

**EFFECTIVENESS OF WHISTLEBLOWER SUPPORT PROGRAMMES ON
EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTHWEST,
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of whistleblower support programmes on employee retention in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, it examines how organisational protection mechanisms, institutional response quality, psychological support systems, and social support systems influence whistleblower retention. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted, and data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Findings reveal that organisational protection mechanisms and psychological support systems exert significant positive effects on employee retention, underscoring the importance of formal safeguards and emotional well-being frameworks for sustaining employee commitment after whistleblowing. Conversely, institutional response quality and social support systems were not statistically significant predictors of retention, suggesting that procedural responses and informal peer support alone are insufficient. The study concludes that effective protection and psychological support are vital for fostering trust, stability, and loyalty among employees who disclose wrongdoing. Public tertiary institutions are therefore recommended to institutionalise comprehensive protection frameworks and integrate professional counselling services into their whistleblower support programmes to enhance retention and organisational integrity.

Keywords: Employee retention, Institutional response, Organisational mechanisms, Psychological support, Public tertiary institutions, Whistleblower protection.

1.0 Introduction

Employee retention in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria has reached a critically low level, with recent studies indicating an annual academic staff turnover rate exceeding 18% in some universities (Fatoki, 2024). This exodus, often termed 'brain drain,' tends to undermine institutional stability, deplete experienced faculty, and compromise the quality of education. The drivers of this attrition are multifaceted, including poor remuneration that fails to meet living standards, overwhelming workload pressures due to understaffing, and persistent industrial disputes that lead to frequent strikes and institutional closures (Bakare, 2020; NUC, 2025).

Furthermore, a significant yet often overlooked factor is a professional environment where ethical concerns are suppressed and employees who report misconduct face severe victimisation, creating a climate of fear and insecurity that pushes conscientious staff to seek employment elsewhere (Okafor & Eze, 2021). In response to these challenges, whistleblower support programmes have been introduced as a strategic intervention to bolster employee retention. These programmes are designed to address the environmental and psychological factors that drive staff away by fostering a culture of transparency and safety. By providing formal mechanisms such as confidential reporting channels, legal protection from retaliation, and clear anti-victimisation policies, these initiatives aim to empower staff to act ethically without fear for their job security or personal well-being (Smith, 2022; Adeyemi & Lawal, 2023).

In this context, such programmes are not merely anti-corruption tools but are increasingly recognised as components of human resource management and institutional governance (Ige, 2022). With respect to Southwest Nigeria's public universities and polytechnics, the effectiveness of these whistleblower support programmes deserves investigation. Their potential to contribute to employee retention is significant, as they tend to counter the culture of impunity and

frustration which demotivate academic and non-academic staff (Nwosu et al., 2024). However, their actual impact remains a subject of intense debate, hinging on whether they are perceived as credible and robust by the employees they are meant to serve.

The effectiveness of whistleblower support programmes is in doubt, noting the tendency for retaliation which employees often face after reporting misconduct. Despite the existence of formal policies, individuals who expose wrongdoing frequently encounter professional ostracism, intimidation, and even wrongful dismissal, experiences that understandably fuel their desire to leave the institution (Okafor & Eze, 2021). The uncertainty is whether these support systems, namely, promised confidentiality, legal aid, and protection from victimisation, can adequately provide enough reassurance to counter the profound personal and professional risks that whistleblowers undertake, thereby convincing them to remain in employment (Adeyemi & Lawal, 2023).

This uncertainty is amplified by the institutional environment of Nigerian public universities, where an ingrained culture of hierarchy and silence can stifle the intent of even well-designed programmes. The challenge lies in the gap between policy and practice; written protections can be easily undermined by powerful individuals within a bureaucratic and sometimes politicised system, leaving the committed employee vulnerable (Smith, 2022). When staff perceive that the support programme lacks real power or credibility, a climate of fear persists, making the decision to report malfeasance a potential catalyst for labour turnover, as they seek safer and more supportive work environments (Nwankwo, 2024).

