

An Investigation On The Effectiveness Of Internal Control Systems At Business And Intellectual Property (BIPA), Windhoek, Namibia

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Abstract:

Effective internal control systems are critical for organizations to achieve operational efficiency, mitigate risks, and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements. This study investigates the effectiveness of internal control systems at BIPA, aiming to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement within its governance framework. The research employs a mixed methods approach to comprehensively evaluate BIPA's internal controls. Quantitative analysis involves assessing key control metrics such as adherence to policies, segregation of duties, and incident reporting rates. Qualitative insights are gathered through interviews and surveys with employees, managers, and executives responsible for overseeing or implementing internal controls. Preliminary findings highlight several areas of strength within BIPA's internal control environment. Issues such as outdated control policies, inconsistent monitoring of control effectiveness, and gaps in employee training on control procedures emerge as challenges that may impact BIPA's overall control effectiveness. Based on these findings, recommendations are proposed to enhance BIPA's internal control systems. These recommendations include Policy and procedure updates and revision of existing control policies to align with current regulatory standards and industry best practices. Enhanced monitoring mechanisms, employee training, and awareness, strengthening risk assessment processes, and integration of risk assessment methodologies to identify and prioritize risks that could impact BIPA's objectives and operations. By addressing these recommendations, BIPA can strengthen its internal control environment, thereby improving operational efficiency, minimizing financial risks, and enhancing stakeholder trust. The findings of this study contribute to the broader understanding of internal control effectiveness in organizational governance and provide actionable insights that can be applied to similar organizations striving to optimize their control systems. In conclusion, this investigation into BIPA's internal control systems underscores the importance of continuous evaluation and enhancement of controls to adapt to evolving risks and regulatory landscapes. It serves as a foundation for future research and practical applications aimed at advancing internal control practices in organizations worldwide.

Key Word: *internal, control, organization, awareness, regulation*

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I. Introduction

Internal Control is a crucial asset for any organization, particularly in the modern knowledge-based economy. The protection and management of intellectual property assets are essential for sustaining competitive advantages and ensuring long-term success (Li & Yuan, 2024). According to Francis and Imiete (2018), internal control systems play a vital role in safeguarding these assets, ensuring compliance with regulations, and mitigating risks. This research aims to investigate the effectiveness of internal control systems at BIPA, with a focus on identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. To improve service delivery and ensure the effective administration of Business and Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) registration, the Business and Intellectual Property Authority (BIPA) has been established as an agency of the Ministry of Industrialization and Trade (MIT). BIPA became officially operational as a State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) with the promulgation of the BIPA Act (Act No. 8 of 2016) on 16 January 2017. BIPA, as an Association Not for Gain (Section 21) was deregistered on 25 August 2017. The functions of BIPA are, to be the central focal point for the registration, administration, and protection of businesses, commercial and industrial property rights (IPRs) as well as to be the legal depository of information, documents, and data required to be lodged under the applicable legislations. BIPA is further tasked with the provision of general advisory services and information dissemination on business registration and IPRs. The ease with which an entrepreneur can set up and operate a business, and the protection of industrial property rights, are important business decisions. To this end, BIPA fulfills a critical function within the Namibian society by solidifying government efforts towards business development in Namibia. Thus, BIPA's Key Strategic Objectives are to formulate appropriate policy and legislative instruments, as well as set up

institutional arrangements geared towards providing a conducive business and investment climate and supportive services (Yazdani & Mirzaee, 2019). The creation of a vibrant and competitive domestic market environment is a crucial part of its operational strategy by which the company seeks to meet its objectives.

II. Material And Methods

This study used a mixed-methods research approach. This approach collected both quantitative data and qualitative data. Thus, the research design was the target population of the study, the sample of the study, the research instrument of the study, the research procedure of the study, data analysis, and the research ethics of the study. According to Nayak & Singh (2021) mixed method has the following cons: More comprehensive: Professional researchers are well known for using exclusivity when using either qualitative or quantitative methods, according to some studies. Nevertheless, an important feature of mixed methods research is the fact that it reduces the weaknesses while drawing from the strong points of an entirely quantitative or qualitative research methodology. The mixed research works by complementing the results obtained from one kind of research together with any other research method (Nayak, & Singh, 2021). Both the qualitative as well as quantitative data are collected simultaneously, and this can have significant time and cost savings benefits. There are many various designs accessible in mixed methods research that a researcher can make use of to save the most time (Nayak, & Singh, 2021).

