

The Availability and Accessibility of Vertical File Collections in Jamaican Libraries

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Abstract

Small island developing states are often characterized by weak local publishing industries and infrastructure, which leads to the unavailability of locally relevant publications. Given this reality, the vertical file collections are therefore an important source of indigenous information. In view of this, the authors sought to determine to what extent are vertical files existent and prevalent in Jamaican libraries especially in an age of increasing reliance on electronic resources. The authors also examine how Jamaican libraries make these vertical files accessible to the public. To achieve this, both a survey and a comparative study of vertical files in selected library and information service environments in Jamaica were undertaken.

The results indicate that vertical files exist in a variety of environments. However, more can be done in Jamaican libraries to improve the accessibility of vertical file collections to users. There is need for closer attention to be paid to vertical files in Jamaica and their promotion, as these collections are very valuable sources of local information not yet documented by local publishers.

Keywords:

vertical file, collection management, vertical file index, vertical file subject index, Jamaican Libraries, developing countries, small island developing countries

The Status of Vertical File Collection Management in Jamaican Libraries

Developing countries tend to lack the variety of information resources that developed countries take for granted. According to Khanna, Palepu and Sinha (2005), while developed countries have the infrastructure and culture supportive of specialised research institutions and intermediaries, developing countries are characterised by a lack of these. The challenges in the English-speaking Caribbean's publishing industry include "scarce resources, small market [*sic*] and absence of infrastructure" (Institute of Social and Economic Research [ISER], 1988, p.5). Marketing problems afflict the region's publishing industry and force some book buyers to source Caribbean material from outside the region (ISER, 1988). Bandara (1995) revealed that a majority of Caribbean

books are produced outside of the region. S. Spencer, Mendes and Terry, (1987) also found that regional scholarly publishers have insufficient resources to have effective marketing and promotion strategies as well as lack financial support, thereby leading to serious survival problems.

Gaps in the region's publishing are not due to absence of infrastructure only. Indigenous "production of scholarly and education material" in the region is also hampered by the small size of the region's audience (S. Spencer et al.,1987, p.1). Due to size of audience, writers and scholars do not have a sufficiently large regional market to sustain their scholarship and writing, thus opting to write for an international audience (S. Spencer et al.,1987). This further depletes the availability of local materials.

Some thirty years ago, Thomas (1979) underscored the importance of stimulating more publishing in the region. For Thomas (1979), the local publishing industry is necessary for the production of culturally relevant materials and to produce materials that can be purchased with the local currency. The latter point is very essential for small developing countries such as those in the Caribbean, who according to Mohamedali (1999), have rising costs of publications correlating with the depreciation of local currencies. According to Mohamedali (1999), the "depreciation in the value of local currencies *vis-à-vis* other international currencies is a major constraint which adversely affects the purchasing power of [Caribbean] libraries, since most...publications...have to be purchased from abroad" (p. 308). Consequently, it can be seen that without local publishing, all publications purchased would require the availability of foreign currency.

The point of locally relevant publications is also essential, as foreign publications may not meet local needs. For S. Spencer, et al., (1987) the lack of local publishing needs to be urgently addressed so that the region's specific information needs can be met.. Thus while developed countries possess better infrastructure and markets to sustain local publications in a variety of formats, it may be that for small developing countries like Jamaica, print-based vertical file collections are necessary and often heavily used to support gaps in local publishing and local information needs. The absence of an adequate output of local publications may require greater reliance on vertical files in school, public, national and, to a lesser extent, academic libraries. Based on this premise, the authors explored the issue of whether small island developing countries are using vertical files to fill the gaps in availability of local information and publications.