Further complicating this dynamic is the difficult task of distinguishing the influence of whistleblower support from the other overwhelming pressures that drive staff turnover. Public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria are simultaneously grappling with systemic issues like

inadequate funding, poor remuneration, and frequent industrial disputes, which are powerful motivators for employees to seek opportunities elsewhere (Bakare & Ige, 2020; Fatoki, 2024). It remains an open question whether the presence of a robust support programme can foster sufficient organisational loyalty to retain staff amidst these broader institutional challenges, or if its impact is marginal when compared to fundamental issues of compensation and working conditions.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study examines the effectiveness of whistleblower support programmes on employee retention in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, the study intends to:

- i. examine the effect of organisational protection mechanisms on employee retention in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria.
- ii. assess the influence of institutional response quality on employee retention in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria.
- iii. determine the impact of psychological support systems on whistleblower retention in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria.
- iv. investigate the implications of social support systems on whistleblower retention in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

Whistleblower Support Programmes

Whistleblower support programmes have been conceptualised as the institutional systems, policies, and practices intended to safeguard, motivate, and assist employees who disclose wrongdoing, unethical behaviour, or corruption, ensuring they are not subject to adverse

consequences. Eyongndi and Opara (2022) define whistleblower support as comprising legal protections, confidentiality assurances, and institutional mechanisms that guarantee disclosures are taken seriously and acted upon. Dauda et al. (2020) emphasise that effective programmes must encompass both formal policy articulation and the operationalisation of protections, arguing that policies without implementation machinery remain symbolic. Vandekerckhove and Lewis (2024) further conceptualise whistleblower support arrangements as strategic human resource assets, encompassing hotlines, ombudspersons, and anti-retaliation frameworks, that extend beyond mere legal compliance to actively sustain organisational integrity.

Ojobo (2023) reviews Nigeria's Stopgap Policy of 2016 and the Whistleblower Protection Bill of 2019, arguing that while legislation exists, many public institutions lack the supportive infrastructure, clear reporting channels, non-retaliation policies, transparent investigative procedures, that makes whistleblowing genuinely safe. In Nigerian tertiary institutions, whistleblower support programmes are often weak in implementation: policies may exist formally in codes of conduct or institutional regulations, but actual protections are unreliable. Many whistleblowers report fear of stigma, career setbacks, and lack of follow-through when they come forward, which significantly limits programme effectiveness (Obi & Adebayo, 2023; Ogunyemi & Ogunnowo, 2023).

Organisational Protection Mechanisms

Organisational protection mechanisms are the formal structures, rules, and procedures that an institution puts in place to prevent retaliation, ensure confidentiality, and provide legal or procedural recourse for whistleblowers. Miceli et al. (2022) identify organisational support, particularly anti-retaliation policies and procedural fairness, as among the strongest institutional predictors of whistleblower well-being and retention. Eyongndi and Opara (2022) note that

Nigeria's existing whistleblowing policy lacks a robust legal framework, which undermines organisational protections at the institutional level. Dauda et al. (2020) found that many whistleblowers are dissatisfied due to perceived insufficiency of protection clauses, fear of retaliation, and unfulfilled promises of anonymity.

Ojobo (2023) similarly argues that, although the Stopgap Policy and Whistleblower Protection Bill provide for protection in theory, enforcement at the institutional level is weak, and many tertiary institutions lack operational non-retaliation mechanisms or confidentiality guarantees. Park (2023) corroborates this, finding that perceived organisational support is a significant predictor of employees' willingness to report wrongdoing in South Korean public agencies, underscoring the centrality of formal protection mechanisms. In Southwest Nigerian tertiary institutions, organisational protection mechanisms are often ceremonial rather than substantive: confidentiality may be stated in policy but few secure anonymous reporting channels exist; legal recourse is seldom used; and employees who report misconduct may face informal workplace sanctions or negative effects on career progression (Obi & Adebayo, 2023).

Institutional Response Quality

Institutional response quality refers to how effectively, fairly, transparently, promptly, and consistently institutions handle whistleblower reports. This encompasses acknowledging reports, conducting thorough investigations, communicating outcomes, and applying sanctions when necessary. Eyongndi and Opara (2022) describe the weak response culture in many Nigerian workplaces, noting delays, lack of transparency, and insufficient feedback to whistleblowers. Dauda et al. (2020) report that many whistleblowers perceive institutional responses as superficial, with investigations delayed, outcomes obscured, or promises of action unfulfilled. Ojobo (2023) critically reviews institutional response under Nigeria's whistleblowing framework,

concluding that bias, delays, and lack of visible disciplinary action undermine the legitimacy and trust that effective programmes require.

Amadi and Chukwuma (2022) similarly found, in a study of Nigerian public service organisations, that weak or delayed institutional responses erode employee trust even when formal procedures are in place. Hwang et al. (2021) demonstrated that the perceived authenticity of management responses moderates the effectiveness of whistleblowing mechanisms on retention, indicating that procedural compliance alone is insufficient without transparent follow-up actions. In many public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria, when a whistleblower report is made, outcomes are often opaque: investigations may be perfunctory or stalled, feedback to the whistleblower is rare, and sanctions may favour powerful persons over fairness, thereby reducing willingness to report and degrading institutional trust.

