

## THE EVOLVING ROLES OF PROFESSIONALLY-TRAINED SECRETARIES IN A DIGITAL ERA

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### **Abstract**

*The role of professionally-trained secretaries in private establishments has undergone significant transformation with the advent of digital technologies. This study explores the evolving roles of professionally-trained secretaries in Ijebu-Ode Local Government, by empirically examining how digital advancements have reshaped their responsibilities, required skills, and professional development. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, the study investigates the impact of digital tools on secretarial work, highlighting the increased need for digital literacy in areas such as document management, virtual meetings, and communication platforms. A sample of 100 professionally-trained secretaries from private establishments was surveyed, using a structured questionnaire. The study's findings revealed that digital competencies are critical to job performance, with professionally-trained secretaries facing challenges in adapting to new technologies. It also showed that effective training programs significantly enhance digital skills, enabling professionally-trained secretaries to support organizational goals more effectively. This research underscores the importance of continuous professional development to keep pace with technological changes, positioning professionally-trained secretaries as integral contributors to organizational efficiency in the digital age. The study recommends among others that Organizations should provide regular training programmes to enhance the digital skills of professionally-trained secretaries. These programmes should cover the latest digital tools and technologies relevant to secretarial roles.*

*Keywords: Digital Age, Digital Competencies, Job Performance, Professional Development, Private Establishments, Technological Adaptation.*

### **Introduction**

The role of professionally-trained secretaries has undergone significant transformation over the years, particularly with the advent of digital technologies. Historically, professionally-trained secretaries were primarily responsible for clerical tasks such as typing, filing, and answering telephones. However, the digital age has redefined these roles, expanding the responsibilities of secretaries to include a range of administrative and technical tasks (Musty, 2023). This shift is largely attributed to the increasing reliance on digital tools and platforms, which have become integral to modern business operations. In private establishments, especially within the Ijebu-Ode Local Government area, professionally-trained secretaries now play a pivotal role in managing digital communications, coordinating virtual meetings, and utilizing sophisticated software for document management. These changes have not only altered the skill set required for the role but have also enhanced the strategic importance of secretaries in organizational contexts. Secretaries are now expected to possess a high level of digital literacy, enabling them to

efficiently manage information and support decision-making processes (Omolade & Tunmibi, 2024).

The integration of digital technologies in office management has led to the development of new competencies among professionally-trained secretaries. For instance, proficiency in office software suites, digital communication tools, and online collaboration platforms is now essential. This evolution has also necessitated continuous professional development to keep pace with technological advancements (Mshelia & Ejoro-Oghen, 2023). Consequently, the traditional perception of secretaries as mere support staff has shifted towards recognizing them as vital contributors to organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Furthermore, the digital age has introduced remote working capabilities, which have further redefined the roles of secretaries. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transition, as many organizations adopted remote working models. In this context, secretaries have had to adapt to new modes of operation, often involving the management of virtual offices and ensuring seamless communication and coordination among remote teams (Bette *et al.*, 2021). This adaptability underscores the dynamic nature of the secretary's role in the contemporary business environment.

The evolving roles of professionally-trained secretaries in the digital age also reflect broader trends in workplace digitization. As organizations strive for greater efficiency and innovation, the demand for tech-savvy secretaries who can navigate digital landscapes has increased. This trend is evident in private establishments within Ijebu-Ode Local Government, where secretaries are often at the forefront of implementing and managing digital solutions. By examining the changes in job responsibilities due to digital advancements, required skills, and the overall impact of digitization on secretarial work, this research will provide valuable insights into the contemporary and future landscape of the secretarial profession.

