

The Role of Internal Cash Control and Separation of Accounting Functions in Reducing the Risk of Financial Fraud in Savings and Loan Cooperatives in Central Java

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ABSTRACT

Financial fraud remains a major challenge for savings and loan cooperatives, particularly in maintaining sound financial governance and member trust. This study examines the role of internal cash control and the separation of accounting functions in reducing the risk of financial fraud in savings and loan cooperatives in Central Java. A quantitative research approach was employed using data collected from 100 cooperative employees through structured questionnaires measured on a Likert scale. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression with SPSS version 25. The results show that internal cash control has a significant negative effect on the risk of financial fraud, indicating that stronger cash control mechanisms reduce opportunities for misappropriation. The separation of accounting functions also has a significant negative effect on fraud risk, demonstrating the importance of clear segregation of duties in preventing unethical behavior. Simultaneously, both variables significantly influence the reduction of financial fraud risk in savings and loan cooperatives. These findings highlight the critical role of effective internal control systems in strengthening financial integrity and sustainability within cooperative institutions.

Keywords: *Internal Cash Control, Separation of Accounting Functions, Financial Fraud Risk, Savings and Loan Cooperatives, Internal Control System.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Savings and loan cooperatives play a strategic role in supporting financial inclusion and local economic development, particularly in regions such as Central Java where they serve micro, small, and community-based economic activities, and as member-owned financial institutions, they are expected to operate based on principles of transparency, accountability, and mutual trust; however, in practice, many cooperatives face serious challenges in financial governance, especially the risk of financial fraud arising from weak internal control systems and inadequate organizational structures, which often manifests in the form of cash misappropriation [1], [2], manipulation of financial records, fictitious loans, and abuse of authority by internal personnel, causing not only financial losses but also eroding member trust and threatening cooperative sustainability, as several reported cases in Indonesia indicate that such fraud is frequently linked to poor cash control procedures and the concentration of accounting functions in a single individual or unit, thereby creating significant opportunities for unethical behavior and underscoring the urgency of strengthening internal control mechanisms within cooperative institutions.

Internal cash control is a critical component of an effective internal control system, as it encompasses policies and procedures designed to safeguard cash assets, ensure accurate recording of transactions, and prevent unauthorized use of funds, where proper mechanisms such as authorization procedures, adequate documentation, periodic reconciliation, and supervisory oversight are essential in minimizing opportunities for fraud, because without adequate internal cash control cooperatives become highly vulnerable to errors and intentional misconduct; in addition

[2], [3], the separation of accounting functions (segregation of duties) is widely recognized as a fundamental principle of internal control that emphasizes the division of responsibilities among different individuals for authorization, recordkeeping, and asset custody, thereby reducing the risk of fraud and errors since no single individual has complete control over all aspects of a financial transaction, although in many savings and loan cooperatives limited human resources often lead to overlapping roles, which in turn increases the likelihood of financial fraud.

From a theoretical perspective, the importance of internal control and segregation of duties can be explained through agency theory and fraud triangle theory. Agency theory suggests that conflicts of interest between principals (members) and agents (management) can lead to opportunistic behavior if not properly controlled, particularly when information asymmetry exists [4], [5]. Meanwhile, fraud triangle theory identifies opportunity as one of the main drivers of fraud, alongside pressure and rationalization. Weak internal cash control systems and the absence of proper separation of accounting functions significantly increase opportunities for fraud to occur, making internal control mechanisms essential in reducing fraudulent behavior within cooperative institutions.