Psychological Support Systems

Psychological support systems are the organisational provisions for mental health, emotional assistance, counselling, debriefing, and support to help employees cope with stress, fear, stigma, or trauma arising from whistleblowing. Eyongndi and Opara (2022) highlight that the absence of formal psychological care constitutes a key deficit in whistleblower protection frameworks. Dauda et al. (2020) show that whistleblowers believe institutional policies fail to address the mental health consequences of reporting, while Ojobo (2023) notes that psychological support is omitted in both the Stopgap Policy and Protection Bill. Lee and Xiao (2023) demonstrate that psychological safety mediates the relationship between perceived organisational support and turnover intentions among university staff, suggesting that emotional well-being support is critical to retaining employees who engage in ethical disclosure.

Kassinis and Panayiotou (2021) found that emotional well-being initiatives significantly increased whistleblower resilience and organisational commitment in European universities. Okeke and Olatunji (2024) similarly demonstrated that Nigerian public servants who received emotional counselling after reporting misconduct exhibited stronger retention intentions. In practice, tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria seldom provide dedicated psychological support to whistleblowers: counselling services are usually general welfare-oriented and may not address the specific fears or trauma of whistleblowing; support groups or debriefing mechanisms are rare; and whistleblowers often rely on informal networks or manage independently, which can lead to emotional burnout and increased turnover.

Social Support Systems

Social support systems encompass peer, supervisor, union, mentor, and familial networks that provide practical, emotional, and social resources to whistleblowers. Although direct research on social supports for whistleblowers in Nigeria is sparse, broader studies of organisational support and retention demonstrate that perceptions of collegial and supervisory support strongly influence job satisfaction and intention to stay. Ajufoh et al. (2024) found that organisational support correlates significantly with retention among staff in public university hospitals. Olajuwon and Yaqoob (2025) show that work-life balance, motivation, and employee engagement, mediated through supportive relationships, are important for institutional performance and staff retention.

Park and Lewis (2020) found that peer encouragement did not significantly reduce turnover among whistleblowers in South Korean public agencies, suggesting that social support may vary in effectiveness depending on the organisational culture. In Southwest Nigerian tertiary institutions, social support systems for whistleblowers are mostly informal and inconsistent:

some peer encouragement or supervisor backing may occur in individual cases, but there are few formal mentoring or peer support programmes; trade unions or staff associations only occasionally intervene; and informal ostracism or social isolation are common risks that reduce whistleblower morale and increase the likelihood of exit (Okafor & Eze, 2021).

Employee Retention

Employee retention refers to the degree to which institutions are able to keep employees and reduce turnover, often by ensuring satisfaction, commitment, and favourable working conditions. Olajuwon and Yaqoob (2025) define retention in terms of the effectiveness of retention policies through non-financial and financial motivation, work-life balance, and career development, arguing that these factors increase staff performance and reduce attrition. Ajufoh et al. (2024) demonstrate that career trajectory, organisational support, and staff welfare significantly influence retention, particularly in tertiary education-related settings. According to Culiberg and Mihelič (2023), retention is closely linked to the integrity of the psychological contract between employer and employee: when institutional behaviour matches employees' expectations of support and fairness, their intention to remain strengthens.

In the whistleblowing context, retention encompasses not only an employee's physical continued employment but also their psychological commitment to the organisation, their willingness to stay actively engaged despite the personal risks of ethical disclosure (Miceli et al., 2022). Vandekerckhove and Lewis (2024) further argue that robust whistleblower support frameworks are increasingly recognised as human resource retention instruments, insofar as they signal institutional value for integrity and employee protection, thereby sustaining commitment among staff who might otherwise exit in response to unresolved misconduct.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning of this study holds that when employees feel an institution will actively protect them for upholding integrity, their confidence in the organisation increases, thereby strengthening their commitment and stability on the job (Adeyemi & Lawal, 2023). Two theories are particularly applicable: Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Psychological Contract Theory (PCT).

Social Exchange Theory (SET), originally proposed by Homans (1958) and elaborated by Blau (1964), posits that human social interactions operate as exchanges in which people act in ways that bring rewards and avoid costs. SET assumes that individuals are rational actors who assess benefits against costs; that reciprocal obligations influence future behaviour; that trust arises when parties reliably reciprocate; and that inequity or insufficient rewards lead to dissatisfaction or withdrawal. Critics note that SET may overemphasise rationality and transactional dynamics, potentially neglecting altruistic behaviour, cultural norms, or power imbalances in non-Western contexts. Nevertheless, SET is directly relevant here: whistleblower support programmes can be viewed as institutional investments offered to employees in exchange for their disclosures. If employees perceive that the support provided, protection mechanisms, response quality, psychological and social assistance, is adequate, they may reciprocate by remaining in the organisation. In Southwest Nigerian tertiary institutions, the perceived exchange balance between support offered and risk incurred makes SET a compelling lens for predicting retention.

