



Special accommodation unveiled: the dynamics of fairness and effectiveness in admissions at Rizal Technological University

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of the Special Accommodation for Admission at Rizal Technological University, examining its distribution across colleges and institutes, perceived fairness, effectiveness, and overall impact on the admission process. Using a mixed-method embedded design, data collection combined quantitative surveys and qualitative responses. Quantitative analysis revealed variations in referral patterns, with mean scores and standard deviations calculated using Jamovi software to assess perceptions of fairness, adherence to guidelines, and effectiveness in selecting qualified candidates. Correlation analysis showed strong positive relationships between fairness and system effectiveness, as well as between fairness and impact on admission, suggesting that higher perceptions of fairness enhance both system efficiency and its perceived influence on admissions. A moderate correlation between system effectiveness and impact on admission indicates that while efficiency contributes to the process, transparency and equity also play crucial roles. Verbatim responses highlighted concerns about inconsistent policy application and the need for stricter adherence to the two-student limit per employee to improve fairness. While the system supports enrollment targets and class size management, challenges related to transparency, perceived equity, and academic qualifications persist. Respondents recommended refining the criteria, setting standardized academic qualifications, and conducting periodic reviews to align the system with the university's strategic goals. This study contributes to understanding referral systems in higher education by emphasizing fairness and merit-based standards to foster institutional trust and uphold academic quality.

RESUMO

Este estudo explora as dinâmicas do Sistema de Acomodação Especial para Admissão na Rizal Technological University, examinando sua distribuição entre faculdades e institutos, a percepção de justiça, eficácia e seu impacto geral no processo de admissão. Utilizando um desenho metodológico misto com abordagem incorporada, a coleta de dados combinou questionários quantitativos e respostas qualitativas. A análise quantitativa revelou variações nos padrões de encaminhamento, com médias e desvios-padrão calculados por meio do software Jamovi para avaliar as percepções sobre justiça, conformidade com as diretrizes e eficácia na seleção de candidatos qualificados. A análise de correlação demonstrou fortes relações positivas entre justiça e eficácia do sistema, bem como entre justiça e impacto na admissão, sugerindo que percepções mais elevadas de justiça aumentam tanto a eficiência do sistema quanto sua influência percebida no processo de admissão. Uma correlação moderada entre eficácia do sistema e impacto na admissão indica que, embora a eficiência contribua para o processo, a transparência e a equidade também desempenham papéis cruciais. As respostas verbais destacaram preocupações sobre a aplicação inconsistente da política e a necessidade de uma observância mais rigorosa do limite de dois alunos por funcionário para melhorar a justiça. Embora o sistema apoie as metas de matrícula e o gerenciamento do tamanho das turmas, persistem desafios relacionados à transparência, à equidade percebida e às qualificações acadêmicas. Os respondentes recomendaram o aprimoramento dos critérios, a definição de qualificações acadêmicas padronizadas e a realização de revisões periódicas para alinhar o sistema aos objetivos estratégicos da universidade. Este estudo contribui para a compreensão dos sistemas de encaminhamento no ensino superior ao enfatizar a justiça e os padrões baseados no mérito, promovendo a confiança institucional e preservando a qualidade acadêmica.

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Introduction

In recent years, referral-based admission systems have gained traction in higher education institutions worldwide, as universities explore alternative ways to diversify and manage student populations (Starck et al., 2021). At Rizal Technological University (RTU), the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system has been integral to student admissions, functioning under the principle of providing accommodations for students with unique circumstances. Established in the 1990s, this system enables university employees, political figures, and foreign partners to recommend students, thereby facilitating their entry into the institution.

Studies worldwide has examined the ramifications of referral-based systems, with studies emphasizing both the benefits and obstacles (Ennover, 2024). A study suggests that referral systems can enhance educational access for marginalized populations, promote diversity, and fortify institutional networks (Pascua, 2023). Nevertheless, research has expressed apprehensions regarding equity and transparency, with some indicating that recommendations can favor relationships over academic qualifications, resulting in disparate chances for students (S. R. Morris, 2024). The efficacy of these systems in enhancing academic quality and advancing university objectives continues to be a topic of active discussion. The findings indicate that although referral systems may provide pragmatic answers for universities, their overall effect on equity and educational quality is intricate and necessitates thorough analysis (Banerjee, 2024).

Referral systems are frequently implemented in both public and private higher education institutions in the Philippines; however, they are not explicitly disclosed (Tiangco et al., 2024). At Rizal Technological University, the Special Accommodation for Admission system is implemented through recommendations from internal personnel, external figures such as public servants, and international partners (Taylan, 2021). Although this strategy is consistent with the university's objective of bolstering institutional connections and increasing enrollment, it has prompted inquiries regarding whether it guarantees equitable access to educational opportunities for all students, particularly those without personal or political connections. Additionally, the general academic performance and diversity of the student body may be impacted by the potential for such systems to prioritize non-academic factors in student selection (Kessler, 2023).