Although prior studies have examined internal control systems and fraud prevention in various organizational contexts, empirical research focusing specifically on savings and loan cooperatives in Central Java remains limited. Given the unique characteristics of cooperatives—such as member-based ownership, community orientation, and relatively simple organizational structures—there is a need for context-specific empirical evidence. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of internal cash control and the separation of accounting functions in reducing the risk of financial fraud in savings and loan cooperatives in Central Java. Using a quantitative approach with data collected from cooperative employees and analyzed using SPSS version 25, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these internal control mechanisms, contributing both theoretically to the literature on fraud prevention and practically by offering actionable recommendations for cooperative management and policymakers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Savings and Loan Cooperatives*

Savings and loan cooperatives are financial institutions owned and managed by their members with the primary objective of improving members' economic welfare through the collection of savings and the redistribution of funds in the form of loans, particularly for micro and small-scale economic actors, and due to their community-based nature they are expected to uphold strong ethical values, transparency, and accountability in financial management; however [6], [7], limited managerial capacity, weak governance structures, and inadequate internal control systems often expose these cooperatives to financial irregularities and fraud, and in the Indonesian context, although savings and loan cooperatives operate under specific regulations and are supervised by relevant authorities, many still struggle to implement effective internal controls—especially in cash management and accounting practices—thereby increasing the importance of strengthening internal mechanisms to ensure financial integrity and long-term sustainability [7].

2.2 *Financial Fraud*

Financial fraud refers to intentional acts of deception committed to obtain unlawful financial benefits, resulting in losses to organizations or individuals, and in cooperative institutions it may take various forms such as cash theft, falsification of financial reports, manipulation of loan data, and misuse of cooperative funds for personal interests, which not only cause direct financial losses but also damage organizational reputation and undermine member trust; according to fraud triangle theory, fraud arises from the interaction of pressure [4], [8], opportunity, and rationalization, where opportunity is a dominant factor that organizations can control through effective internal control systems, as weak cash control procedures and the absence of proper separation of accounting functions create conditions that significantly increase opportunities for fraud, making fraud prevention strategies largely focused on minimizing such opportunities through the implementation of strong internal controls.

2.3 Internal Cash Control

Internal cash control is a component of internal control systems that focuses on safeguarding cash assets and ensuring that cash transactions are properly authorized, recorded, and monitored through procedures such as segregation of cash handling duties, authorization of cash receipts and disbursements, proper documentation, regular cash reconciliation, and periodic internal audits, and strong internal cash control reduces the likelihood of cash misappropriation and errors by limiting unauthorized access to cash and ensuring accountability in cash transactions [9], [10], as previous studies consistently show that effective cash control mechanisms are negatively associated with fraud risk, indicating that stronger controls contribute to better fraud prevention, particularly in savings and loan cooperatives where cash transactions are frequent and significant and thus play a vital role in maintaining financial discipline.

2.4 Separation of Accounting Functions

The separation of accounting functions, commonly referred to as segregation of duties, is a fundamental principle of internal control that involves dividing key financial responsibilities—such as authorization, recordkeeping, and asset custody—among different individuals or units in order to prevent a single individual from having excessive control over financial transactions that could facilitate fraud or errors, and in practice effective separation of accounting functions allows errors or irregularities to be detected more easily because one individual's work is subject to review by another [11], [12]; however, many savings and loan cooperatives face challenges in implementing proper segregation of duties due to limited human resources and simple organizational structures, which often result in overlapping roles and increase the risk of financial fraud, even though empirical evidence suggests that organizations with clear separation of accounting functions tend to experience lower fraud risk compared to those with concentrated accounting responsibilities.

2.5 Internal Control and Agency Theory

Agency theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the importance of internal control systems in organizations by explaining the relationship between principals (members or owners) and agents (management) and highlighting potential conflicts of interest arising from information asymmetry, where in cooperatives management may possess more information about financial activities than members,

creating opportunities for opportunistic behavior; therefore, internal cash control and the separation of accounting functions function as mechanisms to reduce agency problems by limiting managerial discretion and increasing transparency, so that by strengthening internal controls cooperatives can better align management actions with members' interests and reduce the risk of financial fraud arising from agency conflicts.

