Blogging in the New Normal Using the WeCWI-Enabled Blogging Manual: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak has had an irreversible impact on education globally; students must be engaged in a digital environment for their learning process. They were encouraged or even forced to employ specific online learning tools and access a wide range of assigned digital instructional materials. A blog is one of the most popular Web 2.0 tools, while blogging is a favourable instructional and learning activity. However, limited educational resources on blogging are noticeable and can serve as instructional guidance for students. Hence, it needs to have a manual on creating a blog with one of the most popular blog hosts, Blogger.com, which serves as a reference to prepare the students to start blogging. Thus, a pilot study on creating blogs using Blogger.com was conducted with an intact class of 22 students from one of the Matriculation colleges in Kedah, Malaysia. Before collecting data for conducting a mixed-method study on the effectiveness of blogging, a pilot study using a survey on the use of a manual to create a blog as a WeCWI-enabled instructional tool in future research. After analysing the data from the respondents' feedback, it shows that students started their blogs effectively by independently referring to the instructor's directions. Students practise academic writing using blogs as a learning tool, resulting in a noticeable positive effect on self-perceived learning.

Keywords: *WeCWI, blog, blogging, manual, writing, COVID-19*

1.   Introduction

1.1   Background of study

The coronavirus hit Malaysia in 2020, and education has evolved radically from face-to-face physical classrooms to virtual learning at all levels, from preschool to university. Due to the announcement of a Movement Control Order (MCO) and Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) in phases and the adherence to the Standard of Operation (SOP), Matriculation students must begin their courses online at home and in hybrid mode at their respective colleges. This new standard teaching and learning technique puts teachers and students even closer to the age of technological advancement.

This decision by the Matriculation Division, revealed in a release letter on June 6, 2021, spurred the use of educational technology tools in teaching and learning. Thus, students were encouraged, if not required, to use certain online learning platforms and access a broad variety of allocated digital educational resources. To boost students' interest and writing skills, educators should be more mindful of fostering language sensitivity while picking online venues.

Blogging is an educational tool to integrate classroom management, collaboration, and discussion for pedagogical purposes via diverse and creative activities through communication (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011). It is a fact that blogs have been widely used in education since their emergence in different subject

areas and skills development (Li, Bado, Smith & Moore, 2013). For a prevalence of blog-related studies examined the factors influencing users' acceptance of the intention to use blogs (Hsu, Lin & Chiang, 2013), this study aims to discover the respondents' initial response toward blogging. It is helpful for students to start their blogs and thus produce a more significant self-perceived learning impact (Biberman-Shalev, Tur, & Buchem, 2020) in reading and writing. Their attitude toward using the manual can determine their level of acceptance of using the blog.

It is envisaged that blogging based on the WeCWI-enabled framework would assist in creating a platform for students to read more and chances to talk with students for a more engaging learning environment where interaction will take place. Aside from that, students are taught to establish reading habits, openly share material, particularly on current themes, and constantly be receptive to others' remarks. Students become more motivated and influential writers to convey their ideas, inform, change and reshape their writing practices through blogging (Alsamadani, 2017). He claimed that it created self-confidence among students and a desire to share their ideas about a wide range of topics willingly. Students' confidence and self-esteem will increase too.

1.2   Problem statement

A blog is a popular Web 2.0 tool, and blogging is a beneficial instructional and learning activity. Along with the popularity and widespread usage of blogs, the vast internet media, like YouTube and Google Workplace, are overwhelmed with instructions on how to build blogs. However, little research has examined how blogging can be best employed in teaching writing (Chao & Huang, 2007). As a result, students need to gain knowledge on how to start a blog, so a comprehensive manual is needed to serve as a reference for them to get started.

Based on the blog created, they can do blogging writing activities. Though many educational materials on blogging may be used as instructional advice for students, none can be used as a theoretical-and-pedagogical manual based on WeCWI principles that are more targeted for the students' language and cognitive development. WeCWI-enabled blogging manual emphasises reading, discussion, and writing activities through blogging that can improve their writing skills through these three tasks within an online learning environment.