Despite the growing use of referral systems, there is limited research on the specific dynamics of the Special Accommodation for Admission system at RTU, especially regarding its fairness, effectiveness, and impact on the admissions process. While previous studies have touched on general issues related to university admissions and referral practices, there is a notable gap in understanding how the Special Accommodation for Admission operates within the unique institutional and cultural context of RTU. This gap in knowledge hinders efforts to

improve or reform the system in a way that ensures its alignment with the university's mission and academic standards.

The purpose of this study is to explore the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system at Rizal Technological University, focusing on its distribution across different colleges and institutes, as well as its perceived fairness, effectiveness, and impact on the admissions process. By addressing these aspects, this research aims to provide valuable insights that can inform policy improvements, ensuring that the system contributes to a fair and effective admission process while aligning with the university's goals. The findings will also serve as a basis for further discussions on how to create more transparent, equitable, and merit-based admissions practices in the Philippine higher education system.

To attain the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

What is the numerical and percentage distribution of students accepted through Special Accommodation for Admission among the colleges and institutes based on: Internal Recommendation; External Recommendation and Foreign Students?

How does the number of students externally recommended compare to those internally recommended following the Special Accommodation for Admission system in terms of colleges/institutes?

How do the respondents perceive Special Accommodation for Admission system in terms of: Fairness; Fairness; System effectiveness and Impact to Admission

Is there a significant correlation between the variables?

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant correlation between fairness, system effectiveness, and impact on admission in the Special Accommodation for Admission process.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant correlation between fairness, system effectiveness, and impact on admission in the Special Accommodation for Admission process, indicating that perceptions of fairness influence both system effectiveness and the perceived impact of the admission system.

Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to provide an in-depth understanding of the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system at Rizal Technological University (RTU) (Shoshan & Wehrt, 2021). The mixed-method approach is particularly effective in educational research, as it enables the integration of quantitative data and qualitative perspectives to provide a thorough knowledge of the impact and effectiveness of a certain system (Moltudal, 2021).

This study employs an embedded mixed-method design, utilizing quantitative methods as the primary approach, while qualitative data enhances and enriches the

interpretation of the results. In an embedded mixed-method design, one type of data is gathered within another, typically at various phases of the study process (Muraleedharan et al., 2022). Quantitative data was gathered via structured survey questionnaires, concentrating on the quantity of referrals across various categories (internal, external, and foreign) and respondents' perceptions of the Special Accommodation for Admission system's fairness, effectiveness, and impact (Burkart & Huber, 2021). The qualitative data were acquired through the open-ended component of the same survey, allowing respondents to articulate their perspectives, provide recommendations, and share personal experiences about the Special Accommodation for Admission system. This methodology is especially advantageous for examining intricate institutional systems such as Special Accommodation for Admission, since it enables researchers to quantify impressions while simultaneously providing an opportunity for complex viewpoints to surface.

The survey approach serves as the principal data collection tool for this investigation. The survey approach entails collecting data from participants by a systematic series of questions, which may be either closed-ended (quantitative) or open-ended (qualitative). Surveys are extensively utilized in educational research since they can gather data from numerous individuals in a brief timeframe (De Koning et al., 2021). The instrument comprises structured questions as well as open-ended parts to elicit qualitative responses. The open-ended parts enable participants to articulate their perspectives, expounding the rationale behind their quantitative ratings and enhancing the contextual comprehension of the referral system's influence on the department and academic procedures.

The instrument's Reliability Statistics indicate that the scale employed in the study demonstrates outstanding reliability, evidenced by the elevated values of Cronbach's α of 0.905 and McDonald's ω of 0.923. These indices, which assess the internal consistency of a scale, are essential for evaluating the coherence of items in measuring the same underlying construct. Levels beyond 0.70 are often deemed satisfactory; however, levels approaching 1.0, as recorded here, indicate an exceptionally high degree of consistency. This indicates that the items on the scale exhibit a strong correlation and reliably reflect the construct they are designed to assess. This high reliability bolsters the trustworthiness of the findings, suggesting that the scale yields stable and consistent results across many respondents. This degree of internal consistency reinforces the instrument's validity, guaranteeing that the collected data accurately represents the fundamental nature of the idea under investigation.

Respondents

The respondents in this study comprise department heads from various academic departments within the university, who play an essential role during the enrollment period as part of the second line of defense in the admissions process. Their responsibilities during enrollment are critical and multifaceted, encompassing the screening of applicants,

evaluating documentary requirements, conducting interviews, and performing additional post-admission assessments. This gatekeeping role allows them to directly oversee and influence the quality and standards of admitted students.