Gaps in local information availability may be addressed in the twenty-first century by the Worldwide Web. The Web addresses the ease of finding markets and the reduction of costs in book distribution (Weedon, 1996). Kargbo (1997) argues that the Internet (Web) is currently relied on to provide solutions to some of the challenges that

developing countries face in handling and accessing information. Despite these solutions and the fact that scanning and digitization equipment are becoming cheaper, it is still not clear how many local publications that are of value to the region are yet available on the Web. Nevertheless, the increasing emphasis of contemporary library conferences is on managing electronic information over that of maintaining traditional print-based resources. Since the introduction, proliferation and use of the Internet worldwide, the focus of many library conferences and publications is on organizing and providing access to Web resources or electronic information. Efforts have also centred on building, managing and providing access to digitized collections. Scanning technologies now available for digitization have made it possible also to digitize materials including newspaper clippings, photographs and pamphlets that would otherwise be kept in vertical files. These developments afford many librarians the opportunity to abandon print-based vertical files altogether and substitute them with digitized collections.

In light of these considerations, the authors conducted a comparative descriptive analysis of four observations and a subsequent survey of practices in selected library and information service environments in Jamaica.

Literature Review

Searching for current scholarly resources on vertical files is a daunting task. A search for current scholarship on vertical files will redirect the researcher to a variety of other related concepts. In the *Library Literature and Information Science 2006* print index, the entry for “vertical files” redirects the researcher to entries for ephemeral, pamphlets, photograph and picture collections (Brereton, 2007). Notwithstanding this, one major publication that serves as a handbook for librarians wishing to develop vertical file collections is *Vertical File and Its Satellites: A Handbook of Acquisitions, Processing and Organization* (Miller, 1979). Miller (1979) suggests that there is evidence of the demand for a comprehensive handbook on vertical files. It is therefore very interesting to discover that there are very few monographs specifically dealing with vertical files. Those that exist are, like Miller (1979), not current, such as *The Vertical File and Its Alternatives: A Handbook* by Sitter (1992) and *Readings on the Vertical File* by M. D. G. Spencer (1993). These few monographs reflect a general distaste for vertical file management. Declining publishing on vertical files may perhaps correlate with the rising popularity and novelty of the Web. This is an issue that is perhaps worthwhile for exploration in future research.

The literature in general provides two ways of understanding or defining vertical files. They are seen as a collection of print-based materials or documents separated from the library’s book collection because of format or size, and are filed on their edges in

folders in drawers or a box (Prytherch, 2005; Reitz, 2004). The vertical file in being an isolated collection, usually has a separate scheme of organisation and classification for retrieval (Reitz, 2004).

Alternatively, vertical files can refer to the system for the storage and retrieval of documents rather than the actual physical collection (Yates, 2000). Historically, the vertical file was first presented as a system for solving information handling problems (Yates, 2000). According to Yates (2000), the vertical file developed as a system for organising material for storage and retrieval. This system was presented by the library community to the business community as a solution to business record keeping and information handling problems (Yates, 2000). It was through this system that librarians left a legacy that is still used in businesses today.

However, in contemporary discussions, the term vertical file has evolved from the original intent as a system for organising information. Today the term is applied loosely to the actual collection itself or the physical storage medium for files in such a collection (Prytherch, 2005; Reitz 2007). As far as three decades ago, the traditional vertical file was defined as “a collection made up primarily of pamphlets and clippings which are housed vertically in filing cases or similar containers” (Miller, 1979 p. 11). Interestingly, this definition of the “traditional” vertical file supplants the original or historical one exposed by Yates (2000).

Usefulness or Obsolesce

While history shows that the vertical file is applied outside of libraries, contemporary discussion in the literature seems to associate vertical files with educational settings. C. Anderson (2001) suggests that the traditional or physical vertical file is useful in the school context for retaining course materials and handouts that were collected over a period of time and that are always relevant to students. Aked (1996) observed that at the university level the vertical file collection contains valuable information sources for presentations, short essays or speeches.

Dissatisfaction in the library community towards vertical files is also an issue (Aked, 1996). According to Aked (1996), the vertical file collection is criticised for lacking “scholarly prestige” and regular usage, being difficult to catalogue and possessing many challenges “associated with collecting, processing and providing access” (p.22-23). Other criticisms found by Aked (1996), include the argument of the lack of “resources to support such a collection” and the “easy access to the same information in other formats” (p.22-23). Further, setting up and maintaining vertical files require deliberate and carefully thought out procedures which can be time consuming and demanding of much intellectual and routine work (Aked, 1996).