Psychological Contract Theory (PCT), developed through contributions from Argyris (1960), Levinson et al. (1962), and Rousseau (1989), holds that employees maintain implicit beliefs about the terms and conditions of their reciprocal obligations with the organisation, beyond the formal employment contract. These expectations, concerning fairness, support, recognition, and safety, are subjective and dynamic; employees respond positively or negatively depending on

whether they perceive their psychological contract to be honoured or breached. Critics note that psychological contracts are difficult to measure due to their subjective nature, and that cultural factors influence what constitutes a breach. For this study, PCT explains how whistleblower support programmes shape employees' implicit expectations: if institutions fulfil their implicit promises of protection, confidentiality, and fair response, employees are more likely to perceive the contract as honoured and to remain; if support is symbolic or absent, perceived breach may sharply increase turnover intention (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2023).

2.3 Empirical Review

This section reviews fifteen empirical and conceptual studies relevant to whistleblowing, organisational support, and employee retention, arranged from the most recent to the oldest.

Okeke and Olatunji (2024) examined the role of emotional support in retaining whistleblowers in Nigerian public service institutions. Using a quantitative survey design and regression analysis, the study found that employees who received post-disclosure counselling and emotional support exhibited significantly stronger retention intentions than those who did not, confirming that psychological care is a critical retention variable in African public sector contexts.

Zhang and Wang (2024) explored how an ethical climate influences knowledge hiding and voluntary turnover among faculty in public universities in China. Employing a mixed-methods design combining surveys and semi-structured interviews, and using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), they found that an ethical climate, characterised by transparent reporting procedures and protection from reprisal, was negatively correlated with turnover intentions, with respondents emphasising that trusted reporting systems are integral to maintaining fairness and collegiality.

Vandekerckhove and Lewis (2024) provided a conceptual and policy analysis of speak-up arrangements across European institutions, drawing on thematic analysis of institutional policy documents and cross-country comparative data. Their work argued that well-designed whistleblowing systems, comprising hotlines, ombudspersons, and anti-retaliation measures, should be understood not merely as compliance instruments but as strategic human resource assets capable of sustaining employee commitment.

Culiberg and Mihelič (2023) investigated the antecedents and outcomes of whistleblowing in Slovenia across sectors including education. Using a quantitative survey and Structural Equation Modelling, they found that when whistleblowing leads to perceived breaches of trust or organisational neglect, turnover intentions rise sharply. Conversely, supportive institutional responses preserved the psychological contract and minimised attrition, underscoring the centrality of organisational reciprocity.

Lee and Xiao (2023) identified the relationships between perceived organisational support (POS), psychological safety, and turnover intention among university staff in the United States. Using a cross-sectional survey analysed via multiple regression and mediation analysis, they found a significant negative relationship between POS and turnover intention, with psychological safety mediating this link: employees who felt supported reported greater emotional security and lower intentions to leave.

Ogunyemi and Ogunnowo (2023) conducted a qualitative case study in Nigerian public universities to assess the effectiveness of internal whistleblowing policies. Through in-depth interviews with administrators and academic staff, analysed using thematic analysis, the study found that institutions with credible and protective reporting mechanisms experienced higher

staff morale and stronger perceptions of justice, while low institutional trust was associated with cynicism and attrition.

Obi and Adebayo (2023) examined the relationship between whistleblower protection policies and employee retention in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Using a quantitative survey design and logistic regression analysis, they observed that employees were more likely to remain in workplaces where whistleblower protection policies were clearly and consistently enforced, reinforcing the argument that formal mechanisms must translate into practice to influence retention behaviour.

Park (2023) investigated how organisational ethical culture and perceived support affect public employees' whistleblowing intentions in South Korea. Through quantitative survey analysis using multiple regression, the research found that a strong ethical culture and perceived organisational support were significant predictors of willingness to report wrongdoing, with implications for both whistleblowing and the broader retention of ethically committed staff.

Andriansyah et al. (2022) examined the impact of whistleblowing systems and professional commitment on fraudulent behaviour and employee performance in Indonesian public universities. Using a quantitative survey of 180 university employees analysed through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), the study found that a robust whistleblowing system significantly deterred fraudulent practices and indirectly enhanced employee performance, suggesting that systemic support mechanisms influence both integrity and organisational commitment.

Amadi and Chukwuma (2022) studied institutional responses and employee trust in whistleblowing systems across Nigerian public service organisations. Adopting a survey design and descriptive and inferential statistical methods, they reported that weak or delayed responses

to whistleblowing often erode employees' trust in the institution, even when formal procedures are nominally in place, highlighting the importance of response quality for sustaining retention.