The department heads are also heavily impacted by the Special Accommodation for Admission system, which may at times introduce deviations from the established protocols they are accustomed to Enforcing. These potential deviations could add complexity to their tasks, as Special Accommodation for Admission referrals may bypass certain traditional screening steps, thus altering the usual flow of admission processes and potentially affecting the department's standards for admission. This influence of the Special Accommodation for Admission system on department heads' tasks makes them central stakeholders in understanding the system's impact on admissions and departmental operations.

Beyond enrollment duties, department heads are responsible for other essential academic functions, including designing the semester's course offerings, assigning teaching loads to faculty, and handling an array of faculty and student concerns. Their role in these areas means they need to maintain balance and consistency, ensuring that any deviations caused by the Special Accommodation for Admission system do not disrupt the operational efficiency or academic standards of their departments. Given these extensive responsibilities, department heads are uniquely positioned to offer informed perspectives on the Special Accommodation for Admission system's fairness, effectiveness, and influence on departmental and academic goals.

With a total of 27 department heads in the university, the study's sampling strategy aims for comprehensive representation. Statistical analysis indicates that a sample of at least 22 out of the 27 department heads would be sufficient to capture reliable insights. This targeted approach ensures that the study findings are grounded in the experiences and perspectives of those most directly involved in and affected by the admissions and academic structuring processes at the university, thus supporting a thorough evaluation of the Special Accommodation for Admission system's impact.

Data Analysis

A clearer picture of the ways in which various referral categories contribute to total admissions at RTU was provided by the utilization of percentages in the process of analyzing the distribution of students who were referred to the university (Allanson & Notar, 2020). Through the use of the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system, this technique uncovers patterns in the ways in which university personnel, external connections such as public servants, and foreign partners influence the composition of the student population.

The data analysis for this study focuses on calculating the mean score and standard deviation to interpret respondents' perceptions of the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system's fairness, effectiveness, and impact on admissions (Tanaka et al., 2020). The

mean score represents the average response for each survey item, providing a straightforward measure of the overall sentiment of respondents toward various aspects of the Special Accommodation for Admission system (Wilson, 2023). For example, a higher mean score on a particular statement indicates general agreement among respondents, whereas a lower mean suggests disagreement. The standard deviation complements the mean score by indicating the degree of variability in responses; a high standard deviation implies a wide range of opinions, while a low standard deviation suggests consensus (Lazarus et al., 2020).

These calculations were performed using Jamovi Statistical Software, a powerful tool for conducting descriptive and inferential analyses. Jamovi simplifies the process of calculating the mean and standard deviation, enabling accurate and efficient data analysis. By using Jamovi, this study ensures reliability in quantifying the attitudes and perceptions of participants, and the software's user-friendly interface allows for precise adjustments and analysis of results across different data sets (Shepherd & Richardson, 2023).

In addition to the quantitative data, verbatim qualitative responses were incorporated to support and add depth to the statistical findings (Desveaux et al., 2021). These qualitative insights, gathered from open-ended survey responses, were reviewed and selected based on their relevance to each of the primary themes explored in the survey. The verbatim data provide a richer context to the quantitative findings, offering direct quotes that illustrate the reasons behind respondents' ratings and shedding light on specific concerns or endorsements of the Special Accommodation for Admission system. For instance, if respondents rated the system low in terms of fairness, verbatim comments describing perceived inequalities or procedural inconsistencies were included to clarify and reinforce these perceptions.

Results & Discussion

Table 1.

Distribution Report of the Referred Students among Colleges and Institutes

Colleges	Internal	%	External	%	Foreign	%	Total	%
CAS	22	27.5	7	14.0	0	0.0	29	21.2
CED	9	11.3	5	10.0	5	71.4	19	13.9
CEng	18	22.5	6	12.0	1	14.3	25	18.2
CBEA	22	27.5	19	38.0	0	0.0	41	29.9
ICS	5	6.3	1	2.0	1	14.3	7	5.1
IA	3	3.8	1	2.0	0	0.0	4	2.9
IHK	0	0.0	2	4.0	0	0.0	2	1.5
OTHERS	1	1.3	9	18.0	0	0.0	10	7.3
TOTAL	80	100.0	50	100.0	7	100	137	100.0

Internal referrals from university staff, external referrals from public servants or former employees, and foreign referrals from international partners are all included in the table that illustrates the distribution of students who were accepted through the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system. With 22 students apiece, the College of Business, Entrepreneurship and Accountancy (CBEA) and the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) are the two colleges that lead the way in terms of internal referrals. This accounts for 27.5% of the overall number of referrals from within the institution. It would appear from this that university staff have a strong preference for these programs in terms of internal referrals. External referrals are likewise dominated by CBEA, which has 19 students and accounts for 38% of the external pool. On the other hand, CAS has 7 students, which accounts for 14% of the external pool. This demonstrates that CBEA has a solid position on being the referral choice of public servants or former employees, which significantly contributes to the organization's greater external referral base.