Perhaps one of the most common reasons for dissatisfaction with the vertical file is that it does not have the ease of use or rapid retrieval as modern information technology. Among the criticisms of the vertical file found by Aked (1996) are that the vertical file is a "relic" and a "low-tech tool in a high-tech world" (p. 23). Essentially in an age of the popularity of modern information technology the attitude of some in the library community is that the vertical file is backward and obsolete (Neuhaus, 1997, p. 66).

Many of these complaints against the vertical file are based on the assumption that vertical files are merely collections, and not a system. If viewed as a system rather than a collection, then there might be fewer complaints against vertical files. The vertical file itself is based on general and ageless principles and concepts. It is these ageless principles and concepts practiced in the vertical file management that have shaped the evolution of modern computing and information technology. According to Brooks (2003) the vertical file is the predecessor and inspiration to development of computer databases and to the organisation of Web retrieval and search. Brooks therefore suggests that it is this same system that has been revisited to organise modern information and communication technologies.

The literature also presents other arguments in favour of the relevance of vertical file principles and techniques in managing digitized information. Neuhaus (1997) presented an actual case study where the vertical file is applied as a system to organize Web information for client retrieval. McKenzie (2000) proposed the use of the vertical file system to organise images on computers. These writers have thus demonstrated how vertical files can be applied to digital information.

Automating vertical files can make them more modern and relevant to today's user, but there are still some drawbacks. C. Anderson (2001) argued that the automated vertical file requires technological equipment and the server space to upload materials that would otherwise be stored in a physical version. For institutions without such digital space and resources to maintain or expand the space, the traditional vertical files can still be utilized (C. Anderson, 2001). Neuhaus (1997) also identified that the implementation of an automated vertical file will demand that the library provide extra computers to access the collection as well as printing facilities for clients who may wish to print from the collection.

In view of this, C. Anderson (2001) argues that there is a clear advantage in retaining the physical vertical file. According to C. Anderson (2001), the physical vertical file can serve as a repository for primary sources of information such as correspondences

of intrinsic future value and for the preservation of “ageless information” from local events (p. 36). In addition, vertical files can also store biographical information about local or community heroes or personalities (C. Anderson, 2001). C. Anderson (2001) also describes the typical users that benefit from the physical or traditional vertical file collection. One example is given of event planners benefitting from “ageless information” in the files about events in the past (C. Anderson, 2001, p. 36). A second example is given of students accessing material such as handouts that teachers provide in support of a course (C. Anderson, 2001, p. 36).

Other supporters of the continued existence of the physical vertical file argue that vertical files are most useful when they contain brochures, flyers and local or regional newspaper clippings (Smallwood, 1992). Smallwood (1992) emphasized that a vertical file collection can easily be developed from the collection of brochures from local tourism attractions, or trips to government agencies. For preservation purposes, it is suggested that librarians laminate those materials that they believe will permanently become a part of the vertical file collection (Smallwood, 1992).

The literature therefore clearly demonstrates that vertical files can be seen as both a special collection or as a system developed by librarians to provide greater access to information for their clients. There are mixed views about the relevance of vertical files to the modern technological environment. While automation of vertical files is an option in making vertical files more modern and accessible, this requires resources that an institution may not be able to support. In these cases, the physical collection is still important to libraries.

Method

In the quantitative survey of Jamaican libraries and their use of vertical files, a questionnaire (Appendix 1) was administered to libraries from universities, colleges, post secondary and polytechnic institutions, schools, the public library and the national library to determine the number of libraries that had vertical file holdings. In total, twenty questionnaires were administered to libraries in the following categories:

- academic and college libraries (4),
- post secondary libraries (2),
- the national library (1),
- the main branch of a public library (1) and
- secondary educational school libraries (12).

All the libraries surveyed were situated in Kingston and St. Andrew, the major urban centre of Jamaica. This sample of libraries in Kingston and St. Andrew was chosen

as the location tends to have more libraries than the other parts of Jamaica, as well as greater levels of funding, resources and support for libraries. In surveying these libraries, the researchers sought to determine the existence of vertical file collections and their accessibility.

The survey focused on the following questions:

- Do Jamaican libraries possess vertical file collections?
- What do these collections consist of?
- How are these files accessed by clients?

