RDA Implementation in Public Libraries: Challenges Faced and Lessons Learned

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Criticism of RDA

Chris Long (2018) surveyed 100 of the largest, defined by the IMLS due to collection size, American public libraries. 78% had fully adopted RDA for original cataloging leaving a sizable 22% non-adopters.

“RDA is also just difficult to understand and seems to be constantly changing so it’s hard to keep up.” – Survey Respondent

“RDA is a ‘disimprovement’ as a cataloging system...RDA’s basis in FRBR, a set of theoretical mathematics principles, makes both the cataloging process and the resulting records harder for our patrons to use, not easier.” – Survey Respondent

Many aspects of RDA make it more difficult for patrons and staff in public libraries to access material.” – Survey Respondent

(Chong, 2018)

Four of the non-adopting libraries stated they “might” adopt RDA and two of the non-adopting libraries stated they “probably or definitely would not” adopt (Long, 2018).

Factors in Non-Adoption

Panchyshyn, Lambert, and McCutcheon (2019) conducted a study of RDA implementation in Ohio public libraries.

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<th>Rural/Urban Divide</th>
<th>Scarcity of Resources</th>
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<td>• 12.1% of rural catalogers had not heard of RDA versus 2% of urban catalogers (Panchyshyn et. al, 2019)</td>
<td>• Lack of adequate training</td>
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<td>• Lack of staff time</td>
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<td>• Lack of guiding policy &amp; organization</td>
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Panchyshyn et. al identified a statistically significant relationship between education level, geographic location and employment in libraries. A higher number of individuals employed in urban libraries hold a master's degree in library science. Respondents without a MLIS degree were less likely to be comfortable with FRBR based terminology.

Cited by both studies, the more typical library obstacles were present as well. Yet, some of the qualitative responses highlighted a fear of change in the field. Some respondents didn’t see the any significant benefits of RDA adoption in their libraries (Panchyshyn et. al, 2019).

“Ongoing cost of Toolkit seems pretty high and print as currently available is outdated very quickly—this creates a big obstacle for small rural libraries.” – Survey Respondent

(Panchyshyn et. al, 2019)

Conclusion

Theoretical strife, scarcity of resources, educational divides and fear of change all play a role in RDA implementation. Some of these concerns arise from long standing discourse within the field such as debate over item level or work level cataloging. Disagreement on overarching principles can be expected but somewhat concerning, considering the historical context of the debate within the field. This theoretical strife is difficult to address but other issues are less so. With better training and updates, RDA could better achieve its stated objectives. Both qualitative and quantitative data should be utilized to better understand the impact of RDA and cataloging standards. Evaluative studies need to be better utilized to understand the impact of RDA. The potential of RDA to achieve its goals is high but in practicality not all libraries are able to apply the standard.

References


