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PERFORMANCE OF THE NATIONAL HOUSING FUND SCHEME AND BARRIERS TO MORTGAGE ACCESSIBILITY AMONG STAFF OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assessed the performance of the National Housing Fund (NHF) Scheme in delivering affordable housing to staff of tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria, with emphasis on the contributor-beneficiary gap and the factors constraining accessibility and utilisation of NHF funds. A quantitative survey design was adopted, and structured questionnaires were administered to 384 civil servants drawn from nine tertiary institutions in Anambra, Enugu and Imo States, selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, a paired-samples t-test, and multiple regression analysis. Results showed that although 93.2 percent of respondents were registered NHF contributors, only 1.3 percent had ever benefited from an NHF loan, a gap that was statistically significant ($t(8) = 3.562$, $p = 0.007$). Income level, loan procedures, and collateral requirements significantly predicted accessibility ($R^2 = 0.349$, $p < 0.001$). The study concludes that the NHF Scheme performs poorly even among a formally employed, statutorily-contributing population, and recommends streamlined loan processing, revised collateral requirements, and sustained awareness campaigns.

Keywords: National Housing Fund; affordable housing; mortgage accessibility; tertiary institution staff; South East Nigeria.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Access to affordable housing is an essential human right and a significant indicator of socioeconomic advancement, with housing finance systems designed to transform income into the fixed capital asset of a home (Moghayedi, Awuzie, Omotayo, Jeune, Massyn, Ekpo, Braune and Byron, 2021). In Nigeria, persistent inflation, currency devaluation, and high unemployment rates have gradually diminished the purchasing power of citizens, rendering homeownership increasingly challenging for low- and middle-income individuals (Garba, Umar, Umana, Olu and Ologun, 2024).

The National Housing Fund (NHF) Scheme was created under the National Housing Fund Act of 1992, which was later consolidated as Cap. N45, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004, to mobilize long-term, low-interest housing finance for Nigerian workers through mandatory contributions managed by the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria (FMBN) and distributed via Primary Mortgage Institutions (PMIs) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1992; Olorunleke, Gambo and Ufere, 2026). However, more than thirty years after its inception, the effectiveness of the scheme in converting contributions into tangible housing benefits continues to be a subject of debate (Olorunleke et al., 2026).

Within tertiary institutions, academic, administrative and technical staff constitute a large, structured and verifiable population of NHF contributors whose deductions are automatic and statutory. Because their contributions are assured, examining whether this population can convert those contributions into loans and housing benefits offers a stringent test of scheme performance: if a formally employed, compliant group cannot access the fund, the scheme's capacity to serve less-organised populations is called further into question. Empirical evidence already points to a troubling pattern nationally; data from the FMBN indicate that fewer than 20 percent of the roughly four million registered NHF contributors nationwide have ever secured a housing loan (FMBN, 2023, 2024), and anecdotal accounts suggest the South East, with its rapid urbanisation and acute housing pressure, performs no better.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria faces a housing deficit that surpasses 20 million units, marking one of the most critical shortages in Sub-Saharan Africa (Adedeji and Olotuah, 2012). The NHF Scheme was

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developed as a strategic initiative to address this issue. However, more than thirty years after its inception, the scheme seems to be significantly underachieving, especially in the South East region (Adedokun, Akinradewo, Adegoke and Abiola-Falemu, 2012). Systemic challenges such as bureaucratic delays, inadequate funding, low mortgage penetration, stringent collateral requirements, and limited loan access have been recognized as major barriers (Ayobami and Ekwueme, 2024). In tertiary institutions, staff members continue to have NHF contributions deducted from their salaries, yet they largely remain unable to secure housing loans. This disconnect undermines the fundamental social-welfare objective of the scheme and necessitates a focused empirical evaluation at the institutional level.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the performance of the NHF Scheme and the factors influencing its accessibility for staff in tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria.