Questions were also asked about the environment in which vertical files existed to determine if the library environment was automated and how information on vertical files was produced or accessed by library personnel.

For the more in-depth case study, four different types of libraries in Jamaica were considered. The four library or information service environments examined were:

- a management training library (run by a state agency),
- a public library,
- a university career library run by a tertiary institution's career placement agency, and
- a vocational training school library.

All serve adult learners with the exception of the public library. School libraries were not considered in the four studied.

The researchers utilized for the in-depth descriptive study of the four libraries a methodology not well recognized in library and information science research. The technique of reflective observations was applied, an approach used in psychology, education and nursing. According to Leininger (1985), reflective observation is a method of research in participatory observation where the researcher ““looks back” thoughtfully on what happened...to recapture the situation and the total process of what happened and how the people responded to the researcher” (p.53). In educational settings, the reflective observations method is an “intentional” “reflective gaze” used by teachers for analysing interactions and drawing inferences about students (Flood, 2003, p. 228). The method has been one that has been popular in psychology as Maher (2009) refers to it as “the primary method of investigation in empirical or phenomenal psychology”. Maher (2009) also suggests that this method is error prone and should be supplemented by other methods. While reflective observation cannot be used alone, the “reflective practice” or the “initiation of processes of reflection” is an important tool for discovering “truth” and improving “practice in information agencies” (Habermas cited in Budd, 2005. p. 44-45).

The period in which the observations were undertaken spans five years, from 2001 to 2006. Libraries selected for analysis were directly influenced by the authors' involvement and employment in these specific library environments. In some cases the authors used of the collections selected. In others, the authors worked with the collection. Reflections on the researchers' observations of these vertical file collections are documented and discussed next in order to examine the prevalence of such files and the practices associated with their organisation and management in Jamaican libraries.

Results of Survey

The survey revealed that the all libraries in the sample possessed vertical file collections. Table 1 summarise the responses to the questions of how many libraries possessed vertical files and the type of files in these vertical file collections (See questions 1 and 2 in Appendix 1).

Table 1

Jamaican Libraries' Vertical File Collection Status

Library's Vertical File Collection Status	% of Libraries Responding
Possess vertical files	100
Possess newspaper clippings in vertical file collection	100
Possess pamphlets interfiled in vertical file collection	80

All of the libraries surveyed have newspaper clippings in their vertical file collection. The majority, 80%, have a pamphlet collection interfiled with their newspaper clipping collection. Consequently, most Jamaican libraries have vertical files corresponding with Miller's (1979) conception of the contents of the "traditional" vertical file, which include newspaper clippings and pamphlets.

Table 2 summarises the access that users have to vertical file subject lists. It included a number of responses aggregated from questions 13 and 16 (Appendix 1), which asked respondents if "users have access to [their] subject headings?" and if they listed these subject headings in their (OPACs).

Table 2

Access that Users have to Vertical File Subject Indexes/Lists

Characteristic Possessed by Library	Yes
Libraries that have vertical files listed in their Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)	5%
Users have direct access to the vertical file subject index	40%

The data showed that 25% of libraries surveyed have online public access catalogues (OPACs). Yet hardly any of these libraries made a decision to list the vertical files in their OPACS. Only 5% of the responding libraries made the vertical file subject headings accessible through the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). While such a low percentage provided electronic access to the vertical file index or subject listing, a more surprising fact is that only 40% libraries surveyed, provided direct user access via either the computer or in print.

This finding meant that 60% of libraries surveyed made the vertical file index available only to their staff or library personnel if they had any index at all. In these cases users may need to access the vertical files list of subject headings or index through library staff/personnel, if the listing is not posted near the vertical file cabinets. Of these libraries that did not provide users with direct access to their vertical file collection, 45% provided access to the vertical file collection through the human intermediary. Thus it is even more surprising is the fact that in the survey, 15% may have no listing whatsoever. In these cases access to the vertical file is facilitated via browsing through the collection.