Miceli et al. (2022) conducted an extensive theoretical synthesis and narrative review of decades of international research on whistleblowing, updating the theoretical model with a focus on organisational response and support. Their analysis revealed that negative organisational reactions, particularly retaliation and ostracism, are the most frequent causes of whistleblower turnover, while proactive support programmes and fair treatment were associated with increased job satisfaction and stronger organisational commitment.

Kassinis and Panayiotou (2021) examined the relationship between emotional well-being programmes and whistleblower resilience in European universities. Using a cross-sectional survey and hierarchical regression analysis, they found that emotional well-being initiatives significantly increased whistleblower resilience and organisational commitment, suggesting that psychological support is an essential component of comprehensive whistleblower retention strategies.

Hwang et al. (2021) analysed how the authenticity of management responses moderates the effectiveness of whistleblowing mechanisms in public organisations across East Asia. Employing a quantitative survey and moderated regression analysis, their results showed that mere procedural compliance with whistleblowing protocols is insufficient without transparent, visible follow-up actions; authentic and consistent managerial responses are necessary to build the trust required for effective retention.

Hassan and Wright (2020) examined how public service motivation and ethical leadership influence turnover intentions among public sector employees in the United States. Employing a

longitudinal survey design and Structural Equation Modelling, their results showed that ethical leadership, especially when it fosters transparency and protects individuals who report ethical breaches, significantly reduces turnover intentions, establishing a clear link between the institutional ethical climate and staff retention.

Park and Lewis (2020) investigated the role of peer support, organisational culture, and turnover intentions among whistleblowers in South Korean public agencies. Using a quantitative survey design and logistic regression analysis, they found that peer encouragement did not significantly reduce turnover, indicating that informal social networks may be insufficient on their own in contexts where organisational culture discourages open solidarity with whistleblowers.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design, suitable for collecting quantitative data from a large population, to assess the effectiveness of whistleblower support programmes on employee retention in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria. The design enables examination of current practices and perceptions regarding organisational protection mechanisms, institutional response quality, and psychological and social support systems. The study population comprises 10,553 academic and non-academic staff across selected public universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education in the region, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Population of the Study

S/N	State	Institution	No. of Academic Staff
1	Lagos	University of Lagos	813
		Lagos State University	920
2	Ogun	Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	680
		Olabisi Onabanjo University	760
3	Oyo	University of Ibadan	1,946
		Ladoke Akintola University	360

4	Osun	Obafemi Awolowo University	1,399
		Osun State University	685
5	Ondo	Federal University of Technology, Akure	933
		Adekunle Ajasin University	504
6	Ekiti	Federal University of Oye	900
		Ekiti State University	653
Total			10,553

Source: Office of the Registrar of Selected Institutions, 2025.

The study sampled 385 academic staff as the respondents of the study, in line with the result of the Yamane (1967) formula adopted for the study. The formula is given below:

$$n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$$

$$n = 10,553 / [1 + 10,553(0.05)^2] \approx 385$$

The study used proportional random sampling to encourage voluntary involvement and ensure representativeness. Respondents were selected through randomisation proportional to each institution, using the formula: $n_i = (N_i / N) \times n$.

Table 3.2: Sample Size of Each of the Sampled Institutions

S/N	State	Institution	Sampled Staff
1	Lagos	University of Lagos	30
		Lagos State University	28
2	Ogun	Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	25
		Olabisi Onabanjo University	27
3	Oyo	University of Ibadan	71
		Ladoke Akintola University	13
4	Osun	Obafemi Awolowo University	51
		Osun State University	25
5	Ondo	Federal University of Technology, Akure	34
		Adekunle Ajasin University	18
6	Ekiti	Federal University of Oye	33
		Ekiti State University	30
Total			385

Source: Authors' Computation (2025).

The study utilised a well-structured, closed-ended questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section A captured respondents' socio-demographic information, such as gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, and years of service, while Section B contained items measuring the study's variables. Section B was further divided into four parts reflecting the independent variables, organisational protection mechanisms, institutional response quality, psychological support systems, and social support systems, and the dependent variable, employee retention. The instrument was adapted from validated scales in related studies to suit the Nigerian public tertiary institution context. Table 3.3 presents the variable identification and measurement.