Study site

According to Caruso, Gattone, Fortuna and Di Battista (2021) a research site is a place where people conduct research. Common research sites include universities, hospitals, research institutes, and field research locations (Caruso et al., 2021).

Population of the study

Willmann and Seeliger (2017) define population as the universe of units from which a sample was selected. A population contains all the variables of interest to the researcher (Thomas, 2017). Thus, the target population was employees of the Business and Intellectual Property Authority (BIPA), from the finance department at its head office in Windhoek.

Sample size determination and sampling

In conducting research, it is not always possible or practical to include the entire study population in the study (Caruso et al., 2021). A sample is a part of a subset of the measurement drawn from the population (Thomas, 2017). A sample then is a selected group of elements from a defined population. Hence, a representative sample must be chosen from the study population. Willmann and Seeliger (2017) indicate that sampling will provide a valid alternative to a census survey in the following situations where: It is impractical to survey the entire population; the budget constraints prevent a census survey. This research will adopt a simple random probability sampling design to pick the sample. The sample size was determined using Slovine's formula as follows: $n = N / (1 + N e^2)$. A total sample of 15 will be selected which has been computed as follows $15 = 16 / (1 + 16 * 0.05^2)$. This sample will be regarded as representative of the population as per the latter formula.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Employees of BIPA: Participants must be current employees of the Business and Intellectual Property Authority (BIPA) to provide firsthand insights into the internal control systems and practices within the organization.
- Key Stakeholders: Individuals holding key roles in the organization's internal control processes, such as management personnel, internal auditors, compliance officers, and intellectual property specialists, will be included to gather diverse perspectives.
- Employees from the finance department: Participants from the finance department within BIPA will be included to ensure sufficient representation.
- Employees at Different Levels: Participants from different hierarchical levels within the finance department, including executives, managers, supervisors, and frontline staff, will be included to capture insights from various organizational levels.
- Experience with Internal Control Systems: Participants who have direct experience with or knowledge of the internal control systems and processes at BIPA will be included to provide informed perspectives on the effectiveness of these systems.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Former Employees: Individuals who are no longer employed by BIPA or who have left the organization will be excluded from participation, as their insights may not reflect current practices and processes.

- External Stakeholders: Individuals external to BIPA, such as clients, suppliers, consultants, or industry experts, will be excluded from participation as the focus is on internal perspectives on internal control systems.
- Unrelated departments: Employees from departments or areas of the organization that are not directly involved in internal control processes or intellectual property management, such as facilities management or cafeteria staff, will be excluded to maintain relevance to the research topic.
- Employees with limited experience: Participants with limited experience or knowledge of internal control systems and practices at BIPA, such as newly hired employees or those in unrelated roles, may be excluded to ensure informed contributions to the research findings.
- Individuals with conflicts of interest: Participants with potential conflicts of interest, such as those involved in the development or implementation of the internal control systems under investigation, may be excluded to ensure objectivity and impartiality in the research process.

Data management, processing, and data analysis

The data analysis followed approaches, used in data collection for both quantitative and qualitative methods. Regarding the qualitative data, all data was reduced to numerical values and numerical frequency tables which were generated i.e., raw data collected from the field was sorted and summarised in tables and diagrams. The data was then coded and checked for any errors and omissions. The demographic information for the respondents was presented using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies, percentages, and means. Pie charts, chi-square, SPSS, line graphs, and frequency distribution tables were utilised to present the data. All ethical considerations were considered throughout the research process. Participants have been guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity as no names of participants were required, ethical clearance was sought from NBS, to adhere to the principle of informed consent, privacy, and justice; and data collected will be stored for a period of 60 months whereafter, they will be disposed-off by burning them. In addition, issues of reliability, validity, trustworthiness, quality, and rigour are meant to differentiate 'good' from 'bad' research, testing and increasing the reliability, validity, trustworthiness, quality, and rigour will be important to the research in any paradigm (Nayak & Singh, 2021). Data collected from the questionnaires provided support for the conclusions drawn. In addition, to ensure reliability in qualitative research, the examination of trustworthiness is crucial. Since questionnaires were completed, questions should be structured to the point and precise for participants to understand and answer what is required from them and not complicate the questions (Kumar, 2018). Finally, compliant with the research code of conduct, the researcher maintained a high level of ethics throughout the research process by acknowledging sources. The data that was collected during the investigations, is presented and analysed in simple percentages and pie charts. This is because a pie chart presents data as a simple and easy-to-understand picture. It can be an effective communication tool for even an uninformed audience because it represents data visually as a fractional part of a whole. Readers or audiences see a data comparison at a glance, enabling them to make an immediate analysis or to understand information quickly. Calculating percentages is not a difficult task, as it involves just two steps.