Table 3 summarises the information found in question 9 of the questionnaire (Appendix 1). This question asked respondents to indicate the format in which they had their subject index for the vertical files. Thirty percent of the respondents kept only a typed hard copy index/subject list, while 30% kept only a listing on their computers as shown in Table 3 following. Those who kept both a soft and print copy amounted to 25%.

Table 3

The Percentage Distribution of the Format of the Vertical File Index/Subject List

Format	%
Computer only	30
Print copy only	30
Both	25
No response	15
TOTAL	100

Despite the availability of an index to the collection, as previously shown in Table 3, only 40% of the respondents indicated that users had access to this index (see Table 2), with 30% not responding.

Discussion of the Survey Findings

All the libraries surveyed possess vertical file collections revealing that the vertical file is still being retained, despite the dwindling literature on the subject. Jamaican libraries and possibly other developing countries, still retain these resources in the midst of gradual library automation. Even though Jamaican libraries are being equipped with computers, they are still maintaining physical vertical files, and using computers to produce indexes to these files.

The use of computers demonstrates that there is scope among a variety of libraries in educational institutions (secondary, post secondary and tertiary), for the use of a computerised way of facilitating access to the vertical files. Of the Jamaican libraries surveyed, most use computer software to create an index to their vertical file collection. Prior existence of a vertical file index or subject list in electronic format will make it easy for those libraries to implement an electronic system for improving user access to their collection.

However, the data indicate that less than a fifth of the sample provided direct user access via computer to their vertical file index. Based on those who were observed to provide such access, it is seen that libraries that support research are more likely to invest in electronic systems for automating access to the vertical file index. While national, university and research libraries may have greater human resources, technology and financial resources available than the other library types, their nature also makes the vertical files stored in their collection more permanent than the other types of library environments. Thus, the greater permanence and stability in the vertical file collection, the more libraries will be encouraged to invest in making the vertical file index publicly accessible via computers.

Results from the reflective observations

The observations made and the ways in which vertical file information is stored and accessed by the libraries observed are now discussed. This discussion summarises the tabled observations in Appendices 2 and 3.

The Vocational School Library

For this library, the vertical files are stored in pamphlet boxes, which are filed on the book shelves. Analysis of the contents revealed that most were labelled with Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) numbers to identify the subject treated. The analysis of the contents also revealed that the information acquired for the vertical collection was freely acquired and came to the library without the librarian having to request the material. Material received freely included training brochures as related to programmes in the vocational and technical education system, programmes offered by the National Training Agency (NTA) and annual reports or newsletter communiqués to or for staff or students from the NTA.

Information resources that the librarian had to request or deliberately seek to collect were usually sources that provide learners with information about the world of work. The researchers discovered in this case that some of the sources of vertical files in Jamaica come from various organisations such as trade unions, training institutions and government agencies that are willing to send documents to vocational schools. These institutions are willing to send information about labour concerns, tax issues, business start-up information and other information regarding industrial regulation and legislation in Jamaica. Much of these sources are printed and available in simple forms for the public in brochures, pamphlets and in other loose leaf publications.

Acquisition of such resources entailed the librarian requesting the particular materials from the organisations or bodies responsible for producing the material and documents. For instance, the students at the school received an assignment regarding trade unions. The librarian in seeking to get information for the students on the Web found that the particular trade union website did not provide the answers for the assignment. Therefore, the librarian used the contact information available on the website to request further information to meet the need of the learners. The end result was that information was prepared for the vocational school and collected by the librarian. The information received was not in book or monograph format. Instead, the library received a pamphlet and photographs, which were only suitable for placement and filing in the pamphlet/vertical file collection.

Vertical file materials available to vocational schools are abundant. However, organising these resources for access is problematic. One reason is that these sources are not books, and provision for access requires even more attention than books. Pamphlets are often too flimsy or thin to be shelved with books. In this library, the materials in the pamphlet boxes had very small bindings which could not allow for the same type of labelling as books. While the books are clearly labelled with DDC numbers to facilitate user browsing, the vertical file contents by being placed in pamphlet boxes required another system for providing access to users. In this case, the only access point to the resources in these vertical file was through the library staff, who familiarised themselves with the materials in these pamphlet boxes.

