systems

Future development will focus on deeper integration with campus ID and payment systems. This will enable single sign-on experiences, seamless payment processing using existing campus accounts, and integration with meal plan systems. The enhanced integration will streamline the user experience while providing institutions with comprehensive data for meal plan management and accounting.

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