The College of Education (CED) stands out as having five international students, which accounts for 71.4% of all international referrals. In addition, the College of Engineering (CEng) and the Institute of Computer Studies (ICS) each have one international student, which accounts for 14.3% of the total number of international students. In light of this, the strong international ties that CED maintains through the linkages office of the university are brought to light. On the other hand, smaller institutes such as the Institute of Architecture (IA) and the Institute of Human Kinetics (IHK) display a low number of students in each and every category. IA has just three recommendations from within the organization (3.8%) and one referral from outside the organization (2%), but IHK has neither students from within nor students from outside the organization (4%).

While programs under CBEA and CAS have great appeal through both internal and external networks, the overall pattern implies that CED succeeds in international relations relative to referrals. On the other hand, smaller institutes such as IA and IHK might require a greater emphasis on increasing their visibility and interaction with internal, external, and international partners in order to improve the number of referrals they receive.

These findings are consistent with research that has been conducted on the influence of institutional collaborations in higher education as well as referral-based admissions process. A study on enrollment management that was conducted by Gao and Adamson (2022) sheds light on the ways in which internal networks and external stakeholders might have an effect on student recruiting outcomes. This study found that universities frequently rely on recommendations from both within and outside the institution in order to entice students to enroll in particular programs. This is especially true for programs that provide strong professional or career-oriented pathways, such as the College of Business, Entrepreneurship, and Accountancy (CBEA) at Rizal Technological University (RTU). Because of their market relevance and alignment with the demands of the job market, these programs typically benefit

from active referrals from both the personnel of the institution and entities from the outside of the university.

Table 2.

Number-based Distribution of Referred Students among the Categories

College	Internal Recommendations	External Recommendations	Foreign Recommendations	Total Recommendations
CAS	22	7	0	29
CED	9	5	5	19
CEng	18	6	1	25
CBEA	22	19	0	41
ICS	5	1	1	7
IA	3	1	0	4
IHK	0	2	0	2
OTHER S	1	9	0	10
Total	80	50	7	137

A breakdown of referral-based recommendations for the various colleges at the university is presented in the table. It also highlights the origins of these recommendations, which are classified as either internal, external, or foreign for the colleges. With a total of 41 recommendations, the College of Business, Entrepreneurship, and Accountancy (CBEA) stands out as the institution with the highest overall number of recommendations. This includes a significant contribution from both internal recommendations (22) and suggestions from outside sources (19). This indicates that CBEA is able to benefit from strong internal support as well as a wide external network. This may be attributed to the fact that there are several employment options related to business and entrepreneurship, which makes it an appealing field for students who are considering enrolling in it.

The Institute of Human Kinetics (IHK), on the other hand, was the place that received the fewest recommendations, with only two suggestions coming from outside sources and none coming from either internal or external sources. This may be due to a decrease in the demand for IHK programs or perhaps a lack of participation from individuals who are in a position to provide referrals. In a similar vein, the low recommendation numbers for the Institute of Architecture (IA) and the Institute of Computer Studies (ICS) imply that these fields are not as prominently supported within the referral system. This could be due to a lack of awareness or a less emphasis on these programs by both internal and external sources.

The ramifications of these findings show that there is a mismatch in support and visibility among programs, which may have an effect on the diversity of enrollment and the distribution of resources among administrative departments. Higher referral rates may result

in increased enrolment demand for some programs, which may have an impact on the distribution of university resources and the amount of work that faculty members are expected to do. To the contrary, programs that receive a smaller number of referrals might need to implement more marketing or strategic initiatives in order to attract a wider variety of applicants. In addition, the low number of suggestions from foreign countries suggests that the institution has a restricted reach in terms of worldwide participation. This suggests that there is a possible area in which the university might increase its global ties.

This referral pattern is reflective of broader findings in university admissions research, which demonstrate that programs that are linked to high-demand professional routes tend to draw a greater number of referrals, whereas programs that are less visible tend to receive fewer applicants. As an illustration, Mainga et al. (2022) made the observation that university workers and external stakeholders who understand the practical value and job chances that these degrees give are more likely to promote programs in subjects that have a great demand in the labor market. These fields include business and the sciences. This is consistent with the high referral rates that are observed in the College of Business, Entrepreneurship and Accountancy (CBEA) and the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) at RTU. In these educational institutions, students are actively referred by both internal and external networks.

Table 3.