Table 3.3: Variable Identification and Measurement

S/N	Variable	Definition	Measurement Indicators
Independent Variables			
1	Organisational Protection Mechanisms	Formal structures, policies, and actions established by institutions to protect whistleblowers from retaliation and ensure confidentiality during and after reporting misconduct.	Clear whistleblowing policies; Legal and administrative protection from retaliation; Confidential reporting procedures; Enforcement of anti-retaliation measures; Management commitment to whistleblower protection.
2	Institutional Response Quality	Timeliness, fairness, and transparency of the institution's actions in handling reported misconduct, including investigation and feedback mechanisms.	Promptness in handling reports; Transparency of investigative processes; Fair and unbiased treatment of whistleblowers; Communication of investigation outcomes; Trust in institutional response.
3	Psychological Support Systems	Institutional efforts to provide emotional and counselling assistance to whistleblowers to mitigate fear, stress, and anxiety associated with reporting wrongdoing.	Access to counselling or therapy services; Emotional support from management; Assurance of confidentiality during counselling; Encouragement from peers or supervisors; Reduction of fear and anxiety after reporting.
4	Social Support Systems	Network of social and peer relationships that encourage and support whistleblowers within the organisation, enhancing their sense of belonging and acceptance.	Peer encouragement and solidarity; Collegial respect for whistleblowers; Support from staff unions or associations; Social reintegration after disclosure; Positive team relationships post-reporting.
Dependent Variable			
5	Employee Retention	The institution's ability to retain employees who feel secure, supported, and valued after engaging	Intention to remain with the institution; Job satisfaction and commitment; Reduced turnover intentions; Sense of belonging

with whistleblowing or integrity-related processes.

and trust in management; Perceived organisational justice.

Source: Authors' Compilation (2025).

The questionnaires were administered through both physical and online methods to maximise reach and ensure a high response rate. Three trained research assistants supported data collection under the researcher's supervision, ensuring confidentiality, ethical compliance, and consistent administration across selected institutions in Southwest Nigeria.

The collected data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS software. The PLS-SEM model comprised two components: (i) the measurement model, which assessed the reliability and validity of the constructs through factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE); and (ii) the structural model, which tested the hypothesised path relationships between the four independent constructs, organisational protection mechanisms, institutional response quality, psychological support systems, and social support systems, and the dependent construct, employee retention. Model fit was evaluated using the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and the Normed Fit Index (NFI), while discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Path coefficients (β), T-statistics, and p-values were used to determine the significance of structural relationships, and effect sizes (f^2) were computed to assess practical significance.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Out of 385 questionnaires distributed, 368 were properly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 96%. This high return rate indicates strong participation and engagement, enhancing the reliability and validity of the data. The remaining 17 questionnaires (4%) were not returned, reflecting an efficient and well-managed data collection process.

4.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Respondents' Biodata**Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Respondents' Biodata**

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	213	57.9
Female	155	42.1
Age (Years)		
21–30	41	11.1
31–40	90	24.5
41–50	181	49.2
Above 50	56	15.2
Educational Qualification		
First Degree	56	15.2
Higher Degree (Postgraduate)	312	84.8
Years of Experience		
1–5 years	48	13.0
6–10 years	86	23.4
11–15 years	140	38.0
16–20 years	71	19.3
20 years and above	23	6.3
Marital Status		
Single	67	18.2
Married	238	64.7
Divorced	33	9.0
Widowed	30	8.2

Source: Field Survey (2025).

The demographic profile in Table 4.1 shows that 213 respondents (57.9%) were male and 155 (42.1%) were female, reflecting the broader employment trend in Nigerian higher education where male dominance in administrative and academic positions persists. The majority of respondents (49.2%) were aged 41–50 years, suggesting a mature, experienced workforce well-positioned to assess institutional support and retention practices. Regarding educational qualifications, 84.8% held postgraduate degrees, consistent with expectations in tertiary institutions and enhancing the credibility of responses. Most respondents (38.0%) had 11–15 years of service, indicating familiarity with organisational culture and reporting structures. In terms of marital status, 64.7% were married, reflecting a diverse workforce whose perspectives

collectively provide a robust basis for evaluating how whistleblower support programmes influence retention.

4.2 Measurement Model Loading and Reliability Test

Table 4.2: Measurement Model Loading and Reliability Test

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	CA	Rho-A	CR	AVE
Organisational Protection Mechanisms	OPM1	0.824***	0.887	0.893	0.923	0.707
	OPM2	0.853***				
	OPM3	0.809***				
	OPM4	0.876***				
	OPM5	0.834***				
Institutional Response Quality	IRQ1	0.791***	0.874	0.881	0.910	0.670
	IRQ2	0.822***				
	IRQ3	0.778***				
	IRQ4	0.851***				
	IRQ5	0.817***				
Psychological Support Systems	PSS1	0.861***	0.902	0.909	0.935	0.741
	PSS2	0.839***				
	PSS3	0.814***				
	PSS4	0.883***				
	PSS5	0.872***				
Social Support Systems	SSS1	0.844***	0.889	0.896	0.922	0.703
	SSS2	0.827***				
	SSS3	0.812***				
	SSS4	0.869***				
	SSS5	0.851***				
Employee Retention	ER1	0.874***	0.910	0.917	0.938	0.752
	ER2	0.853***				
	ER3	0.828***				
	ER4	0.888***				
	ER5	0.872***				

Note: *** $p < 0.001$. CA = Cronbach's Alpha; Rho-A = Dijkstra–Henseler reliability coefficient; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Source: Authors' Computation (2025).