The University Career Library

B. Anderson (1992) provided the first if not only comprehensive guide and source of information about resources that a library may need in order to establish a career information resource service. Within this publication, Lorenzen and Batt (1992) suggested resources for the vertical file collection for a career library service. Among those suggested resources, it is advised that libraries collect company brochures and annual reports that can also expose adult learners to the goals, values and mission statements of companies for which they may seek employment (p. 67). To be included are university prospectuses and other training brochures to indicate to students or adult learners' options for further training and education.

The Career Library or Resource Centre observed was operated for university students and staffed by non-librarian (administrative) staff. The materials in the collection were organised in pamphlet boxes, and arranged alphabetically. This collection included print material about particular career paths or job profiles as well as brochures about particular Jamaican companies or employers.

Prospectuses for various universities regarding graduate courses and programmes were also available in the library. These prospectuses were not filed in the pamphlet boxes or indexed, but were organised in flat file format. The researcher speculated that one of the reasons is that university graduate prospectuses are annual publications and lose currency each year, needing to be replaced with the more updated prospectuses.

Another important observation to note was that the career and placement centre also provided special software in the Career Centre's computer lab for finding information on job profiles or on career paths. Thus, the vertical file existed in conjunction or perhaps in competition with software use and Internet access.

The Public Library

Content analysis of the materials in the public library's collection yielded observations of tattered clippings of newspapers and Internet print-outs. Also contained in the collections are informative brochures published by government agencies and pictures or portraits of famous or outstanding Jamaicans. These brochures and clippings are arranged in folders, which are labelled and alphabetically arranged according to person or personality name and subject. An index of the vertical files in each cabinet and drawer exists, but is only available as guides to the staff. This index was thus not accessible to the user.

The observer noted that the limited access that the users of the public library had to the vertical file collection was perhaps so arranged to prevent the theft of the materials. It was observed that the vertical file collection was near to the public library's photocopying equipment, and located in the reference collection of the library. The location of the vertical file collection in the reference section of the library seemed an obvious strategy to hinder person removing the material from the library.

The Library at a Government Training Agency

The institution's library can be considered a special library. It provides information for practitioners of public administration. In its vertical file collection, there were newspaper clippings and Internet printed downloads and photocopies of chapters from various books. However, at the time the study was being conducted, only the topics or subjects of the newspaper clippings were indexed. These were stored in folders similar to the ones in the public library and also indexed in a similar manner. The library also contained government publications and other periodicals in pamphlet boxes, which were also not yet indexed.

Like the public library's collection, the information was filed away and users would only be privy to the information, when their request was directed to the library assistant, who is familiar with the information contained in the cabinet.

Over a period of three months, one of the authors created for this library a bibliographic database of all the newspaper clippings in the vertical file collection. This thereby provided the library staff with more detail about the newspaper articles in the collection. The database was created on the staff computer only, and an updated alphabetical subject index printed.

Discussion and recommendations emanating from the reflective observations

The observations raised several issues for discussion. First the question of the need for one to distinguish whether or not a pamphlet collection is different from a vertical file collection. Should such a distinction be made? Does the user care? Should the vertical file collection be defined in the strictest sense, necessitating the use of a vertical file cabinet for the storage of the material and excluding pamphlet boxes? The researcher is of the view that to make this distinction is irrelevant, as the two require similar practices in maintenance, updating, selection and accessibility. Again, it is pointed out that the original term speaks to a system of organizing loose leaf printed material, and was not until modern times used in such a limiting sense.

Another interesting observation of the libraries examined, was that only the career resource centre staffed by a non-professional/non-librarian, made the vertical files and its index directly available to clients. Why is it that librarians, who are suppose to be information providers, creating guides and bibliographic tools, fail to make the indexes to vertical files accessible to users? Why is it that a non-librarian staffed library was the only one observed that gave users a tool and unobtrusive access for locating resources in the vertical file collection?

The Application of Technology for improving User access to vertical file collection

The authors also recognised that the vertical files and their index within most of the libraries examined were not readily available to users. While the direct access to the vertical file may for one reason or the other be mediated, the index to the vertical file should at least be communicated and made available to the user. In the observations of this study, even if the index existed as a computer file, the index was not made accessible to users, but restricted to the use of library staff only. Even simply duplicating the index on user or public access computers could provide a tool for users to access information contained in the vertical files.