Mean and Standard Deviation Values on Special Accommodation for Admission's Fairness

Statement	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
The Special Accommodation for Admission system ensures equal opportunity for all students.	1.74	1.046	Strongly Disagree
The Special Accommodation for Admission referral process is transparent.	2.37	1.422	Disagree
The system's student slot allocation per employee is fair.	2.74	1.147	Moderately Agree
External recommendations do not compromise the fairness of the Special Accommodation for Admission system.	2.53	1.307	Disagree
Special Accommodation for Admission referrals prioritize student merit over personal connections.	2.00	1.106	Disagree
The two-slot limit per employee should be strictly enforced for fairness.	3.47	1.467	Agree
Employees generally follow the same rules when referring students.	2.63	1.300	Moderately Agree
Students referred through Special Accommodation for Admission have a fair chance of acceptance.	2.79	1.437	Moderately Agree
The Special Accommodation for Admission system treats internal and external recommendations fairly.	2.37	1.257	Disagree
The Special Accommodation for Admission system upholds fairness in the overall admission process.	1.84	0.958	Disagree
Over-all	2.45	1.245	Moderately Agree

The table provides a detailed view of respondents' perceptions regarding the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system, emphasizing fairness, transparency, and adherence to established guidelines. The statement with the highest mean score, "*The two-slot*

limit per employee should be strictly enforced for fairness,” has a mean of 3.47 and a relatively high standard deviation of 1.467, interpreted as "Agree." This high standard deviation indicates a broad range of opinions, suggesting that while many respondents support strict enforcement, there are differing views on the slot limit’s implementation and impact. One respondent emphasized, *“The 2-student per employee rule must be strictly implemented, and Special Accommodation for Admission must be limited to at least 3rd-degree relatives.”* This variability may reflect differences in how employees view the connection between strict limits and fairness, underlining the importance of clear policy communication to address concerns about potential favoritism.

The mid-range mean score, observed for the statement *“Students referred through Special Accommodation for Admission have a fair chance of acceptance,”* is 2.79, with a standard deviation of 1.437, translating to “Moderately Agree.” This similarly high standard deviation implies that respondents have mixed perceptions about the fairness of Special Accommodation for Admission’s acceptance rate for referred students. The wide distribution of responses suggests that while there is moderate confidence in the system’s fairness, some question its consistency. This sentiment is reinforced by a respondent’s statement, *“As far as I know, there are no clear policies regarding Special Accommodation for Admission. All I know is there are lists provided by admissions/guidance.”* This feedback points to a need for more standardized guidelines to foster confidence in the system's fairness.

The statement with the lowest mean score, *“The Special Accommodation for Admission system ensures equal opportunity for all students,”* received a mean of 1.74 with a standard deviation of 1.046, interpreted as "Strongly Disagree." The lower standard deviation here reflects a more consistent opinion among respondents, with most agreeing that the system does not ensure equal opportunities. This consensus suggests significant skepticism regarding Special Accommodation for Admission’s fairness, likely due to factors such as external referrals and perceived inconsistencies in the system’s application. A respondent noted, *“There should be qualifications such as exam or grade requirements for those Special Accommodation for Admission applicants prior to admission,”* indicating a demand for merit-based criteria to improve fairness.

In general, the overall mean score for all statements is 2.45, with a standard deviation of 1.245, corresponding to “Moderately Agree.” The moderate standard deviation here implies varied but generally moderate agreement across responses, highlighting areas where respondents see some fairness in the Special Accommodation for Admission system, yet also stressing notable concerns regarding equal opportunity and transparency.

These findings align with research on university referral systems, revealing that stakeholders are highly sensitive to potential biases and integrity in admissions (Bentalha & Alla, 2024). Studies emphasize that transparent and consistently enforced policies are essential to build trust and ensure fairness, especially when systems incorporate external

networks or referral-based admissions (Chen, 2024). High variation in perceptions, as indicated by standard deviations, suggests that policy clarity and accountability measures are critical to address discrepancies in perceived fairness and ensure that all stakeholders feel the system operates equitably.

Table 4.

Mean and Standard Deviation Values of the Special Accommodation for Admission's Effectiveness

Statement	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
The Special Accommodation for Admission system enables deserving students to gain admission.	2.37	1.065	Disagree
Students admitted through Special Accommodation for Admission contribute positively to the university community.	2.37	0.955	Disagree
Special Accommodation for Admission referrals support the university's admission strategy.	2.53	1.219	Disagree
The Special Accommodation for Admission system ensures consistency in the admission process.	2.16	1.015	Disagree
Special Accommodation for Admission-referred students generally perform well academically.	2.37	0.955	Disagree
The referral process is well-organized and efficient.	2.37	1.300	Disagree
The Special Accommodation for Admission system helps attract a diverse group of students to the university.	2.32	1.108	Disagree
The system supports the university's long-term mission and academic goals.	2.32	1.108	Disagree
The Special Accommodation for Admission system should continue as part of the university's admission process.	2.53	0.905	Disagree
The Special Accommodation for Admission system is an effective tool for selecting qualified students.	2.00	1.247	Disagree
Over-all	2.33	1.088	Disagree