Ethics considerations

Ethics applies to all situations and activities in which there can be actual or potential harm of any kind to anybody (Thomas, 2017). The researcher motivated respondents or the research subjects in an ethical manner such as the researcher promised and kept the subject's promises of anonymity.

III. Result

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents:

This section presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants of the study. For example, it shows the gender, age bracket, level of education, Position of employment, and Years of service in the Company. The data relating to the participants was obtained from the primary source (questionnaires).

Gender of participants

Figure 1: Gender profile of respondents

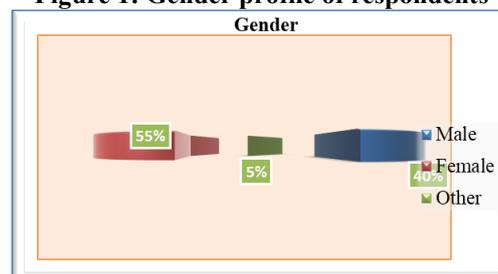


Figure 1 presents the gender profile of respondents. From the pie chart, it can be noted that 55% of respondents were male while 40% of participants were female. The figure further reveals that five percent of respondents indicated that they were neither male nor female. This indicated that most of the persons who participated in the study were male, followed by female. This could easily be deduced that the gender distribution of employees at BIPA is slightly skewed towards female employees. This distribution of study participants is in line with The Namibia Labour Force Survey report of 2018 which indicated that there were more male members of the society (51%) compared to female members (49%) who were employed in Namibia’s urban areas (Namibia Statics Agency, 2019). Generally, the sample frame is gender balanced which suggests that the views expressed on the effectiveness of internal control systems at Business and Intellectual Property (BIPA) in Windhoek are quite representative.

Age profile of respondents

Table 1: Age profile of respondents

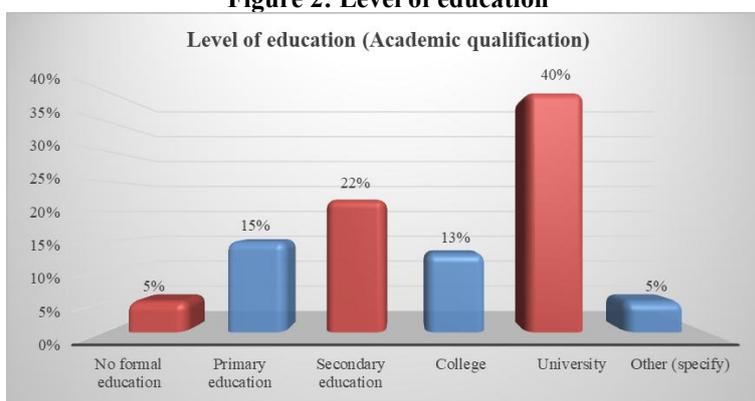
Mode for grouped data		
Age bracket	Staff - Frequency (fi)	Ogive/Accumulative
1 - < 30 Years	3	3
30 - < 50 Years	8	11
50 - < above 50 Years	3	14
Total	$\Sigma 1f \ i=n=14$	

Mode for grouped data

$$M_o = O_{mo} + \frac{c(f_m - f_{m-1})}{2f_m - f_{m-1} - f_{m+1}} = 30 + \frac{3(8 - 3)}{2(8) - 3 - 3} = 30 + 1.8 = \mathbf{31.8 \text{ years}}$$