As Kovács and Pop (2010) claimed, creating a new blog account on one of the most well-known platforms, www.blogger.com, requires few steps and no advanced technological knowledge. After account creation, multiple settings possibilities have grown from one version to another. It is undeniable that just simple steps are requisite. Nevertheless, it is plausible that research respondents may require sophisticated technological expertise, as this is their first introduction to blogging. Therefore, the WeCWI-enabled blogging manual has become their guide for beginning their journey as bloggers and, after that, completing writing tasks.

According to Devrani (2021), each online blogging system has various blog requirements; consequently, a design must be tailored to the system-specific requirements. To meet the demands and objectives of the research, however, a tailor-made blogging manual needs to be explicitly developed to meet the instructional needs. A WeCWI-enabled blogging manual was designed to cater and adapt to the needs and requirements of students' academic writing through blogging to provide a more effective manner of conducting blogging activity in the actual study.

Respondents of the study who are creators-cum-authors of blogs with thematic content must be guided to create brand new blogs as a medium for expressing their opinions. To generate brand-new blogs effectively and efficiently, accurate and relevant content from numerous blogs on the same topic written by different authors must be included to collect and compile diverse perspectives in a single blog (Sharma & Baliyan, 2020). Consequently, a graphical user interface design manual serves as an academic model for students in the study.

1.3   Research objectives

In this pilot test, the study aims to determine the relevancy and effectiveness of the WeCWI-enabled blogging manual to be used in future studies for improving students' writing. The specific objectives of this study are:

1) To create a WeCWI-enabled blogging manual to guide the learners in blogging activities; and
2) To measure the learners' perceptions of using the WeCWI-enabled blogging manual in blogging activities.

1.4   Research questions

The research questions were designed to gain insight into the effectiveness of using the WeCWI-enabled blogging manual in blogging activities. The following research questions guide this study:

1) How to design a WeCWI-enabled blogging manual to guide the learners in blogging activities?
2) What are the learners' perceptions of using the WeCWI-enabled blogging manual in blogging activities?

1.5   Significance of study

Although students are considered beginners in using blogs, they would find blogs a beneficial tool for communicating virtually with peers during their discussions. On participatory Web 2.0 websites such as blogs, one increasingly finds information communicated by laypersons (Winter & Kramer, 2012); also, the rapid use and application of blogs in diverse areas such as education (Vaezi, Torkzadeh & Chang, 2011).

Gudmundsdottir and Brock-Utne (2010) mention that the piloting process has influenced the studies within the educational sciences, a common denominator in the preparatory process. In the process of pre-testing the research instrument such as the use of a questionnaire (Mocorro, 2017), a pilot study as a subset of a feasibility study (Chan, 2019; William, 2019) conducted on a smaller scale to clarify any uncertainty for increasing the chance of successful delivery of the future study.

Besides, this pilot study is crucial because a reflective piloting phase increases the validity of the research results. Therefore, it can be proven that a reflective pilot study can directly augment stronger ties with the critical standpoint towards educational research and increase the validity of research results. Therefore, this pilot study is integral to further research regarding the effectiveness of using blogs for reading and writing performances among students who are bloggers.

2.   Literature review

2.1   Blog

A blog, a contraction of the coined term Web log or Weblog, was first used by John Barger in December 1997 to refer to a web page that contains a list or log with links to other web pages that the blogger found interesting (Martindale, & Wiley, 2005; McBride & Cason, 2006; Risdahl, 2006). According to Merriam-Webster, a blog contains online personal reflections, comments, and frequent hyperlinks, videos, and photographs provided by the author (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Merriam-Webster named the blog the word of the year in 2004 before it became the buzzword for 2004 (Lindroth, 2006).

Blogger.com, founded in August 1999 by Evan Williams, Paul Bausch, and Meg Hourihan, has become its most important and well-known site (Jensen, 2003). The increased popularity has resulted in the addition of new words to the English language, such as blog, blogging, bloggers, and blogosphere (Ross,

2002). A blog is arguably the first form native to the web (Blood, 2003) that allows the blogger, who writes a blog as an online journal and keeps records on a website, to do so without any programming or Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML) knowledge. Despite other blog hosts such as WordPress and Myspace, Blogger.com remains one of the largest and most well-known internet platforms in all fields (Newman, 2019).