2.6 Hypothesis Development

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical evidence discussed above, internal cash control and the separation of accounting functions are expected to play a significant role in reducing the risk of financial fraud in savings and loan cooperatives, as effective internal cash control limits unauthorized access to cash and ensures proper monitoring of cash transactions thereby reducing opportunities for fraud, while the separation of accounting functions minimizes role conflicts and prevents the concentration of financial authority that could facilitate fraudulent behavior; accordingly, this study formulates its hypotheses to empirically examine the influence of these two internal control mechanisms on financial fraud risk.

H1: Internal cash control has a significant negative effect on the risk of financial fraud in savings and loan cooperatives.

H2: The separation of accounting functions has a significant negative effect on the risk of financial fraud in savings and loan cooperatives.

H3: Internal cash control and separation of accounting functions simultaneously have a significant effect on reducing the risk of financial fraud in savings and loan cooperatives.

This literature review forms the conceptual basis for the empirical analysis conducted in this study and guides the development of the research model and methodology.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research approach with an explanatory research design. The objective of this design is to examine and explain the causal relationship between internal cash control and the separation of accounting functions on the risk of financial fraud in savings and loan cooperatives in Central Java. Quantitative methods are considered appropriate because the study aims to test hypotheses and measure the strength and direction of relationships among variables using statistical analysis.

3.2 Research Location and Object

The research was conducted in savings and loan cooperatives operating in Central Java, Indonesia. The object of this study includes internal control practices within cooperatives, specifically internal cash control and the separation of accounting functions, as well as the perceived risk of financial fraud. Respondents involved in this study are individuals who are directly engaged in financial and accounting activities, such as managers, treasurers, cashiers, and accounting staff.

3.3 Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of employees working in savings and loan cooperatives in Central Java who are involved in financial management and accounting processes, and due to

limitations in access and time the study adopts a sample-based approach by selecting 100 respondents using purposive sampling, with criteria that respondents must be employees of savings and loan cooperatives in Central Java and have direct involvement in cash handling, accounting, or financial reporting activities, a technique chosen to ensure that the respondents possess sufficient knowledge and experience relevant to the variables examined in this study.

3.4 Research Variables and Operational Definitions

This study involves one dependent variable and two independent variables, namely internal cash control (X_1), separation of accounting functions (X_2), and risk of financial fraud (Y), where internal cash control refers to the policies and procedures implemented by cooperatives to safeguard cash assets and ensure proper authorization, recording, and monitoring of cash transactions with indicators including authorization of cash transactions, completeness of documentation, regular cash reconciliation, supervisory oversight, and physical safeguarding of cash; separation of accounting functions refers to the division of responsibilities among different individuals for authorization, recordkeeping, and custody of assets, measured through indicators such as clear task division, absence of overlapping roles, independent verification of transactions, and accountability mechanisms; while the risk of financial fraud refers to the likelihood of fraudulent activities occurring within savings and loan cooperatives, including cash misappropriation, manipulation of accounting records, and misuse of funds, with indicators covering perceived vulnerability to fraud, frequency of irregularities, weaknesses in supervision, and the potential for unethical behavior.

3.5 Data Collection Method

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed directly to respondents. The questionnaire was designed based on relevant literature and previous studies related to internal control and fraud risk. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale allows respondents to express the degree of their agreement with each statement and facilitates quantitative analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 through several stages, beginning with descriptive statistics to describe respondents' characteristics and provide an overview of the distribution of responses for each variable, followed by classical assumption tests—including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests—to ensure the validity of the regression model, after which multiple linear regression analysis was employed to examine the effect of internal cash control and the separation of accounting functions on the risk of financial fraud using the model $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$, where Y represents the risk of financial fraud, X_1 represents internal cash control, X_2 represents the separation of accounting functions, α is the constant, β_1 and β_2 are regression coefficients, and ε is the error term, and finally hypothesis testing was conducted using the t-test to assess the partial effects of each independent variable and the F-test to evaluate their simultaneous effect on the dependent variable, with the coefficient of determination (R^2) used to measure the explanatory power of the regression model.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed and returned completely, indicating a response rate of 100%. Respondents consisted of managers, treasurers, cashiers, and accounting staff working in savings and loan cooperatives in Central Java.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Category	Description	Frequency	Percentage
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Position	Manager	25	25%
	Treasurer/Cashier	40	40%
	Accounting Staff	35	35%
Education	Senior High School	32	32%
	Diploma	28	28%
	Bachelor Degree	40	40%
Work Experience	< 5 years	30	30%
	5–10 years	45	45%
	> 10 years	25	25%