Specifically, the objectives are to:

a. Evaluate the performance of the NHF Scheme among staff of tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria, using the ratio of contributors to beneficiaries as the main performance metric; and

b. Identify the primary factors that impact the accessibility and utilization of NHF funds by staff of tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

a. What is the relationship between the number of contributors to the NHF Scheme and the number of beneficiaries among staff of tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria?

b. What are the key factors affecting the accessibility of NHF Scheme funds by staff of tertiary institutions in the region?

1.5 Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant difference between the number of contributors and the number of beneficiaries of the NHF Scheme among staff of tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between key factors (income level, loan procedures, and collateral requirements) and the accessibility of NHF funds by low- and middle-income earners in South East Nigeria.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

Housing finance includes the financial tools, institutions, and regulatory systems that mobilize savings and channel long-term credit towards the acquisition, construction, or enhancement of residential properties. This encompasses both formal methods (such as mortgages, PMIs, and provident funds) and informal approaches (like family loans and thrift and rotating savings associations) (Adedokun, Akinradewo, Adegoke and Abiola-Falemu, 2012; Moghayedi et al., 2021). Affordable housing is typically characterized as housing that does not create an excessive financial strain, generally defined as housing costs that do not surpass approximately 30 percent of a household's income, while also adhering to basic standards of adequacy (Nubi, 2008; Hilber and Schöni, 2022).

The focus of this study is mortgage accessibility, which pertains to the genuine ability of potential borrowers to obtain financing. This ability is influenced not only by eligibility criteria but also by supply-side factors such as the availability of loan products and interest rates, as well as demand-side factors including income verification, creditworthiness, and understanding of application processes (Adedokun et al., 2012; Nubi, 2008). Civil servants employed in tertiary institutions, whose contributions to the National Housing Fund (NHF) are automatically deducted at source in accordance with Section 4 of the NHF Act, represent a defined demographic whose experiences with the scheme highlight the disparity between statutory design and actual implementation (Olorunleke, 2026).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The research is based on Housing Affordability Theory and Institutional Theory. Housing Affordability Theory, linked to Stone's (2006) residual-income model and earlier contributions by Hancock (1993), posits that affordability should be assessed by the income left after housing expenses in relation to non-housing essentials. Furthermore, it asserts that loan products must correspond in size, duration, and interest rate with the income profiles of borrowers to achieve truly affordable results (Hilber and Schöni, 2022; Makinde, 2024).

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Institutional Theory, introduced by North (1990) and further developed by Scott (2001), elucidates organizational and policy performance through the lens of formal and informal regulations, administrative capabilities, and transaction costs that govern access to resources. When applied to the NHF, it indicates that the clarity of the NHF Act, the administrative efficiency of the FMBN and PMIs, and the transaction costs incurred by applicants (such as documentation, processing steps, and waiting periods) collectively influence whether statutory contributions are transformed into loans (Adedokun et al., 2012). When considered together, these two theories formulate the study's operational proposition: NHF performance is influenced by both affordability alignment (the suitability of loan terms to contributors' income) and institutional friction (the navigability of procedures and requirements), necessitating an examination of both aspects to elucidate the observed outcomes.

2.3 Empirical Review

Several Nigerian studies converge on the finding that NHF contribution rates far outstrip benefit rates. Adedokun, Akinradewo, Adegoke and Abiola-Falemu (2012) evaluated the contribution of the NHF Scheme to housing delivery and identified bureaucratic inefficiency and cumbersome application procedures as central obstacles to conversion of contributions into loans. Ebekozien and Aigbavboa (2021), reviewing the NHF Scheme nationally, similarly reported weak translation of contributions into disbursed loans, attributing this to institutional and procedural bottlenecks at the FMBN-PMI interface. Nairametrics (2022), compiling FMBN administrative disclosures, reported that cumulative disbursements of about ₦394.6 billion between 1992 and 2022 remain small relative to the scale of the contributor base and national housing need, reinforcing the case for scaling and procedural reform.