The table provides a comprehensive analysis of respondents' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and impact of the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system on the university's admission process. The statement with the highest mean score, "*Special Accommodation for Admission referrals support the university's admission strategy*," holds a mean of 2.53 and a standard deviation of 1.219, interpreted as "Disagree." While the mean score reflects a general disagreement, the relatively high standard deviation reveals a considerable variance in opinions. This suggests that while some respondents believe the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system does not align well with the university's strategic objectives, others may view it as playing a supportive role in the institution's broader admission goals. This discrepancy highlights the need for clearer communication and alignment between the Special Accommodation for Admission system and the university's admission strategy to ensure that all stakeholders understand the system's intended function and impact. As one respondent aptly noted, "*Depending on the Special Accommodation for*

Admission, it can be both beneficial and not beneficial to the institution,” illustrating the complex perspectives surrounding the system's effectiveness.

The mid-range mean score of 2.16, with a standard deviation of 1.015, is associated with the statement, *“The Special Accommodation for Admission system ensures consistency in the admission process,”* interpreted as "Disagree." The lower standard deviation in this case signals that most respondents consistently feel the Special Accommodation for Admission system lacks consistency, with little variability in opinions. This suggests a more unified concern that the referral process is not standardized, potentially resulting in unequal treatment of students and disparities in the outcomes of the admission process. One respondent's comment, *"The lack of clear criteria in Special Accommodation for Admission referrals leads to inconsistent outcomes,"* accentuates this sentiment, emphasizing the need for a more structured and transparent referral process to maintain fairness and consistency.

The statement with the lowest mean score, *“The Special Accommodation for Admission system is an effective tool for selecting qualified students,”* received a mean of 2.00 and a standard deviation of 1.247, interpreted as "Disagree." This reflects a strong consensus among respondents that the system is ineffective in selecting the most qualified candidates based on merit. The high standard deviation, however, indicates that a small group of respondents may still perceive Special Accommodation for Admission as an effective tool, with some believing it serves its intended purpose. Nonetheless, the predominant view suggests that the system's reliance on personal connections or informal networks compromises its ability to identify the most academically qualified students. One respondent's statement, *“Special Accommodation for Admission is not an effective tool, it is better to admit students based on the results of the entrance exam,”* reflects widespread concerns that Special Accommodation for Admission referrals prioritize relationships over academic qualifications, potentially undermining the quality of the student body.

In general, the overall mean score for the set of statements is 2.33, with a standard deviation of 1.088, which corresponds to "Disagree." The moderate standard deviation indicates that while the majority of respondents disagree with the system's effectiveness and fairness, there remains a small group with differing views. This suggests that while there is significant concern about the Special Accommodation for Admission system's alignment with university goals, its consistency, and its merit-based selection process, some individuals still see potential value in the system. The general trend points to a clear need for substantial revisions to the Special Accommodation for Admission system to improve its alignment with the university's strategic goals, ensure consistency, and better prioritize academic merit in the admission process. As one respondent aptly expressed, *“We are hoping that the research would be a basis for providing a better special admissions policy - to formalize the process. After all, there will always be referrals, and the university can always choose to either accept or reject them.”*

These findings resonate with research on referral-based admission systems, which often reveal mixed perceptions regarding their fairness and effectiveness in selecting qualified students. As noted by Halabieh et al. (2022), referral systems can be perceived as beneficial or problematic depending on how they are structured and implemented. The variability in responses, indicated by high standard deviations, underscores the need for clear policies, greater transparency, and enhanced fairness to foster trust and improve the overall effectiveness of university admission processes. These insights highlight the importance of establishing a more formalized and transparent referral system that is better aligned with merit-based admission criteria, ensuring fairness and academic integrity.

Table 5.

Mean and Standard Deviation Values on Special Accommodation for Admission's Impact to Admission

Statement	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Special Accommodation for Admission referrals affect the number of students admitted to our department program.	3.74	1.447	Agree
Special Accommodation for Admission students contribute to the academic diversity in our department.	2.89	1.37	Moderately Agree
Special Accommodation for Admission admissions impact departmental resource allocation and faculty workload.	3.74	0.872	Agree
Special Accommodation for Admission-referred students align with the department's academic standards.	2.16	0.958	Disagree
The Special Accommodation for Admission system helps my department meet its enrollment targets.	2.79	1.357	Moderately Agree
The Special Accommodation for Admission process affects the distribution of students across blocks in our department.	3.47	1.307	Agree
Special Accommodation for Admission referrals influence class size management within the department.	3.84	1.119	Agree
Special Accommodation for Admission admissions enhance the academic quality of students in the department.	2.26	0.933	Disagree
The Special Accommodation for Admission system affects our department's long-term academic planning.	3.26	0.991	Moderately Agree
Special Accommodation for Admission referrals influence departmental admission decisions and priorities.	3.68	1.003	Agree
Over-all	3.18	1.136	Moderately Agree