Using a blog as a language learning tool has paved the way and provided opportunities for learners to actively participate in various stages of the learning process. According to Pinkman (2005), the pedagogical tool known as a blog plays "a more communicative role than the less interactive CALL applications" (p. 14). Ahmad (2020) emphasises that a blog is one of the technological tools or applications in Cloud-based Collaborative Writing (CBCW) to examine writing performance.

2.2   Blogging

Blogging has evolved as a natural extension of the internet. Its popularity stems from its ease of use on online platforms. Students would benefit from blogging based on technology as a learning tool, and if they were told to write through blogging, they would be even happier because of free to write about any topic they wanted. Students also enjoy blogging because it allows teachers to monitor their students' blogs and write and comment on how to build the teacher-student relationship virtually through blogging.

Blogging, in contrast to academic writing, is informal (Pappas, 2013), ranging from personal interest to education. Students must be exposed to online channels such as blogging to transition from formal to informal academic writing. They can improve their writing skills without even realising it. According to Seitzinger (2006), blogging enables students to "reflect on their perceptions of the learning materials and on their learning process" (p. 6).

Based on the assessment results, Suhaili and Suadiyatno (2016) claimed that students improved their writing because blogging is enjoyable and allows students to interact through interactive blogs. Students will undoubtedly learn and improve in writing if they enjoy the process with their peers and stay motivated to write (Mir & Ghoreishi, 2020). Using blogs in ESL classrooms was highly recommended (Mah, 2009; Mah & Er, 2009). As investigated in this study, the acceptance of writing web logs in an ESL classroom can be a critical foundation for promoting various CMC applications in English Language Teaching (ELT).

2.3   Web-based Cognitive Writing Instruction (WeCWI)

This pilot test applies blogging in writing based on Web-based Cognitive Writing Instruction (WeCWI), founded by Mah (2014). It is a hybrid e-framework for developing web-based instruction (WBI), contributing to instructional design and language development. It synthesises four main theoretical rationales of language acquisition, cognitive theories, composition studies, and e-learning as an equation called WeCWI Integrated Formula (Language Acquisition + Composition Studies + Cognitive Theories) E-learning = Language & Cognitive Developments.

WeCWI's contribution to instructional design from the macro perspective is to disseminate knowledge and share ideas with in-class and global students through instructional and technological discoveries. The micro perspective in instructional design draws attention to reading, discussion, and writing through pedagogical and theoretical discoveries. To bring a positive user experience to the learners, WeCWI aims to create an instructional tool with different interface designs besides integrating the fundamental theoretical-and-pedagogical principles to boost language and cognitive development (Mah, 2014, 2015, 2020).
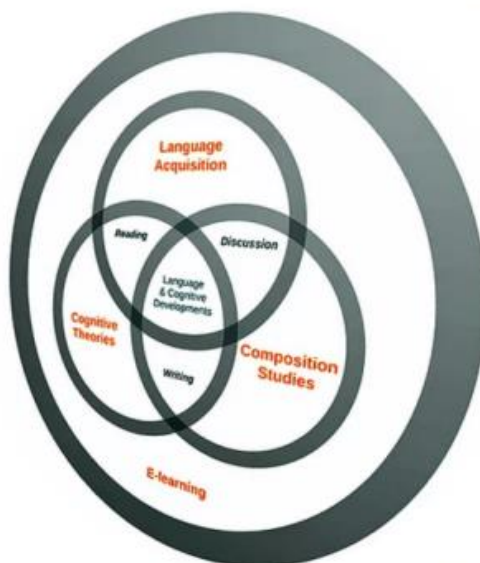
Figure 1: WeCWI: A Theoretical-and-Pedagogical e-Framework for Language Development

3.0   Methodology

This pilot test applies blogging in writing based on Web-based Cognitive Writing Instruction (WeCWI), founded by A quantitative research design through a survey was applied in this pilot test. Babbie (2010) states that tools like questionnaires and software can be used to collect numerical data in a descriptive quantitative research design, in which the subjects are measured once. Subsequently, the study employed a survey method involving tools like Blogger as the web host at www.blogspot.com, a blogging manual created in Microsoft Word format, and Google Form, a survey builder online site.