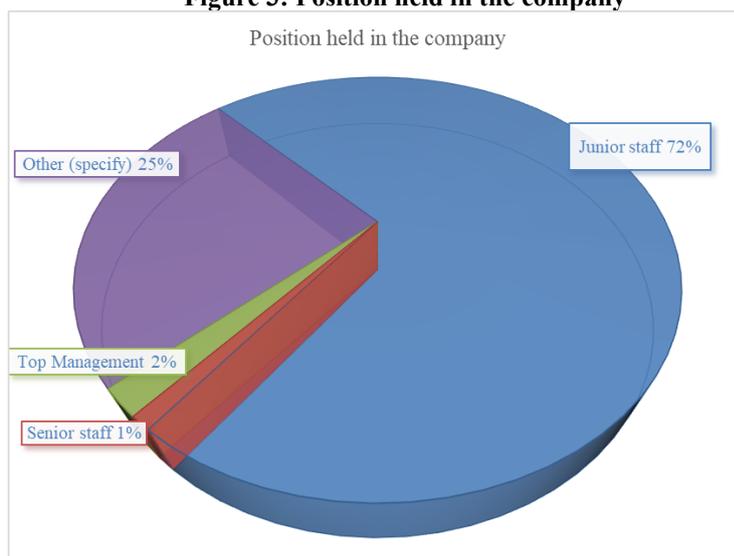
Thus, the respondents' central (Mode) age was 31.8 years or 32 years. This was a clear indication that most of the participants in the study were in the middle age group. The results are in line with the report of on Namibia Labour Force Survey Report of 2018 which indicated that most of the labour force in Namibia is aged between 25 and 44 years (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019). This reveals that the selection of the study participants aligns quite well with the national age distribution of employees in the country. In addition, it can also be inferred that the employees in the older age groups had a better understanding and importance of research, and this motivated them to respond to the questionnaire than those in the younger age groups. This is indicated by the fact that 57 (57%) of the 100 respondents were in the age group of above 30 years. It is also noted that the age groups presented in Table 4.1 above show that the BIPA comprised mature employees at the time of this study.

Figure 2: Level of education



The graph presents the educational profile of respondents. From this bar graph, it can be established that 40% of the participants had a University level of education while 22%, 15%, and 13% of the participants had Secondary, Primary, and College levels of education, respectively. Finally, participants with no formal and other levels of education represented 5% each. This indicates that most of the participants have advanced their studies up to the tertiary education level. This makes up 53% of the respondents, which was made as follows: (13% - College + 40% - University). Therefore, the researcher could easily conclude that most of BIPA’s employees had furthered their studies up to the University level. The distribution of educational level is in line with the findings of research conducted by Hamukwaya (2019) which established that 75% of participants had a higher and tertiary educational level. Therefore, the researcher may easily infer that the results are in line with the educational distribution of the Namibian labour market.

Figure 3: Position held in the company



The Pie chart in Figure 4.3 illustrates results on the positions of respondents held at BIPA. The results indicated that 72% of the interviewees were junior staff members while 25% of the participants indicated they were in other categories of employment. Furthermore, two percent of the respondents were Top Management and only one percent of the participants were senior staff members. This may also be deduced that most of the participants were junior staff members and that one may easily conclude that most of the staff members at BIPA employees were young.

Since most of the participants were youth, the researcher could easily argue that these findings were in line with the results indicated under respondents' educational profiles, which indicated that most participants have advanced their studies up to the tertiary education level. The distribution of the employee's level of education is evident in this study and it is in line with the typical organisational structures and management practice (Selase & Kombate, 2018).

In addition, a study by Hamukwaya (2019) established that Middle and top management comprised 96 (18%) and 12 (2%) employees respectively. Generally, the distribution of middle and top management is always lower in comparison to junior staff members, and this is not different to BIPA.

Figure 4: Years of service at BIPA

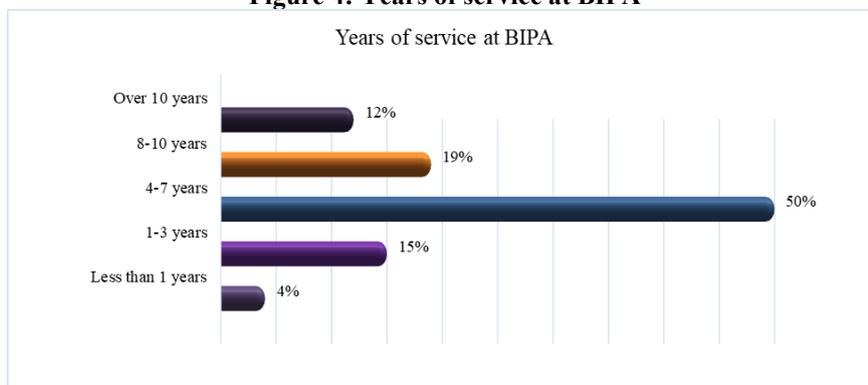


Figure 4 illustrates the number of years of service participants had worked for BIPA. The results indicated that 69% of the participants had worked for BIPA for a period not greater than 7 years. 69% comprised 50% of participants who worked for a period between 4 and 7 years, 15% of participants who worked for a period between 1 and 3 years, and 4% of participants who worked for a period less than one year. The results further revealed that 19% and 12% of the participants had worked for BIPA between 8 – 10 years and over 10 years, respectively.

