

Implementing Resource Description And Access (RDA) For Adaptability And Compatibility In Libraries

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Abstract

Resource Description and Access (RDA) represents a pivotal transition in library cataloging, offering a flexible and interoperable framework suited to the demands of digital resource management. This opinion piece evaluates the implementation of RDA as a tool for fostering adaptability, compatibility, and inclusivity in library systems. Drawing from recent literature and professional experience, the article analyzes the benefits of RDA—namely, enhanced resource discoverability, interoperability with global metadata frameworks, and support for technological innovation. It also addresses practical challenges surrounding transition, including system upgrades, staff development, and financial constraints. The discussion concludes with pragmatic recommendations for successful adoption and a call for ongoing research and collaboration to ensure libraries remain future-ready and user-centered.

Keywords: Resource Description and Access (RDA), cataloging, metadata, interoperability, digital libraries, accessibility

Introduction

In the fast-changing world of libraries and information services, Resource Description and Access (RDA) has emerged as a game-changer in how we organize and share information. RDA was developed to replace the older Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2), offering a more flexible and forward-looking approach to cataloging. It's designed for the realities of the digital age, where libraries handle not just books but also e-resources, multimedia, and linked data.

What makes RDA stand out is its focus on making library catalogs easier to connect, search, and share—both locally and globally. It provides a clear structure for creating high-quality metadata, which helps users find exactly what they need and allows libraries to exchange information seamlessly with other institutions. Because it works well with emerging technologies, RDA also ensures that today's catalogs can adapt to future innovations.

By supporting both traditional and digital materials, RDA bridges the gap between the library's print heritage and the growing demand for online resources. It creates space for innovation, allowing librarians to experiment with new tools and methods while still maintaining consistency and quality.

Statement of the Problem

The transition to Resource Description and Access (RDA) in libraries addresses critical challenges in traditional cataloging systems, which often struggle to meet the demands of modern information environments. Legacy standards, such as the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2), are increasingly inadequate for managing diverse digital collections, supporting interoperability with global systems, and accommodating emerging technologies like linked data. Many libraries face issues with inconsistent metadata, limited accessibility for diverse user groups, and inefficiencies in cataloging processes, which hinder resource discoverability and user satisfaction. Additionally, the lack of adaptability in outdated cataloging frameworks makes it difficult for libraries to integrate with evolving digital platforms and meet the expectations of tech-savvy patrons. Without adopting RDA, libraries risk maintaining fragmented, less accessible catalogs that fail to align with current and future information-sharing standards, ultimately limiting their ability to provide effective and inclusive services in a rapidly changing technological landscape.

Objectives of RDA Implementation

1. **Enhance Resource Discoverability:** Implement RDA to create detailed, user-friendly metadata that improves the accuracy and efficiency of resource discovery for library patrons across diverse platforms.
2. **Ensure Interoperability:** Adopt RDA standards to facilitate seamless data exchange and compatibility with global library systems, enabling integration with other metadata frameworks and digital repositories.

3. **Support Adaptability to Technological Advances:** Utilize RDA's flexible structure to accommodate emerging technologies, such as linked data and semantic web applications, ensuring library catalogs remain relevant in a rapidly evolving digital environment.
4. **Improve Accessibility for Diverse Users:** Apply RDA principles to produce inclusive and accessible catalog records that cater to varied user needs, including support for multiple languages and formats.
5. **Streamline Cataloging Processes:** Leverage RDA's standardized guidelines to simplify and optimize cataloging workflows, reducing redundancies and enhancing consistency across library collections.
6. **Promote Future-Readiness:** Prepare libraries for long-term sustainability by aligning cataloging practices with RDA's forward-thinking approach, ensuring compatibility with future metadata standards and systems

Significance

The implementation of Resource Description and Access (RDA) for adaptability and compatibility in libraries holds substantial importance for advancing library and information science practices. This study is significant because it addresses the critical need for modernized cataloging systems that enhance resource discoverability, interoperability, and user accessibility in an increasingly digital world. By adopting RDA, libraries can create standardized, high-quality metadata that improves search accuracy and supports seamless integration with global information systems, fostering collaboration and resource sharing. The study highlights RDA's role in enabling libraries to adapt to emerging technologies, such as linked data and semantic web applications, ensuring long-term sustainability and relevance. Furthermore, it underscores the potential for RDA to streamline cataloging processes, reduce operational inefficiencies, and cater to diverse user needs, including multilingual and accessible formats. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for library administrators, catalogers, and policymakers, guiding the transition to RDA and promoting the development of inclusive, future-ready library systems that meet the evolving demands of patrons and the broader information ecosystem.