Table 1 presents the profile of respondents involved in this study, showing that the majority of respondents hold positions directly related to financial operations within savings and loan cooperatives, namely treasurers/cashiers (40%) and accounting staff (35%), while managers account for 25%, indicating that the data were obtained from individuals who are closely involved in financial management and therefore possess relevant knowledge regarding internal cash control, accounting functions, and fraud risk; in terms of educational background, most respondents have a bachelor's degree (40%), followed by senior high school graduates (32%) and diploma holders (28%), suggesting a relatively adequate level of formal education to understand financial and accounting procedures, while the distribution of work experience shows that 45% of respondents have worked for 5–10 years, 30% have less than five years of experience, and 25% have more than ten years of experience, indicating that the majority of respondents have sufficient practical experience in cooperative operations, which strengthens the reliability of their perceptions and responses regarding internal control practices and financial fraud risk within savings and loan cooperatives.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provide an overview of respondents' perceptions regarding internal cash control, separation of accounting functions, and financial fraud risk.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Internal Cash Control (X_1)	100	2.40	4.80	3.92	0.46
Separation of Accounting Functions (X_2)	100	2.30	4.70	3.85	0.49
Risk of Financial Fraud (Y)	100	1.90	4.60	2.41	0.58

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the research variables, indicating that internal cash control (X_1) has a mean value of 3.92 with a standard deviation of 0.46, suggesting that, on average, savings and loan cooperatives in Central Java have implemented internal cash control practices at a relatively good level with fairly consistent responses among respondents, as reflected by the low dispersion of data; similarly, the separation of accounting functions (X_2) shows a mean value of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 0.49, indicating that the segregation of duties in cooperatives is generally perceived as adequate, although some variability still exists due to differences in organizational size and human resource capacity, while the risk of financial fraud (Y) records a lower mean value of 2.41 with a standard deviation of 0.58, implying that respondents perceive the overall risk of financial fraud to be relatively low to moderate, and this pattern supports the assumption that better implementation of internal cash control and separation of accounting functions is associated with lower perceived fraud risk in savings and loan cooperatives.

4.3 Validity and Reliability Test Results

Validity testing showed that all questionnaire items had correlation coefficients greater than the critical value ($r_{\text{table}} = 0.196$, $n = 100$, $\alpha = 0.05$), indicating that all items were valid.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Result
Internal Cash Control (X_1)	0.812	Reliable
Separation of Accounting Functions (X_2)	0.798	Reliable
Risk of Financial Fraud (Y)	0.845	Reliable

Table 3 presents the results of the reliability test, showing that all research variables have Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70, which indicates good internal consistency of the measurement instruments. Internal cash control (X_1) has a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.812, while separation of accounting functions (X_2) records a value of 0.798, demonstrating that the questionnaire items used to measure these independent variables are consistent and reliable in capturing respondents' perceptions. Furthermore, the risk of financial fraud (Y) shows the highest Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.845, indicating a strong level of reliability in measuring fraud-related constructs. These results confirm that the research instrument is dependable and suitable for further statistical analysis, as the items consistently reflect the underlying variables examined in this study.

4.4 Classical Assumption Test

The normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method produced a significance value of 0.086 (> 0.05), indicating normally distributed data. Multicollinearity testing showed tolerance values of 0.624 and VIF values of 1.602 for both independent variables, confirming no multicollinearity issues. The heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser method showed significance values above 0.05, indicating no heteroscedasticity.