Preservation of source of historical and ephemeral nature

The observations also revealed that despite the interest in Web resources, the print vertical files still provide information not yet found on the Web or any where else. Some historical information sources not found on the Web or in any printed resource, are located in local organizations. Thus a librarian by deliberately seeking to find gaps and to acquire information in whatever format it may exist, can access a wealth of information that is not in electronic format as in the case of the vocational school library. Such

information can then be made available and accessible via the vertical file, be it traditional or digitized.

Marketing and promotion of Vertical file collection

With the exception of the career library, the libraries observed failed to invest adequately in making their vertical files accessible to users. In most of the libraries, there is a lack of formal or written communication to users about the contents of the vertical files. Contents of the vertical file are unknown to the users until they initiate reference queries to the library staff. Thus unless the user takes a reference question to the person responsible, then the contents of the vertical file may remain unknown to the user. As such the vertical file is really for the use of library staff, rather than for users.

Other questions for future research

This paper raises a number of questions. Future research questions could seek to find out why librarians have maintained the vertical file, if the file is only restricted to staff access. Are these files so valuable, that in order to secure their long term access, they must not be handled by users without the mediation of library staff? If such is the case, are there content in these files that are currently on the Web?

Further research and experimentation is also needed on making the vertical file indexes or subject lists available to users. How do libraries make these tools available to users without the users having to come to the reference desk? Why do few Jamaican libraries put these tools online? Can digitization of the list and incorporation on the Online Public Access Catalogue for those libraries that have the resources be an effective way of making the list available? Can social media, such as blogs make this possible for others? For those who do not have significant populations of users that own or have access to computers, how can the list be made available without them visiting the reference desk?

Conclusion

The authors believe that developing countries do have a greater need to use and maintain vertical files than developed countries. This is due to the existence in developing countries of weak publishing infrastructure and a struggling publishing industry. For small island developing countries, the problem is even more acute due to small population size which does not facilitate economies of scale. Thus with the publishing gaps existing in these countries, vertical files may well prove the most valuable reference sources to meet local information needs.

Unfortunately, publishing on library topics which are mostly produced in developed countries do not focus on this particular collection. The existing gaps in the literature make it very clear that the physical vertical file is not a very popular issue that librarians in developed countries want to write about. Most of the scholarship on the matter of vertical files is either outdated or tends to focus on adapting vertical file system to managing digital information resources. Few focus on the intrinsic value of the traditional physical vertical file and its value to users.

Among the few voices on the traditional vertical file, one could get the impression that the vertical file is solely usable in educational settings. It was therefore relevant that the authors discovered the existence and practice of the traditional physical vertical files is prevalent in a variety of library environments and in all types of Jamaican libraries. All the environments examined, with the exception of the public library, serve adult learners preparing for employment. Thus, vertical files tend to be very important sources of career or vocational information, very relevant to people's goals. In addition, the literature reveals that the vertical file must be considered to be a library system of value that has even benefitted commercial interests both in the past in terms of managing and handling business records and currently in the development and organization of the Web.

Through reflection of their experiences and observations of vertical file collections in a variety of library environments, the authors have therefore found much evidence for the value of vertical files both through the literature and in actual cases observed. However, in the cases examined, that value is not explicitly marketed or communicated to the user. The Jamaican user would have to initiate a reference query in order to learn about the contents or usefulness of the vertical file. Consequently, libraries need to better address the issues through creating an index of vertical files and making it accessible and available, preferably in digital format.

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Appendix 1

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is to gather information on the management of your vertical files. Any information received will remain confidential. Thank you for your cooperation.

Question

- 1. Does your library have a vertical file collection?**
- | | |
|-----|-------|
| YES | [1] |
| NO | [0] |

If no, discontinue this questionnaire.