The results in Figure 4.4 are also in the same direction as the study findings in Figures 4.2 and 4.3. The latter figures indicated that most of BIPA's staff members were young and did not work for over 7 years. The latter findings are in line with results obtained from a study by Hamukwaya (2019) in which a general observation was that most of the employees (322 = 59.2%) had continuous employment in the City of Windhoek for at least 6 years.

The work experience of the respondents was crucial in this study to ascertain if there was a significant number of respondents who had a fair understanding of the cost-effectiveness of service delivery by BIPA and this set of work experience was quite satisfactory. Noting that most of the participants had longer experience at BIPA, one could easily infer that the BIPA's staff complement was made up of experienced staff members. Thus, BIPA could manage costs efficiently and provide excellent services.

Reliability Testing Using Cronbach's Alpha

Table 2: Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha level of reliability	
Cronbach's Alpha Score	Level of Reliability
0.0 - 0.20	Less reliable
>0.20 - 0.40	Rather reliable
>0.40 - 0.60	Quite reliable
>0.60 - 0.80	Reliable
>0.80 - 1.00	Very reliable

$$\alpha = \left\{ \frac{k}{k - 1} \right\} * \left(1 - \left(\frac{\sum s^2i}{s^2t} \right) \right)$$

Where:

- k = number of items (question/statement) in the questionnaire
- si = SD of ith item
- st = SD of sum score

$$= \left\{ \frac{16}{16 - 1} \right\} * \left(1 - \left(\frac{6.8}{6.8^2} \right) \right)$$

α = 0.91

A test for internal consistency of the model using Cronbach's alpha in this study yielded a total reliability scale of 0.91 as calculated above. Cronbach Alpha ranges between 0 and 1, with 0 indicating a perfectly unreliable measurement and 1 being a perfectly reliable measurement. The total reliability scale for the study was 0.91, demonstrating an overall reliability aspect slightly like that of Ha (2020) which was 0.906. This reliability value for this study is reliable because the highest reliability that can be obtained is 1.0.

Analysis

This section presents an analysis of data collected through responses to research survey questions and the questionnaires from the groups of respondents and the discussion of the results to come up with the findings.

How effective are internal control systems at BIPA in safeguarding Business Registration intellectual property assets

Table 3: How effective are internal control systems at BIPA in safeguarding Business Registration services intellectual property assets

Item	(5) Very effective	(4) Effective	(3) Less effective	(2) Neutral	(1) Not effective
Safeguarding of intellectual property assets	43%	36%	7%	7%	7%
Risk mitigations	36%	36%	14%	7%	7%
Compliance with regulations	50%	29%	7%	7%	7%
Operational efficiency	57%	21%	7%	7%	7%
Average response	46%	30%	9%	7%	7%

Table 3 reflects the study findings on how effective internal control systems at BIPA in safeguarding intellectual property assets. The study findings revealed that on average, 46% of participants indicated that internal control systems at BIPA in safeguarding intellectual property assets were very effective in Risk mitigations, compliance with regulations, and operational efficiency while 30%, 9%, 7%, and 7% of respondents were of the participants that internal control systems at BIPA in safeguarding intellectual property assets were

effective, less effective, neutral and not effective about Risk mitigations, compliance with regulations, operational efficiency was effective, as per the latter.

2. The extent to which internal control systems at BIPA mitigate risks associated with Business Registration Services and Intellectual property management

Figure 5: The extent to which internal control systems at BIPA mitigate risks associated with intellectual property management