The table presents data on respondents' perceptions regarding the impact of the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system on departmental processes and academic goals. The statement with the highest mean score, "*Special Accommodation for Admission referrals influence class size management within the department,*" achieved a mean of 3.84 and a standard deviation of 1.119, interpreted as "Agree." This indicates that a majority of respondents believe that Special Accommodation for Admission referrals play a significant role in managing class sizes. The moderate standard deviation suggests that while most respondents are in agreement, there is still some variation in opinions regarding the extent of the system's influence. This variability could be due to differences in how individual

departments manage their student intake. The implication is clear that the Special Accommodation for Admission system, particularly its role in determining student admissions, directly affects departmental resource planning, and careful attention is needed to balance student numbers with class size and faculty resources. One respondent succinctly stated, *“The Special Accommodation for Admission system directly affects our planning for both faculty workload and classroom resources,”* emphasizing its practical implications on resource management.

The second-highest mean score is for the statement, *“Special Accommodation for Admission referrals affect the number of students admitted to our department program,”* with a mean of 3.74 and a standard deviation of 1.447, interpreted as "Agree." The relatively high standard deviation indicates a broader range of opinions among respondents, with some strongly agreeing that the referral system significantly impacts their department's enrollment numbers, while others may have reservations about its effect. This suggests that the influence of Special Accommodation for Admission referrals on program enrollment may vary by department, reflecting the diverse nature of academic disciplines and how departments view and manage referral-based admissions. The considerable variation highlights a need for more consistent and transparent policies regarding how referrals are integrated into the admissions process, as one respondent noted, *“There should be clear policies on accepting Special Accommodation for Admission referrals to prevent any confusion or inconsistency.”*

The mid-range mean score is for the statement, *“The Special Accommodation for Admission system affects our department's long-term academic planning,”* with a mean of 3.26 and a standard deviation of 0.991, interpreted as "Moderately Agree." The lower standard deviation suggests a more consistent belief that Special Accommodation for Admission has some, albeit moderate, impact on long-term academic planning. While not perceived as the primary driver of academic strategy, the Special Accommodation for Admission system is still seen as a factor to consider in future departmental decisions. This perception likely reflects the degree to which departments are incorporating Special Accommodation for Admission into their broader academic goals and resource allocation. One respondent pointed out, *“Special Accommodation for Admission must be reconsidered to improve long-term academic planning and prioritize admissions based on merit,”* highlighting concerns that the system's current structure may not align with future academic priorities.

The statement with the lowest mean score, *“Special Accommodation for Admission-referred students enhance the academic quality of students in the department,”* received a mean of 2.26 and a standard deviation of 0.933, interpreted as "Disagree." The low mean score, coupled with a relatively narrow standard deviation, reflects a consistent and clear perception that Special Accommodation for Admission-referred students do not necessarily contribute positively to the academic quality of the department. This outcome highlights a concern that the Special Accommodation for Admission system, with its focus on personal connections

rather than academic merit, might compromise the overall academic standards of the department. One respondent highlighted this concern, stating, *“Those Special Accommodation for Admission students who are not performing well or who have reached the maximum failing grades are often separated from the department,”* suggesting that the system may admit students who do not meet the academic standards typically expected of students in the department.

In general, the overall mean score for the set of statements is 3.18 with a standard deviation of 1.136, which corresponds to "Moderately Agree." This result indicates that while respondents acknowledge the influence of the Special Accommodation for Admission system on departmental operations—particularly in areas such as class size management and student enrollment—its impact on academic quality and long-term planning is less universally endorsed. The moderate standard deviation here suggests that perceptions of the system's effectiveness vary, with departments experiencing different levels of impact depending on their specific needs and priorities.

These findings resonate with existing research on referral-based admission systems in higher education, which often point to mixed impacts on academic planning, enrollment, and resource allocation (Davis, 2021). The high standard deviations reflect the diversity of opinions on how these systems affect academic outcomes, underscoring the need for ongoing evaluation and refinement of the Special Accommodation for Admission referral process. The variation in responses highlights the importance of developing clearer and more consistent policies to ensure the system supports departmental goals, maintains academic standards, and aligns with the university's long-term objectives. Such efforts would help create a more transparent, merit-based admissions process that balances the needs of the institution with the goal of promoting academic excellence.

Table 6.
Correlation Report

Variables	Pearson's r	p-value
Fairness and System Effectiveness	0.637	< 0.003**
Fairness and Impact to Admission	0.688	< 0.001**
System Effectiveness and Impact to Admission	0.458	0.049*

The correlation report shows significant relationships among fairness, system effectiveness, and impact on admission in the context of university admissions. Firstly, *fairness and system effectiveness* exhibit a strong positive correlation ($r=0.637$, $p=0.003$), indicating that as *fairness in the admission process improve*, so does the *effectiveness of the system*. This suggests that stakeholders view an equitable process as integral to an efficient

system, reinforcing the idea that transparency and consistency contribute to a well-functioning admissions mechanism.