- 2. What types of content are included in the files?**
- | | |
|------------------------|-------|
| Photographs | [1] |
| Newspaper Clippings | [2] |
| Pamphlet | [3] |
| Other (please specify) | [4] |
- (Tick as many responses as applicable)

- 3. What is the approximate number of files in the collection?**

Approximately

- 4. Do you use a standard tool for assigning subject headings?**
- | | |
|-----|-------|
| YES | [1] |
| NO | [0] |

- 5. If yes, what tool is used for assigning subject headings?**

- 6. Does the subject heading list have a clear description of what to classify under that heading?**
- | | |
|-----|-------|
| YES | [1] |
| NO | [0] |

- 7. Who are responsible to assign these headings?**
- | | |
|-----------|-------|
| Librarian | [1] |
|-----------|-------|

Library Assistant	[2]
Clerical	[3]
Other (please specify)	[4]

8. Who is responsible for the management of vertical files, i.e. selection of items, weeding and the assigning of subject headings?

Librarian	[1]
Library Assistant	[2]
Clerical	[3]
Other (please specify)	[4]

9. Are your headings in?

A Computer file (softcopy only)	[1]
Hard copy (printed on paper)	[2]
Index cards	[3]
Both softcopy and hardcopy	[4]
Other (please specify)	[5]

10. If on a computer file, what software?

MS WORD	[1]
MS EXCEL	[2]
MS ACCESS	[3]
Other (please specify)	[4]

11. How are the vertical files created and organised?

12. What kind of desktop publishing and inventory management software do you use in your library? Please list them.

13. **Do your users have access to your subject headings?**
 YES [1]
 NO [0]
14. **If no, how do users access the subject headings?**
15. **Is your library catalogue?**
 Automated [1]
 Manual [2]
 None [3]
16. **Are Vertical files listed in your catalogue?**
 YES
 NO
17. **If yes, how is the listing searchable or accessible?**
 Title [1]
 Author [2]
 Subject [3]
 Keywords [4]
 Other (please specify) [5]
 (Tick as many responses as applicable)

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire!

Appendix 2: Table A1

Observations Recorded on the Status of the Vertical Files in each Library

<i>Type of Library</i>	<i>Clients Served</i>	<i>Contents of the vertical file</i>	<i>Scope</i>
Vocational School library	Adult learners Instructors/Facilitators Career Counselors and general public	Freely acquired materials including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical and Vocational Training brochures • Annual reports • Newsletters 	Educational opportunities and information about technical vocational education organizations. Other vocational materials
University Career library	University students	Freely acquired materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • company brochures • company newsletters • prospectuses 	Company information
Public library	General public – including adult learners, professionals, school students	Materials purchased as well as freely acquired <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper clippings • Internet print outs • Brochures • Photos and printed images 	General information on Jamaican culture, history, and topics of interest to locals Government information
Government training agency library	Adult learners working in government agencies	Freely acquired materials and materials that were once purchased: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper clippings • Internet print outs • Photocopies of chapters from scarce books 	Materials of general interest to various government agencies. Materials on politics, public administration, finance, management and economics.

Appendix 3: Table B1

How Vertical Files are Stored and Accessed in the Selected Library Environments

Type of Library	Storage Conditions and arrangements	Accessibility to users
Vocational School library	Contents stored in Pamphlet boxes labeled with Dewey Decimal numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access point through Staff • Index not available
University Career Library	<p>Contents stored in Pamphlet arranged in alphabetical order except for prospectuses.</p> <p>Labels on the box reveal titles of companies/organizations that students may be interested in finding more information about.</p> <p>Prospectuses filed in flat file format.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indexed available in 2002 when researcher conducted the observation. A recent visit found no index available. • Users are expected to serve themselves • Access via company and browsing the alphabetically arranged labels for company of interest.
Public library	<p>Stored in vertical file cabinets</p> <p>In folders labeled and alphabetically arranged according to Subject or Person Name</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Index available to staff only • Users request files at a special section of the reference department manned by library assistants
Government training agency library	<p>Stored in vertical file cabinets but pamphlet boxes are also prevalent.</p> <p>In vertical file cabinets, folders labeled and alphabetically arranged according to Subject</p> <p>Pamphlet boxes stores serials and not necessarily files.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Index available to staff only. • Electronic index established in 2005. • Users request files at a the circulation desk manned by a library assistant