At the subnational level, Chinwe and Obinna (2025) evaluated federal government workers' satisfaction with, and determinants of success in, accessing the NHF Scheme in Enugu urban area, and found that awareness, income level and procedural complexity significantly shaped access outcomes; their study, however, was confined to a single urban locality. Olorunleke, Gambo and Ufere (2026) examined drivers of homeownership through the NHF among Nigerian university staff and similarly found income and procedural factors to be decisive. Song and Yahaya (2025) surveyed NHF awareness and challenges in Taraba State and found low awareness compounding procedural barriers, while Sabo and Bello (2024) reported comparable accessibility constraints among low-income earners in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State.

Collectively, these studies establish that the contributor-beneficiary gap and the influence of income, procedure and collateral requirements on accessibility are well documented in other parts of Nigeria, but none provides a comparative, multi-institution assessment specific to tertiary institution staff across the three core South East states of Anambra, Enugu and Imo, a gap the present study addresses.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative survey research design, appropriate for the collection of standardised, comparable data on contributor and beneficiary status and on perceived accessibility barriers across multiple institutions.

3.2 Area of Study

The study area was the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, delimited to Anambra, Enugu and Imo States, which host the largest concentrations of tertiary institutions in the zone and some of its most rapidly urbanising cities (Awka, Onitsha, Enugu, Owerri), where housing-affordability pressure and mortgage-financing demand are most acute (Ukanwa, Xiong, Wasim and Galloway, 2022).

3.3 Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The target population consisted of civil servants, including academic, administrative, and technical personnel, from nine intentionally chosen tertiary institutions. These institutions were selected with three from each state, comprising one federal university, one state university, and one polytechnic: Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU), and Federal Polytechnic Oko in Anambra State; University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), and the Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu (IMT) in Enugu State; as well as Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), Imo State University (IMSU), and Imo State Polytechnic in Imo State. The overall population across these nine institutions, as sourced from the institutional personnel/statistics units, was 25,339. A minimum sample size of 384 was calculated using Cochran's (1977) formula, ensuring a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error. This sample size was then proportionately distributed among the institutions using a finite population correction. A multi-stage sampling approach was

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employed: purposive sampling was utilized to select the nine institutions, proportionate stratified random sampling was applied to distribute the sample across the institutions, and simple random sampling was used to choose individual respondents within each institution.

Table 1: Sampling Frame for Civil Servant Respondents

Institution	State	Population (N_h)	Sample (n_h)
UNIZIK	Anambra	7,713	117
COOU	Anambra	3,307	50
Federal Poly Oko	Anambra	1,954	30
UNN	Enugu	3,260	49
ESUT	Enugu	658	10
IMT	Enugu	592	9
FUTO	Imo	5,189	79
IMSU	Imo	1,866	28
Imo State Poly	Imo	800	12
Total	–	25,339	384

Source: Institutional Personnel/Statistics Units (2026); Field Survey, 2026.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to civil servants in the sampled institutions in February 2026, capturing socio-demographic characteristics, self-reported NHF contributor, loan-application and loan-benefit status, and Likert-scale items (5-point, Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) measuring perceived accessibility barriers. Content validity was established through review by the researcher's supervisor and subject-matter professionals. All 384 questionnaires distributed were returned and found usable, a 100 percent response rate attributable to direct researcher administration and follow-up. Data were coded and analysed in SPSS version 28.

For Hypothesis One, because the number of contributors and the number of beneficiaries are paired counts recorded for the same nine institutions, a paired-samples t-test was used. For Hypothesis Two, because three independent variables (income level, loan procedures, collateral requirements) were tested against a single accessibility outcome, multiple regression analysis was used, with composite Likert-scale scores serving as the basis for the model. The null hypotheses were rejected where the computed p-value was less than 0.05.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Socio-Demographic and NHF Participation Profile

Among the 384 civil-servant participants, 63.3 percent were male while 36.7 percent were female; 74.9 percent were within the prime working-age range of 30 to 49 years; and 40.1 percent received a monthly income between ₦200,001 and ₦300,000, with a total of 35.2 percent earning ₦200,000 or less, indicating that the majority of respondents fall within the target low- and middle-income category of the scheme.