This study is hinged on the technological determinism theory which posits that technology drives societal changes, influencing all aspects of human life, including the workplace. The adoption of digital technologies has led to a paradigm shift in the roles of professionally-trained secretaries, requiring them to acquire new skills and adapt to new modes of operation (McLuhan, 1964). This theory helps explain the increasing reliance on digital tools in secretarial work. As technology advances, secretaries must continually update their skill sets to remain relevant and effective in their roles. For example, the widespread use of email, cloud storage, and project management software has transformed traditional secretarial tasks, making proficiency in these tools essential. Furthermore, technological determinism suggests that the evolution of technology shapes organizational structures and workflows. In the modern office, secretaries often take on roles that involve complex data management, virtual collaboration, and digital communication. This shift not only changes the nature of their daily tasks but also impacts their interactions with colleagues and superiors, necessitating a higher level of digital literacy and adaptability. Understanding technological determinism provides insight into how secretaries can proactively embrace technological changes to enhance their professional capabilities and contribute to organizational success.

Despite the significant changes in the roles of professionally-trained secretaries due to digital advancements, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that specifically focus on these transformations within the context of private establishments in Ijebu-Ode Local Government. Many professionally-trained secretaries in this region are grappling with the challenges of adapting to new technologies while balancing traditional responsibilities. This gap in the literature necessitates an in-depth analysis to understand the extent of these changes and their implications for both professionally-trained secretaries and the organizations they serve. Moreover, the rapid pace of technological change poses a continuous challenge for secretaries to keep their skills updated. There is a pressing need to identify the specific digital competencies required and the training needs of professionally-trained secretaries in private establishments. Addressing these issues is crucial for enhancing the efficiency and productivity of professionally-trained secretaries, thereby contributing to the overall effectiveness of organizational operations in the digital age.

## **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and were tested at a .05 level of significance:

*Research Hypothesis 1:* There is no significant relationship between demographic characteristics of secretaries and digital advancements.

*Research Hypothesis 2:* There is no significant relationships between familiarity with tools, years of training and digital competencies of secretaries in a digital age.

*Research Hypothesis 3:* There is no significant relationships between challenges faced by secretaries, prior exposure to technology, level of digital literacy and workplace support.

*Research Hypothesis 4:* There is no significant relationships between training programmes, workplace mentoring and access to digital resources.

## **Methods**

### ***Research Design***

The study adopted a quantitative research design to explore the characteristics and roles of professionally-trained secretaries in the digital age within private establishments in Ijebu-Ode Local Government. A quantitative approach was used to collect detailed data that could be generalized to the larger population.

### ***Research Participants and Sampling Procedure***

The population comprised all professionally-trained secretaries employed in private establishments within Ijebu-Ode Local Government, spanning small, medium, and large enterprises relevant to the study's focus on evolving secretarial roles. A sample of 100 secretaries was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across industries and organizational sizes.

### ***Research Instrument***

A self-designed questionnaire was used as the primary research tool. It included two sections: Section A captured respondents' bio-data, while Section B employed a four-point Likert scale to assess opinions on the roles, skills, and challenges of secretaries. The questionnaire's validity was enhanced through expert reviews, with suggestions incorporated to improve relevance and clarity.

### ***Reliability of Instrument***

Reliability was performed using the test-retest method. A small group of secretaries was surveyed twice within a two-week interval to ensure consistent results. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the instrument with a coefficient value of 0.964.

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

Questionnaire were personally distributed to professionally-trained secretaries, with explanations provided for clarity. Completed copies of questionnaire were retrieved within two days to minimize loss or delays.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data collected from the participants were analyzed using percentage and multiple linear regression to test the relationships between and among variables.

## Result

**Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents.**

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex	Male	35	35.0
	Female	65	65.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age	21-30 years	40	40.0
	31-40 years	35	35.0
	41-50 years	20	20.0
	51 years & above	5	5.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Qualification	SSCE	10	10.0
	OND	30	30.0
	HND	40	40.0
	B.Sc	15	15.0
	Others	5	5.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Position at Work	Junior Secretary	30	30.0
	Senior Secretary	25	25.0
	Administrative Assistant	20	20.0
	Office Manager	15	15.0
	Others	10	10.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Years of Experience	1-5 years	25	25.0
	6-10 years	30	30.0
	11-15 years	20	20.0
	16-20 years	15	15.0
	21 years and above	10	10.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The Table summarizes the demographic characteristics of the respondents. A majority are female (65%) and predominantly young, with 40% aged 21-30 years and 35% aged 31-40 years. Most respondents hold an HND (40%) or OND (30%) qualification. Common job roles include Junior Secretary (30%) and Senior Secretary (25%), with most respondents having 6-10 years (30%) or 1-5 years (25%) of work experience.

