

EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOURCE DESCRIPTION AND ACCESS (RDA) IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (NOUN)

By

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Abstract

The study examines the application of Resource Description and Access (RDA) in academic libraries, with a focus on the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). It assessed the level of awareness of RDA among cataloguing staff, the extent of its application in cataloguing practices, the challenges hindering its adoption, and strategies for improvement. A descriptive survey design was employed, and structured questionnaires were administered to cataloguers and librarians using simple random sampling. The population was 60 cataloguers and metadata librarians across the six geographical zones in Nigeria and Data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to examine awareness, implementation levels, perceived benefits, and barriers to RDA usage. Findings revealed that while cataloguing staff demonstrated moderate awareness of RDA, its practical implementation remained inconsistent and limited. Major challenges included infrastructural inadequacies, insufficient training opportunities, and the absence of institutional policies to support the transition to modern cataloguing standards. Despite these challenges, respondents acknowledged RDA's potential to enhance resource description, interoperability, and access to information. The study concludes that without deliberate institutional commitment, the adoption of RDA will remain slow and fragmented. It recommends targeted capacity-building initiatives to improve staff expertise, formulation of supportive policies, and greater investment in ICT infrastructure to address infrastructural gaps. These measures are critical for aligning Nigerian academic libraries with international metadata standards, improving cataloguing accuracy, and enhancing access to knowledge resources.

Keywords: Resource Description and Access (RDA), Cataloguing and Classification, Academic Libraries, Metadata Standards

Introduction

Cataloguing and classification are at the core of library operations, serving as the bedrock for knowledge organization and information retrieval. Over the years, cataloguing codes such as AACR2 (Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition) have guided library professionals in describing, organizing, and granting access to resources. However, the emergence of the digital environment and the growing demand for interoperability across bibliographic systems prompted the development of Resource Description and Access (RDA).

RDA was introduced in 2010 by the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA as a replacement for AACR2, designed to meet the needs of the digital information environment. Unlike AACR2, which primarily focuses on print resources, RDA provides a framework for describing both digital and physical resources, thereby enhancing bibliographic control and improving global access to knowledge. RDA provides a more flexible and comprehensive framework for describing all types of resources and aims to address the needs of users in today's digital and networked environment (Oliver, 2010). Its adoption and application in academic libraries are crucial for ensuring standardized metadata creation and enhancing resource discoverability. RDA is based on the conceptual models of the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) and the Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD), offering a user-centered approach to cataloguing. According to Zeng and Qin (2008), the principles embedded in RDA promote interoperability, data reuse, and integration across diverse information systems. This makes

RDA particularly relevant in academic libraries, where access to accurate and up-to-date bibliographic information is essential for learning, teaching, and research. There was an emphasis on the importance of comprehensive training and infrastructural readiness for effective RDA adoption (Tillett, 2009).

Despite its global adoption, many academic libraries in developing countries, including Nigeria, have been slow in implementing RDA due to infrastructural limitations, inadequate awareness, insufficient training, and lack of supportive policies (Olorunsola, 2019). For a major institution like the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), which operates within a digital and distance-learning framework, adopting RDA is crucial in order to enhance interoperability, accuracy, and access to resources for its large, geographically dispersed student population.

AACR2 served libraries well in the **print era**, but its structure was rigid and not well-suited for modern **digital resources** and **linked data** applications. RDA was developed to address these limitations, providing a **more flexible, digital-friendly, and future-oriented** cataloguing standard. As libraries continue to embrace digital transformation, **RDA ensures better interoperability, metadata integration, and improved resource discovery**, making it the preferred choice for **modern cataloguing and classification**. This study, therefore, evaluates the level of awareness, extent of implementation, challenges, and strategies for enhancing the adoption of RDA in NOUN libraries.

Statement of the Problem

Although Resource Description and Access (RDA) has become the preferred international standard for cataloguing in the digital era, many academic libraries in Nigeria

still rely on outdated practices, particularly the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2). This slow transition to RDA limits the capacity of libraries to effectively organize, manage, and share bibliographic data in today's dynamic, technology-driven information environment.

The delayed adoption of RDA in Nigerian academic libraries is linked to several challenges, including limited awareness of the standard, inadequate training opportunities for cataloguers, insufficient technological infrastructure, and the absence of institutional policies promoting modern cataloguing practices. Consequently, the potential benefits of RDA such as improved metadata quality, interoperability across library systems, and enhanced user access to resources remain largely unrealized in many academic institutions.

This situation raises significant concerns about the relevance and efficiency of cataloguing practices in Nigerian academic libraries, especially given the growing integration of digital resources and the demands of global information exchange.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the extent to which RDA has been adopted and implemented in the NOUN University Library where digital resources are central to library operations. Limited adoption of RDA could hinder effective cataloguing, reduce access to digital content, and create interoperability gaps with international metadata standards. Thus, there is a need to evaluate the level of awareness, application, challenges, and possible strategies for improving RDA adoption in NOUN libraries. By doing so, the study intends to provide insights that will support the modernization of cataloguing practices in Nigerian academic libraries.