In terms of participation in the NHF, 93.2 percent of respondents identified themselves as registered contributors. Given that Section 4 of the NHF Act mandates contributions to be compulsory and automatically deducted at source for public-sector employees, and that enforcement has remained stringent in the public sector even after a 2020 amendment that made participation optional solely for private-sector employees (Aluko and Oyebode, 2020; Lexology, 2024; PensionNigeria, 2020), the 6.8 percent who answered "No" likely indicates a lack of awareness regarding the automatic deduction rather than actual non-participation.

Therefore, every civil servant surveyed is considered a statutory contributor for the purposes of Objective One. The significant variation lies not in contributor status but in the conversion to tangible benefits: only 20.6 percent of respondents had ever applied for an NHF loan, and a mere 1.3 percent (5 out of 384) had ever received any benefits.

Table 2: NHF Contributors and Beneficiaries by Institution

Institution	State	Contributors (n)	Beneficiaries	Beneficiary Ratio (%)
UNIZIK	Anambra	117	2	1.71
COOU	Anambra	50	1	2.00
Federal Poly Oko	Anambra	30	0	0.00
UNN	Enugu	49	1	2.04

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ESUT	Enugu	10	0	0.00
IMT	Enugu	9	0	0.00
FUTO	Imo	79	1	1.27
IMSU	Imo	28	0	0.00
Imo State Poly	Imo	12	0	0.00
Total	–	384	5	1.30

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 2 shows that only four of the nine institutions (UNIZIK, COOU, UNN and FUTO) recorded any beneficiaries at all, none recording more than two, while five institutions recorded zero beneficiaries among sampled respondents. The overall beneficiary ratio of 1.30 percent confirms that the nationally-documented contributor-to-beneficiary conversion problem (FMBN, 2023, 2024) is fully reproduced among staff in several institutions in South East Nigeria

Table 3: Factors Affecting Accessibility and Utilisation of NHF Funds

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Income level affects ability to access NHF loans	4.21	1.03	Significant
2	Loan repayment terms are affordable	3.28	1.21	Not Significant
3	Collateral requirements are difficult to meet	4.15	1.02	Significant
4	Loan processing procedures are cumbersome	4.14	1.07	Significant
5	Bureaucratic delays discourage application	4.33	0.97	Significant
6	Land title requirements limit access	4.21	0.95	Significant
7	NHF funds are practically accessible	2.11	1.13	Not Significant
8	I am willing to utilise NHF loan in future	3.80	1.17	Significant
	Overall Mean	3.53	1.07	Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2026. (5-point scale; mean ≥ 3.50 = significant.)

Bureaucratic delays (M = 4.33) were the most strongly perceived barrier, followed by income constraints and land-title requirements (both M = 4.21). Notably, respondents strongly disagreed that NHF funds are practically accessible (M = 2.11), while loan repayment terms alone were not perceived as significant (M = 3.28), suggesting that prior institutional and procedural hurdles, rather than repayment burden itself, prevent contributors from reaching the disbursement stage.

4.2 Test of Hypothesis One

Table 4: Paired Samples Statistics

Pair 1	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
NHF Contributors	42.67	9	36.15	12.05
NHF Beneficiaries	0.56	9	0.73	0.24

Table 5: Paired Samples Test

Pair (Contributors – Beneficiaries)	Mean Diff.	SD	95% CI	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Difference	42.11	35.47	14.85 – 69.37	3.562	8	0.007

Source: SPSS v.28 Output, Field Survey 2026.

The mean number of NHF contributors per institution (M = 42.67, SD = 36.15) is substantially higher than the mean number of beneficiaries per institution (M = 0.56, SD = 0.73), a mean difference of 42.11 (95% CI: 14.85–69.37) that is statistically significant, $t(8) = 3.562$, $p = 0.007$. Since $p < 0.05$, H_{01} is rejected: there is a statistically significant difference between the number of contributors and the number of beneficiaries of the NHF Scheme among staff of tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria. The strong positive correlation between the two variables across institutions ($r = 0.946$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that larger institutions have marginally more beneficiaries in absolute terms, but scaling is nowhere near proportionate to the automatically-enrolled contributor base, underscoring a structural rather than incidental failure of conversion.