Initially, a manual was designed on creating a blog with one of the most popular free web hosts of blogs, Blogger, to prepare the students to start blogging. This manual was developed in offline Microsoft Word because the user manual can be set up quickly, and it is suitable for small-size documents. The template is designed in two panels; the first panel displays illustrations in numbering format, while the second contains instructions and descriptions.

Later, the students must create their blogs individually by referring to the WeCWI-enabled blogging manual. They are expected to understand, comprehend, and follow the manual step-by-step until they can develop the blogs successfully. By giving exposure to creating the blogs, students are tested on whether the manual design is relevant and comprehensive as a self-assisted reference in future. In the following step, students need to answer a questionnaire after reviewing and evaluating the manual.

Zahra (2012) mentioned that one common approach in applying questionnaires is to develop a new questionnaire due to a lack of suitable questionnaires to explore the constructs that have yet to be investigated in previous research. For this reason, nine questions were formulated in the questionnaire to cater for this pilot test. After that, the questionnaire will be tested and verified for validity using SPSS.

A total of 22 respondents were purposively chosen from pre-university Engineering-majored students of Kedah Engineering Matriculation College of batch Session 2020/2021. It is evident that among the 22 non-randomised respondents, 59% of the respondents were males and the rest (41%) were females. As to age, the age of respondents was between 18 and 19. Therefore, the respondents were willing to participate in this research.

Before students answer the questionnaire, students should have given a briefing on the pilot test going to be conducted on the efficacy of the WeCWI-enabled manual to create their blogs. The instructions from the manual should be precise and concise, with clarity in providing the steps to create blogs, and later developing the blogs for reading, discussion and writing activities.

Once students have completed the creation of their blogs in one week, students are asked to answer a questionnaire. A set of 5-point Likert Scale questionnaires consisting of 9 questions was developed to collect the data by taking a step-by-step approach as shown: Step 1: Identify the goal of the questionnaire, which is the information to be gathered focuses on objectives. Step 2: Choose the question type. After all, the questionnaire is considered the best way to collect this pilot test result as it was quantitative design research.

The questionnaire provides a 5-point Likert Scale that gives an equal number of positive and negative choices, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree. Step 3: Develop questions for the questionnaire. The nine questions are succinct and straightforward, written in simple sentences without technical jargon to confuse the respondents. Therefore, there are directly helpful to the pilot study's objectives. Step 4: Check the validity of the questionnaire. Step 5: Disseminate the questionnaire.

This questionnaire was developed using the survey builder online site, Google Form, as it eases the participants to do self-administered questionnaires online. The questions were mainly to fulfil the objectives; hence, the questions were tested to be valid using the Pearson Correlation coefficient in SPSS. All statistical applications were duly performed by SPSS software.

Table 1: The nine questions in the questionnaire

No.	Questions
Q1	The overall design of the manual is attractive.
Q2	The formatting of the manual is well laid out.
Q3	There is sufficient information as guidance to create a new blog.
Q4	The content is organised systematically to facilitate my blogging.
Q5	The illustrations and numbering system are effective in guiding blogging.
Q6	The manual is easy to read.
Q7	The manual is helpful.
Q8	This manual helps me to create a blog successfully.
Q9	This manual has met my expectations.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Validity test

Table 2: Testing the validity of a questionnaire using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Correlations

		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	TOTAL
Q1	Pearson Correlation	1	.580**	.501*	.171	.413	.070	.187	.149	.335	.473*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005	.018	.446	.056	.758	.403	.509	.128	.026
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Q2	Pearson Correlation	.580**	1	.492*	.230	.226	.417	.295	.234	.298	.524*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005		.020	.303	.313	.054	.183	.295	.178	.012
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22