4.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of internal cash control and separation of accounting functions on the risk of financial fraud.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Results

Variable	Regression Coefficient (β)	t-value	Sig.
Internal Cash Control (X_1)	-0.432	-4.587	0.000
Separation of Accounting Functions (X_2)	-0.317	-3.126	0.002

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining the effect of internal cash control and separation of accounting functions on the risk of financial fraud. The regression coefficient for internal cash control (X_1) is -0.432 with a t-value of -4.587 and a significance level of 0.000, indicating that internal cash control has a significant negative effect on financial fraud risk, meaning that stronger cash control practices significantly reduce the likelihood of fraud in savings and loan cooperatives. Similarly, the separation of accounting functions (X_2) shows a regression coefficient of -0.317 with a t-value of -3.126 and a significance level of 0.002, which also demonstrates a significant negative relationship with fraud risk, suggesting that clearer segregation of duties contributes to lowering the potential for fraudulent activities. The constant value of 4.312 indicates the baseline level of fraud risk when both independent variables are absent.

1. Internal cash control (X_1) has a significant negative effect on fraud risk ($t = -4.587$; $p < 0.001$), supporting H1.
2. Separation of accounting functions (X_2) also has a significant negative effect on fraud risk ($t = -3.126$; $p = 0.002$), supporting H2.

The results of the simultaneous test (F-test) show an F-value of 28.764 with a significance level of 0.000, indicating that internal cash control and the separation of accounting functions simultaneously have a significant effect on reducing the risk of financial fraud, thereby supporting

hypothesis H3, while the coefficient of determination reveals an R value of 0.608 with an R square of 0.370 and an adjusted R square of 0.357, which indicates that 35.7% of the variation in financial fraud risk can be explained by internal cash control and separation of accounting functions, whereas the remaining 64.3% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study, such as organizational culture, management integrity, internal audit effectiveness, and external supervision.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that internal cash control plays a significant role in reducing the risk of financial fraud in savings and loan cooperatives in Central Java. The strong negative regression coefficient indicates that cooperatives with well-established cash authorization, documentation, reconciliation, and monitoring procedures tend to experience lower levels of fraud risk. This finding supports fraud triangle theory, which emphasizes that reducing opportunities for fraud through effective internal controls is a key strategy in preventing fraudulent behavior within organizations [4], [8], [13].

Similarly, the separation of accounting functions is shown to significantly reduce the risk of financial fraud. Proper segregation of duties prevents the excessive concentration of authority in a single individual and allows for cross-checking of financial transactions, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability in cooperative operations. This result is consistent with agency theory, which suggests that effective control mechanisms reduce information asymmetry between management and members and limit opportunistic behavior that may lead to financial misconduct.

Furthermore, the simultaneous effect of internal cash control and separation of accounting functions confirms that internal control systems are more effective when multiple control mechanisms operate together. Implementing strong cash control without adequate segregation of accounting functions, or vice versa, may not optimally mitigate fraud risk. Therefore, savings and loan cooperatives should prioritize strengthening both aspects of internal control to enhance financial governance, protect member assets, and ensure organizational sustainability, as these measures collectively serve as essential strategies for mitigating financial fraud risk in cooperative financial institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that internal cash control and the separation of accounting functions play a significant role in reducing the risk of financial fraud in savings and loan cooperatives in Central Java, as effective internal cash control mechanisms—such as proper authorization, documentation, supervision, and reconciliation—significantly reduce opportunities for fraudulent activities, while clear separation of accounting functions minimizes the concentration of authority and enhances transparency, thereby lowering the potential for financial misconduct, and the simultaneous influence of both variables confirms that a comprehensive internal control system is more effective in mitigating fraud risk than isolated control measures, providing important practical implications for cooperative management to strengthen cash control procedures and ensure adequate segregation of accounting duties even in organizations with limited human resources, while future research is recommended to incorporate additional variables such as organizational culture, internal audit effectiveness, and management integrity to further explain financial fraud risk in cooperative institutions.

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