Literature Review and Current Context

The implementation of Resource Description and Access (RDA) in libraries has been widely discussed in library and information science literature, particularly for its role in enhancing adaptability and compatibility in cataloging systems. RDA, introduced in 2010 by the Joint

Steering Committee for Development of RDA, was designed to replace the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2) and address the limitations of traditional cataloging in the digital age. This review synthesizes key findings from existing research, highlighting RDA's impact on library systems, challenges in its adoption, and its significance for future-ready information management.

RDA and Adaptability in Cataloging Scholars emphasize RDA's flexible framework as a cornerstone for adaptability in library cataloging. Tillett (2011) notes that RDA's alignment with the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) and Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD) enables libraries to create structured, user-centered metadata that improves resource discoverability. Unlike AACR2, which was primarily designed for print-based collections, RDA accommodates diverse formats, including digital and multimedia resources. Studies by El-Sherbini (2013) highlight RDA's entity-relationship model, which allows libraries to describe resources with greater granularity, supporting dynamic updates and integration with evolving technologies. This adaptability is critical as libraries manage increasingly complex digital collections, ensuring catalogs remain relevant in a rapidly changing information landscape.

Compatibility and Interoperability RDA's compatibility with global standards and linked data environments is a recurring theme in the literature. Dunsire et al. (2015) argue that RDA's alignment with semantic web principles, such as the use of Resource Description Framework (RDF), facilitates interoperability with external systems, including digital repositories and open-access platforms. This compatibility enables libraries to share metadata seamlessly across institutions, enhancing global access to resources. Research by Park and Tosaka (2016) underscores RDA's role in bridging library catalogs with linked data initiatives, such as BIBFRAME, which aims to replace MARC formats with more web-friendly structures. However, studies also note challenges, including the need for technical expertise and infrastructure to fully leverage RDA's linked data potential (Coyle, 2016).

User Accessibility and Inclusivity RDA's focus on user needs is another critical area of discussion. According to Gorman (2014), RDA's detailed metadata standards support the creation of accessible records that cater to diverse user groups, including those requiring multilingual or accessible formats. Research by Chapman and Schwartz (2019) highlights how RDA's emphasis on clear, consistent descriptions improves search precision, benefiting both general users and those with specific accessibility needs. This aligns with the broader goal of libraries to provide equitable access to information, particularly in diverse and globalized communities.

Challenges in RDA Implementation Despite its advantages, the adoption of RDA presents challenges. Studies by Danskin (2013) and Jones (2017) identify barriers such as high training costs, resistance to change among catalogers accustomed to AACR2, and the need for significant updates to library management systems. Smaller libraries, in particular, face resource constraints that hinder RDA implementation (Adamich, 2018). Additionally, the transition from MARC to RDA-compatible formats requires substantial investment in technology and staff development, as noted by McCutcheon (2015). These challenges highlight the need for strategic planning and support to ensure successful adoption.

Future Directions and Gaps Recent literature points to the potential of RDA to support emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, in cataloging processes (Zhang & Liu, 2020). However, gaps remain in understanding the long-term impact of RDA on library workflows and user satisfaction, particularly in non-Western contexts where multilingual cataloging is critical. Further research is needed to explore cost-effective strategies for RDA adoption in resource-constrained libraries and to assess its effectiveness in enhancing user engagement across diverse digital platforms.

The Author's Argument and Perspective

RDA: A Practical Step Forward for Library Cataloging

The way libraries organize and connect information is changing fast. Resource Description and Access (RDA) isn't just a new set of cataloging rules—it's a modern approach that helps libraries stay relevant in a digital, interconnected world. While moving to RDA comes with challenges, the benefits are too significant to ignore.

Keeping Up with Change

Libraries today handle much more than printed books. Digital collections, videos, datasets, and online archives are part of everyday work. RDA is built to adapt to these different formats. Its structured, entity-based metadata means catalogs can be updated easily and remain useful, no matter how technology changes. This flexibility ensures that libraries won't have to start from scratch each time a new format or platform appears.