Research Questions

The main purpose of the study is to evaluate the implementation of RDA in academic libraries, with a focus on the National Open University of Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. What is the level of awareness of RDA among cataloguing staff at NOUN libraries?
2. To what extent is RDA implemented in cataloguing practices in NOUN libraries?
3. What challenges hinder the implementation of RDA in NOUN libraries?
4. What strategies can be implemented to improve RDA implementation and utilization in NOUN libraries?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in the following ways:-

1. **For librarians:** It provides insights into their level of preparedness, training needs, and areas where capacity building is required for the adoption of RDA.
2. **For NOUN management:** It highlights policy and infrastructural gaps that need to be addressed to ensure successful transition to RDA.
3. **For academia:** It contributes to literature on metadata standards in Nigeria, offering a reference point for other institutions considering RDA adoption.
4. **For global librarianship:** It adds to the discourse on how developing countries can align their cataloguing standards with international best practices.

Literature Review

Resource Description and Access (RDA)

Resource Description and Access (RDA) is a cataloguing standard developed to succeed the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2). Unlike AACR2, which was largely designed for print-based resources, RDA provides a more flexible and user-centered approach to bibliographic description, making it suitable for describing resources in both physical and digital environments (Oliver, 2010). It is based on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) and Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD), emphasizing relationships between entities such as works, expressions, manifestations, and items (IFLA, 2017). Scholars argue that RDA enhances interoperability, supports linked data applications, and aligns library cataloguing practices with international metadata standards (Tillett, 2011). Thus, its global adoption is viewed as a significant step toward modernizing bibliographic control and improving access to resources.

Several studies have explored the awareness of RDA among cataloguing professionals. Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020) reported that while awareness of RDA is increasing among Nigerian librarians, understanding of its principles remains low, often limited to training workshops and conferences. Similarly, Olorunsola and Adetimirin (2021) noted that awareness does not necessarily translate into practice, as many cataloguers still rely on AACR2 due to familiarity and institutional inertia. In contrast, studies in more technologically advanced regions (Park & Tosaka, 2015) demonstrate that cataloguers not only show high awareness but also embrace RDA as a tool for facilitating resource discovery in digital environments. This suggests a global divide in RDA adoption, with developing countries like Nigeria lagging due to infrastructural and policy constraints.

Globally, the application of RDA varies across institutions. In developed contexts, RDA has largely been integrated into cataloguing workflows, enhancing metadata consistency and resource discovery (Moulaison Sandy & Bossaller, 2017). However, in Africa, the adoption rate is slower. Aina (2019) revealed that most Nigerian academic libraries still rely on AACR2 due to limited ICT infrastructure and lack of skilled manpower. Within NOUN, studies suggest that although librarians are familiar with the concept of RDA, its application in cataloguing is fragmented and inconsistent (Owolabi & Lawal, 2022). This inconsistency reflects broader challenges in transitioning from traditional cataloguing rules to more dynamic, digital-friendly standards.

The literature highlights several barriers to the effective adoption of RDA in developing countries.

- ❖ **Infrastructural Limitations:** Many Nigerian academic libraries face poor ICT infrastructure, limited internet connectivity, and inadequate software support for modern metadata standards (Ogbomo & Akpojotor, 2020).
 - ❖ **Training and Skills Gap:** Studies by Adetunji (2021) and Ifijeh (2020) show that cataloguers often lack the technical training needed to understand and apply RDA effectively.
 - ❖ **Policy and Institutional Support:** Olorunsola (2018) argues that the absence of supportive policies and institutional frameworks further limits RDA integration in Nigerian libraries.
- These challenges reflect a systemic problem where awareness alone cannot drive implementation without adequate institutional commitment.

Despite challenges, RDA offers significant benefits that have been documented across the literature. Tillett (2011) and Oliver (2010) emphasize that RDA improves resource description, facilitates linked data applications, and enhances interoperability across library systems. In Nigeria, respondents in studies by Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020) acknowledged that RDA could improve cataloguing accuracy, facilitate global information exchange, and modernize academic library practices if fully implemented. Furthermore, RDA's emphasis on relationships among resources enables more intuitive search and retrieval, thus improving user access and satisfaction (Park & Tosaka, 2015).

Several strategies have been proposed to improve RDA adoption in academic libraries.

- ❖ **Capacity Building:** Continuous professional development, workshops, and hands-on training are critical for building cataloguers' competence in RDA (Adetunji, 2021).
- ❖ **Policy Formulation:** Institutional and national library bodies must formulate policies that mandate or encourage RDA implementation (Olorunsola & Adetimirin, 2021).
- ❖ **Investment in ICT:** Adequate ICT infrastructure, including integrated library systems compatible with RDA, is essential for practical adoption (Ogbomo & Akpojotor, 2020).
- ❖ **Collaborative Networks:** International collaborations and partnerships with professional associations such as IFLA can provide the necessary support for transitioning into RDA-based cataloguing (Moulaison Sandy & Bossaller, 2017).