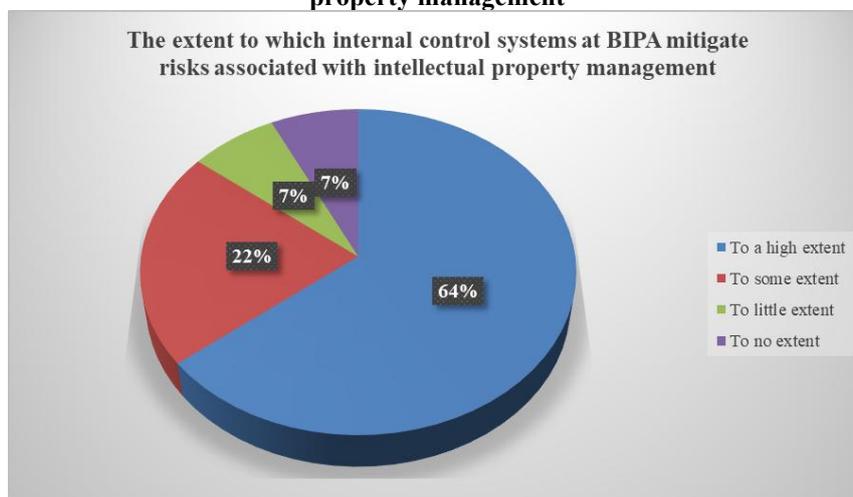
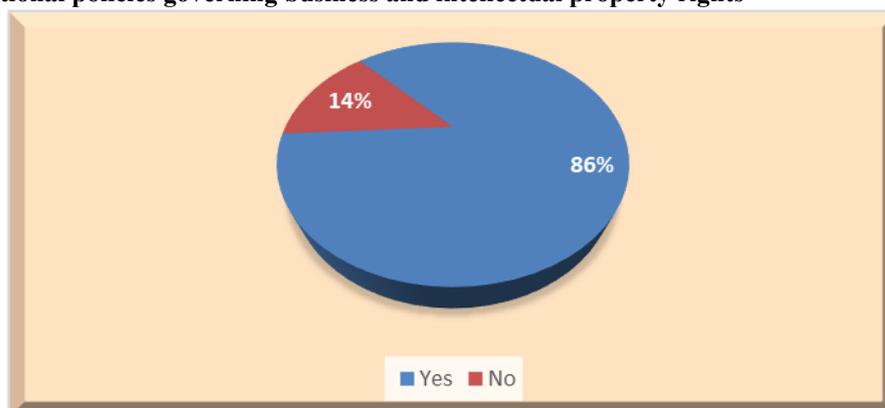


Figure 5 presents results on views on the extent to which internal control systems at BIPA mitigate risks associated with intellectual property management. The results indicated that the majority (which translates to 64%) of participants believed that internal control systems at BIPA mitigate risks associated with intellectual property management to a high extent while 22%, 7%, and 7% of participants were of the ideas that internal control systems at BIPA mitigates risks associated with intellectual property management to some extent, to little extent and no extent respectively.

3. Effectiveness of internal control systems at BIPA in ensuring compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and organizational policies governing business and intellectual property rights



The pie chart under Figure 4.6 illustrates responses from respondents to the question about the effectiveness of internal control systems at BIPA in ensuring compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and organizational policies governing intellectual property rights. Eighty-six percent of the participants strongly indicated that internal control systems at BIPA in ensuring compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and organizational policies governing intellectual property rights were in place while only 14% believed internal control systems at BIPA in ensuring compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and organizational policies governing intellectual property rights were not in place.

This is a clear indication that BIPA had proper internal control systems to ensure that they comply with relevant laws, regulations, and organizational policies governing Business and Intellectual property rights.

4. How internal control systems at BIPA contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of Business Registration and Intellectual property management processes.

Of most participants, 93% have indicated that internal control systems at BIPA contribute significantly to the efficiency and effectiveness of the business and intellectual property (IP) process in several ways:

- **Risk management:** Internal controls help identify and mitigate risks associated with business and intellectual property, such as unauthorized use or infringement. By establishing procedures for IP management and compliance, BIPA ensures that risks are minimized, protecting its intellectual assets.
- **Compliance and legal requirements:** Effective internal controls ensure that BIPA complies with legal requirements related to business and intellectual property rights. This includes proper documentation, licensing agreements, and adherence to copyright, patent, and trademark laws. By staying compliant, BIPA avoids legal disputes and potential financial penalties.
- **Streamlined processes:** Internal controls streamline the Business and IP process by defining clear roles and responsibilities. This clarity reduces confusion and ensures that tasks related to Business and IP creation, registration, and protection are executed efficiently. Automation and standardized procedures further enhance process efficiency.
- **Cost management:** By managing business and intellectual property efficiently through internal controls, BIPA can optimize costs associated with IP maintenance, registration fees, and legal expenses. Clear guidelines on budget allocation for IP protection and enforcement help in controlling expenditures.
- **Protection of intellectual assets:** Internal controls safeguard BIPA's intellectual assets against theft, misuse, or unauthorized disclosure. This protection is crucial for maintaining competitive advantage and preserving the value of innovative ideas and products developed by the organization.
- **Enhanced decision-making:** Reliable data and information provided by internal controls enable informed decision-making regarding intellectual property strategies. This includes decisions on patent filings, licensing opportunities, and IP portfolio management, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively.