## Hypotheses Testing

*Research Hypothesis 1:* There is no significant relationship between demographic characteristics of secretaries and digital advancements.

**Table 2: Multiple Linear Regression on the Relationship Between Demographic Characteristics of Secretaries and Digital Advancements.**

Variable	B	SE	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	1.05	0.22	--	4.77	0.000
Digital Advancements	0.65	0.08	0.72	8.13	0.001*
Years of Experience	0.12	0.04	0.18	3.00	0.003
Age	-0.05	0.03	-0.09	-1.67	0.098
Level of Education	0.18	0.06	0.25	3.00	0.003

Note.  $R^2 = 0.58$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.56$ ;  $F(4,95) = 32.05$ ;  $p < 0.001$

Digital advancements significantly explain the roles of secretaries ( $B = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Together with years of experience and level of education, the model accounts for 58% of the variance in secretarial roles. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

*Research Hypothesis 2:* There is no significant relationships between familiarity with tools, years of training and digital competencies of secretaries in a digital age.

**Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression on the Relationships Between Familiarity with Tools, Years of Training and Digital Competencies of Secretaries in a Digital Age.**

Variable	B	SE	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	1.15	0.18	--	6.39	0.000
Digital Competencies	0.68	0.07	0.75	9.71	0.001*
Familiarity with Tools	0.10	0.05	0.11	2.00	0.048
Years of Training	0.14	0.06	0.15	2.33	0.021

Note.  $R^2 = 0.65$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.63$ ;  $F(3,96) = 59.14$ ;  $p < 0.001$

Digital competencies are a critical predictor of job performance ( $B = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The model explains 65% of the variance in job performance, highlighting the importance of digital skills in secretarial roles. The null hypothesis is rejected.

*Research Hypothesis 3:* There is no significant relationships between challenges faced by secretaries, prior exposure to technology, level of digital literacy and workplace support.

**Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression on the Relationships Between Challenges Faced by Secretaries, Prior Exposure to Technology, Level of Digital Literacy and Workplace Support.**

Variable	B	SE	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	1.20	0.20	--	6.00	0.000
Challenges Faced by Secretaries	0.55	0.07	0.68	7.86	0.001*
Prior Exposure to Technology	-0.08	0.06	-0.10	-1.33	0.186
Level of Digital Literacy	0.20	0.06	0.25	3.33	0.001
Workplace Support	0.18	0.05	0.22	3.60	0.001

Note.  $R^2 = 0.54$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.52$ ;  $F(4,95) = 27.23$ ;  $p < 0.001$

Challenges faced significantly predict the ability to adapt to digital tools ( $B = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Workplace support and digital literacy also play a role in adaptation. The null hypothesis is rejected.

*Research Hypothesis 3:* There is no significant relationships between training programmes, workplace mentoring and access to digital resources.

**Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression on the Relationships Between Training Programmes, Workplace Mentoring and Access to Digital Resources.**

Variable	B	SE	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	1.10	0.19	--	5.79	0.000
Training Programmes	0.63	0.07	0.74	9.00	0.001*
Workplace Mentorship	0.15	0.06	0.18	2.50	0.014
Access to Digital Resources	0.18	0.05	0.22	3.60	0.001

Note.  $R^2 = 0.62$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.60$ ;  $F(3,96) = 52.63$ ;  $p < 0.001$



Training programs significantly enhance digital skills ( $B = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The model explains 62% of the variance, emphasizing the importance of structured training and resources. The null hypothesis is rejected.

## Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the transformative impact of digital advancements on secretarial roles. Regarding the first hypothesis, the study revealed a significant relationship between digital advancements and secretarial roles ( $B = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This aligns with the work of Adenekan and Jimoh (2021), who emphasized that technological innovations and digital tools significantly enhance secretarial efficiency, particularly in public institutions. Similarly, Fasae (2024) noted that the evolution of modern office technologies has transformed secretarial roles, requiring professionals to consistently reskill and upskill to meet evolving organizational demands. These findings collectively highlight that digital advancements are pivotal in reshaping secretarial roles and improving their alignment with modern office requirements.

The second hypothesis focused on the critical role of digital competencies in job performance. This study found digital competencies to be a strong predictor of job performance, explaining 65% of the variance ( $B = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Supporting this, Kadhim (2024) emphasized that digital literacy is essential for enhancing workplace productivity, efficiency, and collaboration. Likewise, Kuteyi and Fasoranti (2021) reported that ICT tools dramatically improve secretarial performance by enabling the timely and accurate processing of information. Together, these studies and the findings of this research affirm that digital competencies are indispensable for secretarial professionals to perform effectively in a technology-driven workplace.

The third hypothesis explored the challenges secretaries face in adapting to digital tools. This study identified significant barriers, including insufficient workplace support and limited digital literacy ( $B = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hashim et al. (2024) highlighted similar issues, reporting that organizations often struggle with providing the infrastructure and training necessary for successful digital transformation. Additionally, Fasae (2024) emphasized that secretarial professionals face challenges in keeping pace with the rapid evolution of technology, necessitating continuous organizational investment in upskilling initiatives. These findings highlight the importance of addressing systemic and organizational barriers to enable secretarial professionals to effectively adapt to digital platforms.

Finally, this study examined the role of training programs in enhancing secretaries' digital skills, with findings showing a strong positive impact ( $B = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Omolade and Tunmibi (2024) similarly demonstrated that state-of-the-art equipment and targeted training programs significantly improve secretarial performance in tertiary institutions. Furthermore, Brown and Lee (2023) underscored the value of mentorship-based training in equipping secretarial professionals with the digital competencies needed to excel in technology-driven roles. These findings collectively affirm the critical importance of continuous training and development programs in ensuring that secretarial professionals remain proficient and adaptable in an evolving technological landscape.

In summary, this study's findings align with existing literature, highlighting the essential role of digital advancements, competencies, and training in transforming secretarial roles. Future research should delve deeper into systemic factors such as organizational culture and external infrastructural challenges to provide a more holistic understanding of these transformations.

## Conclusion

This study has examined the evolving roles of secretaries in the digital age, focusing on private establishments within Ijebu-Ode Local Government. The findings indicate that digital advancements have significantly transformed the responsibilities of secretaries, expanding their role beyond traditional clerical tasks to include complex administrative, technical, and digital competencies. The analysis revealed that digital skills are crucial for the job performance of secretaries, who now play an integral role

in the management of digital communications, virtual meetings, and document management. Furthermore, secretaries face substantial challenges in adapting to new technologies, but effective training and development programs can enhance their digital skills and facilitate their successful adaptation. The study highlights the importance of ongoing professional development and the need for private establishments to invest in training programs to ensure that secretaries remain adept in an increasingly digital workplace. As organizations continue to rely on digital tools and technologies, the role of the secretary as a vital contributor to organizational efficiency and effectiveness will only grow. In conclusion, the digital age has redefined the secretary's position in the workplace, and embracing technological advancements is key to their continued success.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Implement Regular Digital Training Programs:** Organizations should provide regular training programs to enhance the digital skills of secretaries. These programs should cover the latest digital tools and technologies relevant to secretarial roles.
2. **Provide Access to Advanced Digital Tools:** Ensure that secretaries have access to the necessary digital tools and technologies to perform their duties effectively. This includes investing in up-to-date software and hardware.
3. **Foster a Supportive Digital Work Culture:** Create a supportive and inclusive work environment that encourages the adoption of digital tools and practices. This can help in reducing resistance to digital transformation.
4. **Offer Continuous Learning and Development Opportunities:** Provide ongoing professional development programs and continuous learning opportunities to help secretaries stay updated with the latest digital advancements.

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