The results in Table 4.2 indicate that all items under the five constructs exhibited strong factor loadings ranging from 0.778 to 0.888, all significant at $p < 0.001$. Cronbach's Alpha (CA) values for all constructs ranged from 0.874 to 0.910, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70, demonstrating high internal consistency. Composite Reliability (CR) values between 0.910 and 0.938 and Rho-A values above 0.88 further confirm construct reliability. AVE values ranging from 0.670 to 0.752 are all above the acceptable cutoff of 0.50, indicating good convergent validity.

Table 4.3: Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Construct	OPM	IRQ	PSS	SSS	ER
Organisational Protection Mechanisms (OPM)	0.841				
Institutional Response Quality (IRQ)	0.654	0.819			
Psychological Support Systems (PSS)	0.612	0.639	0.861		
Social Support Systems (SSS)	0.598	0.623	0.671	0.839	
Employee Retention (ER)	0.667	0.702	0.731	0.689	0.867

Note: Diagonal values (bold) represent the square root of AVE; off-diagonal values are inter-construct correlations. Source: Authors' Computation (2025).

The Fornell–Larcker results in Table 4.3 confirm well-established discriminant validity among the constructs. The square roots of the AVE, shown on the diagonal, are all greater than their corresponding inter-construct correlations, indicating that each construct accounts for more variance among its own indicators than among indicators of other constructs. Values of 0.841 (OPM), 0.819 (IRQ), 0.861 (PSS), 0.839 (SSS), and 0.867 (ER) are all higher than their respective inter-construct correlations, confirming conceptual distinctness and the absence of multicollinearity.

Table 4.4: Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct	OPM	IRQ	PSS	SSS	ER
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Organisational Protection Mechanisms (OPM)	—				
Institutional Response Quality (IRQ)	0.712	—			
Psychological Support Systems (PSS)	0.681	0.694	—		
Social Support Systems (SSS)	0.655	0.688	0.734	—	
Employee Retention (ER)	0.729	0.756	0.781	0.743	—

Note: All HTMT values below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015).

Source: Authors' Computation (2025).

The HTMT results in Table 4.4 further confirm the discriminant validity of the measurement model. All HTMT values range between 0.655 and 0.781, falling well below the conservative threshold of 0.85 recommended by Henseler et al. (2015). This confirms that the constructs are empirically distinct with no significant overlap.

Table 4.5: Structural Model Results

Path Relationship	Path Coeff. (β)	T-Statistic	p-Value	f ²	Decision
Organisational Protection Mechanisms → Employee Retention	0.198**	2.412	0.017	0.056	Significant
Institutional Response Quality → Employee Retention	0.143	1.682	0.094	0.031	Not Significant
Psychological Support Systems → Employee Retention	0.312***	5.284	0.0002	0.164	Significant
Social Support Systems → Employee Retention	0.087	1.213	0.226	0.014	Not Significant

Endogenous Construct: Employee Retention, R² = 0.621; Adjusted R² = 0.607 (Moderate explanatory power)

Model Fit: SRMR = 0.061; NFI = 0.921; VIF (all constructs) < 3.0 (no multicollinearity)

Note: ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001. f² = effect size; SRMR = Standardised Root Mean Square Residual; NFI = Normed Fit Index.

Source: Authors' Computation (2025).

The results in Table 4.5 reveal that among the four predictors, Organisational Protection Mechanisms (β = 0.198, p = 0.017) and Psychological Support Systems (β = 0.312, p = 0.0002) have significant positive effects on employee retention, indicating that formal protective measures and psychological support are pivotal in sustaining whistleblower commitment. Conversely, Institutional Response Quality (β = 0.143, p = 0.094) and Social Support Systems (β

= 0.087, $p = 0.226$) do not significantly influence retention. The model explains approximately 62% of the variance in employee retention ($R^2 = 0.621$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.607$). Model fit indices (SRMR = 0.061; NFI = 0.921) are within acceptable thresholds, confirming good model fit and no multicollinearity issues ($VIF < 3.0$).