The rest of the participants indicated that internal control systems at BIPA play a pivotal role in ensuring that the intellectual property process is efficient, compliant with legal requirements, and well-protected. By managing risks, optimizing processes, and supporting decision-making, these controls contribute to the overall effectiveness of BIPA's IP and Business registration management efforts.

5. Factors influencing internal control systems over Business and intellectual property at BIPA

Table 4: Factors Influencing Internal Control Systems Over Business and Intellectual Property at BIPA

Item	5 = Strongly agree	4 = Agree	3 = Have no idea	2 = disagree and	1 = Strongly disagree
Safeguarding of intellectual property assets	64%	14%	0%	0%	21%
Risk mitigations	57%	21%	14%	7%	0%
Compliance with regulations	50%	43%	7%	0%	0%
Operational efficiency	57%	43%	0%	0%	0%
Average response	57%	30%	5%	3%	5%

Table 4 reflects the study findings on Factors influencing internal control systems over Business and intellectual property at BIPA. The study findings revealed that on average, 57% of respondents strongly agreed that Safeguarding intellectual property assets, Risk mitigations, Compliance with regulations, and Operational efficiency were some of the Factors influencing internal control systems over intellectual property at BIPA. In addition, 30%, 5%, 5%, and 3% of respondents agreed, had no idea and strongly disagreed that Safeguarding intellectual property assets, Risk mitigations, Compliance with regulations, and Operational efficiency were some of the Factors influencing internal control systems over the intellectual property at BIPA. However, the research concluded that Safeguarding intellectual property assets, Risk mitigations, Compliance with regulations, and Operational efficiency were some of the Factors influencing internal control systems over intellectual property at BIPA as indicated by the majority of participants that make up 57%.

IV. Discussion

The investigation into the effectiveness of internal control systems at BIPA in Namibia reveals several key findings which have been drawn into conclusions below:

Current state of internal controls

BIPA has established foundational internal control mechanisms to manage its operations, including procurement, financial management, and human resources. These controls are designed to ensure compliance with regulations, mitigate risks, and safeguard assets.

Challenges identified

Despite the presence of internal controls, several challenges were identified during the investigation. These include inconsistencies in control implementation across different departments, lack of integration between systems, and occasional gaps in monitoring and evaluation.

Impact on efficiency and effectiveness

Effective internal controls contribute significantly to BIPA's operational efficiency and effectiveness. They streamline processes, reduce operational risks, and support decision-making by providing reliable data and information.

Room for improvement

There is room for improvement in enhancing the comprehensiveness and integration of internal controls across all departments. This includes strengthening monitoring mechanisms, enhancing staff training on control procedures, and leveraging technology for automation where feasible.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of internal control systems at BIPA:

- **Comprehensive review and update:** Conduct a comprehensive review of existing internal control frameworks to identify gaps and areas for enhancement. Update policies and procedures to reflect current best practices and regulatory requirements.
- **Strengthen monitoring and oversight:** Implement robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure that internal controls are consistently applied and monitored across all departments. This includes regular audits, performance evaluations, and management reviews.
- **Enhance staff training and awareness:** Provide ongoing training and awareness programs for staff members to ensure understanding and adherence to internal control procedures. This includes training on new policies, procedures, and technological tools.
- **Implement technology solutions:** Explore and implement technology solutions, such as integrated software systems for procurement and financial management, to enhance automation and efficiency in control processes.
- **Foster a culture of compliance:** Promote a culture of compliance and ethical behavior throughout the organization. Encourage proactive reporting of potential control weaknesses or breaches and ensure swift corrective actions.

V. Conclusion

This research provides recommendations that could assist BIPA to realise ways how to effectively manage internal control systems over intellectual property. This study should also enable policymakers and relevant ministries to form policies that create greater competition and manage internal control systems over intellectual property.

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