Secondly, fairness also has a strong positive correlation with impact on admission ($r = 0.688$, $p = 0.001$), meaning that *fairness significantly influences how the admission process is perceived in terms of its impact*. This implies that if *fairness is upheld*, the overall credibility and acceptance of *admission outcomes improve*, possibly affecting stakeholder trust and institutional reputation.

Finally, the correlation between system effectiveness and impact on admission ($r = 0.458$, $p = 0.049$) is moderate but still statistically significant. This suggests that while an effective system contributes to a smoother admission process, its perceived impact is not solely dependent on efficiency but also on other factors such as accessibility, flexibility, and responsiveness.

These findings highlight the complicated relationship between fairness, effectiveness, and admission outcomes. If the institution seeks to refine its admission policies, ensuring fairness should be a top priority, as it directly strengthens both system effectiveness and perceived impact. This emphasizes the need for a balanced approach—one that prioritizes procedural justice while optimizing operational efficiency to sustain trust and institutional credibility.

Conclusion

This study highlights critical perceptions and concerns regarding the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system at Rizal Technological University, emphasizing the need for enhancements in transparency, fairness, and academic standards within the admissions process. While the system aids in meeting enrollment targets, respondents indicate that it may benefit from stricter policies, clearer guidelines, and more merit-based criteria to ensure that admissions reflect the university's commitment to equity and academic excellence. Correlation analysis further supports these concerns, revealing strong positive relationships between fairness and system effectiveness.

These findings suggest that as fairness perceptions improve, so do both the perceived effectiveness of the system and its impact on admissions, reinforcing the necessity of a transparent and just referral process. The moderate correlation between system effectiveness and impact on admission highlights that while an efficient system is valuable, its legitimacy also depends on fairness and adherence to guidelines. This study accentuates the importance of refining the Special Accommodation for Admission system to better serve both the institution's mission and the aspirations of its students, ensuring a balance between accessibility, procedural justice, and academic integrity not only within the bounds of RTU but among other universities as well.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Rizal Technological University, through its admission office, strengthen the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system by implementing clearer guidelines and stricter policies to ensure fairness and merit-based referral-based admissions. The university should rigorously enforce the two-slot limit per employee to prevent undue influence in the referral process. Clear criteria prioritizing academic qualifications, such as minimum standards or entrance exam requirements, should be established to ensure merit-based admissions.

Increasing transparency by providing detailed information on admission criteria and the roles of internal, external, and international referrals would enhance trust and promote fairness, aligning the process with the university's commitment to academic excellence. Regular assessments of the Special Accommodation for Admission system's impact on departmental resources, class size management, and academic quality are also advised to ensure that it aligns with the university's goals and standards.

Creating a formal review process for low-performing Special Accommodation for Admission students may help maintain academic standards within each department, supporting both student success and the overall quality of the university's academic environment.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include several factors that may impact the generalizability and depth of the findings. First, while the study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of the Special Accommodation for Admission referral system among various stakeholders, the scope is limited to one institution, Rizal Technological University, which may limit the applicability of results to other settings or systems.

Data collection primarily relied on self-reported perceptions through surveys, which could introduce subjective bias and may not capture the full range of stakeholder views or unspoken sentiments. Furthermore, the qualitative data were limited to verbatim responses, which, while useful in supporting quantitative findings, may not provide an exhaustive view of the diverse opinions and experiences related to Special Accommodation for Admission referrals.

Although the mixed-method approach strengthens the study, a more extensive qualitative component, such as interviews or focus groups, could offer deeper insights into individual and departmental perspectives on system effectiveness and fairness. Future research could expand on these limitations by incorporating broader institutional comparisons and more robust qualitative methods.

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Disclosure of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to this study. All research activities, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation, were conducted independently and without any external influence that could affect the study's outcomes or conclusions. The authors have no financial, professional, or personal affiliations that could be perceived as having biased the study. All results and interpretations presented are solely the product of unbiased research efforts.

Ethics Statement

This study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical guidelines to ensure the integrity and respect for all participants involved. Informed consent was obtained from all survey participants before data collection commenced. Each participant was fully informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses.

Data collection was carried out after ethics approval using an online-based survey, allowing participants to complete the questionnaire at their convenience and in a secure environment that protects their privacy. The writing of the manuscript was guided solely by human input, with content developed by the authors. ChatGPT was used exclusively to enhance and refine language and structure, with no autonomous data analysis, interpretation, or original content generation by AI.

The authors have full responsibility for all content in the study, including interpretations, conclusions, and overall ethical accountability. This ensures that all findings and insights presented in the manuscript are the result of human analysis and judgment.

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