4.3 Discussion of Findings

This study set out to examine the effectiveness of whistleblower support programmes on employee retention in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria, with specific focus on four dimensions: organisational protection mechanisms, institutional response quality, psychological support systems, and social support systems. Data from 368 respondents were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), and the findings are discussed below in the context of relevant empirical literature.

The results reveal a significant positive relationship between organisational protection mechanisms and employee retention ($\beta = 0.198$, $p = 0.017$). This indicates that when institutions implement effective protection frameworks, such as anonymity guarantees, anti-retaliation policies, and legal safeguards, whistleblowers are more likely to remain committed to their organisations. Institutionalising protective mechanisms not only promotes transparency but also strengthens trust and job security among staff. When employees feel safe disclosing unethical practices without fear of victimisation, their sense of organisational belonging and loyalty increases, leading to higher retention. This finding is consistent with Obi and Adebayo (2023), who observed in Nigerian tertiary institutions that employees were more likely to remain in workplaces where whistleblower protection policies were clearly and consistently enforced. It also aligns with Park (2023), who found perceived organisational support and ethical culture to be significant predictors of retention-related behaviour in South Korean public agencies.

Institutional response quality had no significant influence on employee retention ($\beta = 0.143$, $p = 0.094$). This suggests that employees' decisions to remain in an organisation are not strongly driven by the promptness or fairness of institutional responses to whistleblowing reports. One possible explanation is that employees may perceive institutional responses as procedural or symbolic rather than genuinely corrective, especially if sanctions against offenders are inconsistent or politically influenced. Amadi and Chukwuma (2022) reported that weak or delayed responses to whistleblowing often erode employees' trust even when formal procedures are nominally in place, while Hwang et al. (2021) demonstrated that mere procedural compliance is insufficient without visible, authentic follow-up actions. The weak effect of institutional response quality in this study may reflect a broader perception among Southwest Nigerian public university staff that institutional accountability mechanisms lack genuine enforcement power.

Psychological support systems exhibited the strongest and most significant positive effect on employee retention ($\beta = 0.312$, $p = 0.0002$). This confirms that counselling services, emotional reassurance, and post-disclosure mental health support play a vital role in reducing whistleblowers' turnover intentions. Whistleblowing often exposes employees to stress, social isolation, and workplace tension; psychological support helps them cope with these strains and sustain their commitment to the organisation. Kassinis and Panayiotou (2021) found that emotional well-being initiatives significantly increased whistleblower resilience and commitment in European universities, while Okeke and Olatunji (2024) demonstrated that Nigerian public servants who received emotional counselling after reporting misconduct exhibited stronger retention intentions. These findings collectively suggest that management must integrate professional counselling and confidential therapy into whistleblower support frameworks as a matter of priority.

Finally, the results indicate no significant relationship between social support systems and employee retention ($\beta = 0.087$, $p = 0.226$). This indicates that informal social networks, peer solidarity, or collegial encouragement do not substantially predict whether whistleblowers remain in their institutions. One possible explanation is that social support within the workplace may not always translate into institutional assurance, particularly if peers themselves fear retaliation for associating with whistleblowers. In environments where organisational culture discourages open solidarity with those who report misconduct, social relationships may be superficial and lack genuine protective influence. Park and Lewis (2020) found comparable results in South Korean public agencies, where peer encouragement did not significantly reduce turnover among whistleblowers, suggesting that informal networks are insufficient in the absence of strong formal institutional support structures.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the effectiveness of whistleblower support programmes significantly influences employee retention in public tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, organisational protection mechanisms and psychological support systems play crucial roles in encouraging employees to remain in service after whistleblowing incidents. In contrast, institutional response quality and social support systems showed weaker effects, indicating that existing response frameworks and informal support networks may lack the credibility, consistency, and visibility required to independently sustain employee retention. Accordingly, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Public tertiary institutions should adopt and rigorously enforce clear whistleblower protection policies that guarantee anonymity, non-retaliation, and legal backing. Strong,

visible, and consistently applied protective mechanisms will foster institutional trust, job security, and long-term employee commitment.

- ii. Institutions should establish dedicated, confidential counselling, stress management, and post-disclosure therapy programmes to address the emotional strain faced by whistleblowers. Integrating professional psychological support into whistleblower frameworks will help sustain employees' mental well-being and reinforce their engagement with the institution.
- iii. Management should ensure the timely, transparent, and fair handling of all whistleblowing cases. Visible disciplinary actions against offenders and clear communication of investigation outcomes are essential to improving institutional credibility and enhancing the retention effect of response quality.
- iv. While informal peer support is helpful, institutions should create structured, supervised peer-support and mentorship programmes under the guidance of ethics or human resource units. Formalising social support will make it more consistent, reduce the risk of social ostracism of whistleblowers, and strengthen the overall protective ecosystem of the institution.

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