Connecting with the World

Users no longer consider libraries to be isolated places—they expect to find resources from different systems all in one place. RDA is designed to work with semantic web principles, which makes it easier for libraries to share information across networks and collaborate with others

globally. This global connection makes library resources more visible and useful far beyond local communities.

Serving Everyone Better

Libraries are for everyone, and RDA supports that mission. It uses standardized vocabularies and detailed descriptions that help people find what they need, whether they speak different languages, use assistive technologies, or need extra context to understand a resource. In other words, RDA doesn't just improve data—it improves accessibility and inclusivity.

Making Searches Smarter

For users, RDA means better search experiences. Detailed metadata allows for faceted searching, so people can refine results quickly and get exactly what they require. When combined with AI-driven tools, RDA can also support personalized recommendations and improved accessibility features, making library systems feel more intuitive and user-friendly.

Facing the Challenges

Of course, moving to RDA isn't without hurdles. Staff requires training, systems may need upgrades, and there's a financial cost. Sometimes, inconsistent application across libraries can lead to uneven results. But these issues are not deal breakers—they're problems that can be solved through collaboration, shared training programs, and policy development. The transition may take time, but it's an investment in the library's future.

Why It Matters Now

In today's world, a library's impact is often judged by how easy it is to find and use its resources online. RDA helps libraries meet those expectations by building catalogues that are adaptable, connected, and accessible. It's a standard that doesn't just prepare libraries for today's needs but also positions them for tomorrow's opportunities. RDA is more than an upgrade—it's a strategic move. Libraries that embrace it will be better equipped to serve diverse communities, connect with global networks, and adapt to whatever changes the future brings. The effort to transition will pay off in stronger, more inclusive, and more future-ready library services.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The successful adoption of Resource Description and Access (RDA) in libraries requires more than simply updating cataloging rules—it demands a coordinated, forward-thinking approach.

First, libraries should strategically plan for the transition by assessing their technical infrastructure, allocating resources for necessary upgrades, and developing a structured change management

process. Equipping staff with the skills to work effectively with RDA is essential, making targeted training programs a critical part of the plan.

Second, collaboration is key; by building partnerships with other libraries, consortia, and professional bodies, institutions can share resources, pool expertise, and collectively address challenges. Such cooperation also fosters a sense of shared ownership over the transition process.

Third, libraries should work to standardize the application of RDA across their systems. Consistency ensures that metadata remains interoperable, making it easier to share and integrate information with other catalogs and platforms on a global scale.

Fourth, advocating for funding is crucial—particularly for resource-constrained institutions. Clear communication about RDA's benefits to stakeholders, funders, and policymakers can help secure the necessary financial support for system upgrades, training, and implementation.

Fifth, the transition should be user-centered. Libraries must monitor and evaluate how users interact with RDA-compliant catalogs, gathering feedback to refine search features, accessibility options, and overall user satisfaction.

Finally, libraries should embrace emerging technologies by integrating RDA with AI-driven tools and semantic web applications. These technologies can enhance discoverability, personalize search results, and make resources more accessible to diverse audiences, including multilingual and differently-abled users.

By combining careful planning, collaboration, standardization, advocacy, and innovation, libraries can ensure that RDA adoption is not only successful but also transformative. This approach will position libraries to better serve their communities, strengthen global information sharing, and remain adaptable in the face of future technological changes.

Conclusion

Resource Description and Access (RDA) is a pivotal standard for building adaptable, compatible, and inclusive cataloging systems in modern libraries. Its flexible, entity-based framework allows seamless integration with emerging technologies, supports global interoperability, and promotes user-focused services that meet the needs of diverse audiences. By aligning with semantic web principles and accommodating multiple formats and languages, RDA ensures that library catalogs remain relevant and accessible in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

Yet, successful adoption is not without challenges. Limited funding, inadequate technical infrastructure, and gaps in staff expertise can slow implementation and diminish potential benefits. Addressing these barriers requires strategic planning, staff training, collaborative partnerships, and consistent application of RDA standards across institutions.

Libraries that commit to investing in RDA—despite initial hurdles—will be better positioned to deliver efficient, innovative, and future-ready services. This investment strengthens their role as trusted gateways to knowledge, fosters greater engagement with users, and enables seamless participation in global information networks. Ultimately, adopting RDA is not just about improving cataloging—it is about ensuring that libraries remain adaptable, inclusive, and capable of meeting the evolving expectations of today’s digital patrons.

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