4.3 Test of Hypothesis Two

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Table 6: Model Summary (Key Factors and NHF Accessibility)

Model Summary	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	F(3,380)	p-value
Regression Model	0.591	0.349	0.344	67.91	< 0.001

Table 7: Regression Coefficients – Factors Predicting NHF Accessibility

Predictor	β	Std. Error	t	p-value	Sig.
Constant	3.764	0.254	14.82	< 0.001	***
Income Level	0.250	0.052	4.81	< 0.001	***
Loan Procedures	-0.286	0.054	-5.30	< 0.001	***
Collateral Requirements	-0.243	0.056	-4.34	< 0.001	***

Source: SPSS v.28 Output, Field Survey 2026.

The overall regression model is statistically significant, $F(3,380) = 67.91$, $p < 0.001$, explaining 34.9 percent of the variance in perceived NHF accessibility ($R^2 = 0.349$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.344$). Income level positively predicts accessibility ($\beta = 0.250$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher-income respondents find it comparatively easier to access loans, while loan procedures ($\beta = -0.286$, $p < 0.001$) and collateral requirements ($\beta = -0.243$, $p < 0.001$) both exert significant negative effects. Since $p < 0.05$, H_{02} is rejected: a significant relationship exists between these key factors and the accessibility of NHF funds.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The evidence gathered from various institutions indicates that, in line with the statutory and automatic nature of public-sector NHF contributions, all civil servants sampled are indeed contributors. However, only 1.30 percent have ever received a loan, a disparity that is consistent across all nine institutions and three states, with five institutions reporting no beneficiaries at all. This situation is in alignment with, and significantly worse than, national FMBN statistics which reveal that less than 20 percent of contributors nationwide have accessed loans (FMBN, 2023, 2024). The paired t-test substantiates that this is not merely a random occurrence but a statistically significant structural characteristic of scheme delivery in the region.

Regarding accessibility, bureaucratic delays have been identified as the most significant perceived obstacle, which is consistent with the findings of Adedokun, Akinradewo, Adegoke, and Abiola-Falemu (2012) and Ayobami and Ekwueme (2024). They noted that bureaucratic inefficiency and complicated application processes are major barriers to the national utilization of NHF. The pronounced negative impact of cumbersome procedures and collateral requirements, juxtaposed with the significant positive influence of income, confirms that the low uptake is primarily due to institutional design failures rather than a lack of willingness among contributors: 93.2 percent of respondents are registered contributors, yet only 1.3 percent have benefited.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the NHF Scheme and the factors influencing its accessibility among employees of tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria.

The findings indicate that, despite a nearly universal contributor base established through mandatory payroll deductions, the scheme has not succeeded in translating this participation into adequate housing benefits, as evidenced by a beneficiary ratio of merely 1.30 percent across nine institutions in Anambra, Enugu, and Imo States.

This shortcoming is statistically significant and is primarily attributed to bureaucratic and procedural obstacles, stringent collateral requirements, and income-related exclusions, rather than any deficiency in contributor participation or willingness.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this foundation, the following recommendations are proposed:

Firstly, the FMBN should enhance the NHF loan application and disbursement process by implementing a standardized, time-sensitive framework that includes digital tracking, with a target processing time not exceeding 90 days from the submission of a complete application, as bureaucratic delays were identified as the most significant perceived obstacle ($M = 4.33$).

Secondly, the FMBN, in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Housing, should reassess the minimum collateral requirements and eligibility criteria to more accurately reflect the realities faced by low- and middle-income earners, considering group collateral arrangements and employer-backed guarantees for staff of tertiary institutions whose employment and deductions can be verified and audited.

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Thirdly, given that 20.6 percent of respondents had applied for a loan while only 1.3 percent had successfully obtained one, the FMBN, in partnership with the bursary departments of tertiary institutions, should implement ongoing mortgage literacy and NHF awareness campaigns that clarify eligibility, required documentation, and grievance procedures, conducted in both English and Igbo to maximize outreach.

These initiatives, aimed directly at the barriers identified in this study, provide a feasible pathway to transforming the scheme's substantial, statutorily guaranteed contributor base into tangible affordable housing solutions for staff of tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria.

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