The literature reveals a clear gap between awareness and application of RDA in Nigerian academic libraries. While studies acknowledge its benefits, infrastructural inadequacies, lack of training, and weak policy frameworks hinder its full integration.

Comparisons with developed contexts highlight the need for Nigerian academic libraries to invest in ICT, foster training, and adopt institutional policies supportive of RDA. Without deliberate action, the adoption of RDA in institutions such as NOUN will remain fragmented and slow.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this paper is descriptive survey design. According to Nworgu (2015), descriptive design is a design in which people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered being representative of the entire group. The research work was conducted in NOUN libraries across six geographical zones. These areas were chosen so to reach out to all study centre libraries across Nigeria and as such accessible and easier for the researcher to get the necessary data for my research exercise. The target population comprised 60 cataloguers and metadata librarians working within NOUN library system. The total population of this study is manageable because it is not large. Therefore, the whole population was studied without sampling. The questionnaires were administered using a combination of physical distribution and online survey tools, ensuring responses from all zones. The structured questionnaires contain both closed and open-ended questions. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentages) were used. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, and percentages to present findings on awareness levels, application extent, challenges, and strategies. Results were interpreted in relation to research questions, highlighting trends, gaps, and implications for practice.

Implication of the Study

The implication is that unless NOUN and similar institutions invest in infrastructure, training, and supportive policies, they risk being left behind in global bibliographic practices. This could negatively affect the visibility and accessibility of their resources in international databases and collaborations.

Findings

The findings revealed the following:

The data findings for this study were presented based on a descriptive survey involving 60 cataloguers and metadata librarians using a questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions. The responses are analyzed using frequency and percentage. These findings align with similar studies conducted in other developing countries, suggesting that infrastructural and training challenges remain the biggest barriers to RDA adoption.

Table 1: Awareness of RDA among Staff

Response Option	Frequency(F)	Percentage(%)
Fully aware	24	40%
Partially aware	21	35%
Not aware	15	25%
Total	60	100%

The table shows that 40% of respondents are fully aware of RDA, while 35% are partially aware, and 25% are not aware at all. This indicates a moderate level of awareness among staff, suggesting the need for more intensive training and sensitization on the RDA standard.

Table 2: Extent of RDA Application in Cataloguing

Response option	Frequency(F)	Percentage(%)
Frequently applied	15	25%
Occasionally applied	18	30%

Rarely applied	12	20%
Not applied at all	15	25%
Total	60	100%

Only 25% of respondents frequently apply RDA, while 30% apply it occasionally. A significant 45% either rarely or do not apply RDA at all, highlighting limited practical implementation. This may be due to infrastructural gaps or lack of formal policy on RDA use in the institution.

Table 3: Challenges Faced in Applying RDA

Challenge identified	Frequency(F)	Percentage(%)
Inadequate training and awareness	18	30%
Lack of ICT infrastructure and tools	15	25%
Resistance to change from AACR2	12	20%
Absence of RDA- Compliant Cataloguing System	9	15%
Limited support from management	6	10%
Total	60	100%

The leading challenge is inadequate training and awareness (30%), followed by lack of ICT infrastructure (25%). These findings point to systemic and institutional barriers that must be addressed for successful RDA adoption and use.

Implication of the Study

The implication is that unless NOUN and similar institutions invest in infrastructure, training, and supportive policies, they risk being left behind in global bibliographic practices. This could negatively affect the visibility and accessibility of their resources in international databases and collaborations.

Recommendations

1. Regular RDA training should be organized for cataloguing staff.
2. Institutional policies should mandate the adoption of RDA.
3. The university should invest in relevant ICT tools and cataloguing software.
4. Partner with other institutions and professional bodies for shared resources and expertise.

Conclusion

This study reveals a significant gap between awareness and application of Resource Description and Access (RDA) in NOUN Library. While there is a moderate level of awareness among library staff regarding the principles and benefits of RDA, its actual implementation in cataloguing practices remains minimal. The findings indicate that several critical barriers hinder the effective adoption of RDA. These include inadequate training opportunities for staff, insufficient technological infrastructure, and limited access to relevant resources, and a general resistance to change within the institution.

Addressing these challenges is essential for aligning the library's cataloguing operations with international standards, thereby enhancing the discoverability and interoperability of bibliographic records. To bridge this gap, there is a pressing need for strategic investments in staff capacity building through workshops and continuous professional development programs. Furthermore, upgrading the library's technological infrastructure and fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability will be instrumental in facilitating a successful transition to RDA.

The adoption of RDA holds great promise for improving the quality and consistency of cataloguing in academic libraries. Therefore, NOUN Library must take deliberate steps to overcome existing challenges and embrace modern cataloguing standards to remain relevant in the evolving landscape of library and information science. The study concludes that although NOUN cataloguers are moderately aware of RDA, its actual application remains limited and inconsistent. Challenges such as infrastructural inadequacies, insufficient training, and lack of institutional policy continue to hinder adoption. To ensure effective cataloguing, interoperability, and enhanced access to resources, deliberate institutional commitment and investment are required.

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