Q3	Pearson Correlation	.501*	.492*	1	.494*	.556**	.622**	.607**	.481*	.588**	.828**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.018	.020		.019	.007	.002	.003	.023	.004	.000
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Q4	Pearson Correlation	.171	.230	.494*	1	.655**	.501*	.608**	.671**	.562**	.781**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.446	.303	.019		.001	.018	.003	.001	.006	.000
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Q5	Pearson Correlation	.413	.226	.556**	.655**	1	.387	.530*	.628**	.757**	.806**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.056	.313	.007	.001		.075	.011	.002	.000	.000
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Q6	Pearson Correlation	.070	.417	.622**	.501*	.387	1	.470*	.573**	.561**	.727**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.758	.054	.002	.018	.075		.027	.005	.007	.000
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Q7	Pearson Correlation	.187	.295	.607**	.608**	.530*	.470*	1	.442*	.498*	.723**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.403	.183	.003	.003	.011	.027		.040	.018	.000
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Q8	Pearson Correlation	.149	.234	.481*	.671**	.628**	.573**	.442*	1	.624**	.770**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.509	.295	.023	.001	.002	.005	.040		.002	.000
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Q9	Pearson Correlation	.335	.298	.588**	.562**	.757**	.561**	.498*	.624**	1	.813**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.128	.178	.004	.006	.000	.007	.018	.002		.000
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
TOTAL	Pearson Correlation	.473*	.524*	.828**	.781**	.806**	.727**	.723**	.770**	.813**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026	.012	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows that the sample size is 22, and the degree of freedom is 20. Therefore, the Critical Value is 0.422, while Obtained Value of all nine questions is more than the Critical Value, ranging from the smallest value of 0.473 (Q1) to the immense value of 0.828 (Q3). In short, all nine questions in the questionnaire 'How to create a blog' are highly significant, so there are valid questions.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of 5-point Likert Scale questions

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	22	3	5	4.14	.468
Q2	22	3	5	3.95	.375
Q3	22	2	5	4.05	.785
Q4	22	3	5	4.27	.703
Q5	22	3	5	4.14	.640
Q6	22	3	5	4.18	.664
Q7	22	3	5	4.32	.568
Q8	22	2	5	4.32	.716
Q9	22	3	5	4.36	.581

Note: 1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Neutral, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree

The five-point Likert Scale is considered an interval scale. The mean is very significant. There are two questions: Q3 and Q8 showed the minimum scale was 'disagree'. The other seven questions' minimum scale was a 'neutral' response. The method to analyse the data is following from 1 to 1.80 represents (strongly disagree), 1.81 until 2.60 represents (disagree), from 2.61 until 3.40 represents (neutral), from 3:41 until 4:20 represents (agree), and 4.21 until 5.00 represents (strongly agree).

The five questions: Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5 and Q6, illustrated that respondents agreed on the items because the mean is between 3.95 and 4.18 (ranging from 3.41 to 4.20). While the mean of the other four questions: Q4, Q7, Q8 and Q9, are above 4.21, showing 'strongly agree'. In summary, the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the questions in the questionnaire.

5.   Findings and discussion

According to Mah (2014, 2015, 2020), the micro perspective in instructional design draws attention to reading, discussion, and writing through pedagogical and theoretical discoveries. Based on WeCWI framework, the student's writing performance can be enhanced through using the WeCWI-enabled Blogging that contributes to reading (R), discussion (D) and writing (W) towards cognitive development. Thus, blogging is undeniably an output to fulfil the criteria guided by WeCWI as the theoretical-and-pedagogical framework.

To answer the first research question, the manual is designed in three steps: Step 1 is to create a blog; Step 2 is to Manage a blog; Step 3 is to create pages and posts. It is to ensure the respondents, who are among the pre-university students, understand the steps to improve their blogs for academic purposes. On the other hand, they are laymen in blogging; therefore, a concise and more straightforward version of the manual template should be customised among themselves. Figure 2 shows the screenshots of the WeCWI-enabled blogging manual to be evaluated by the students.
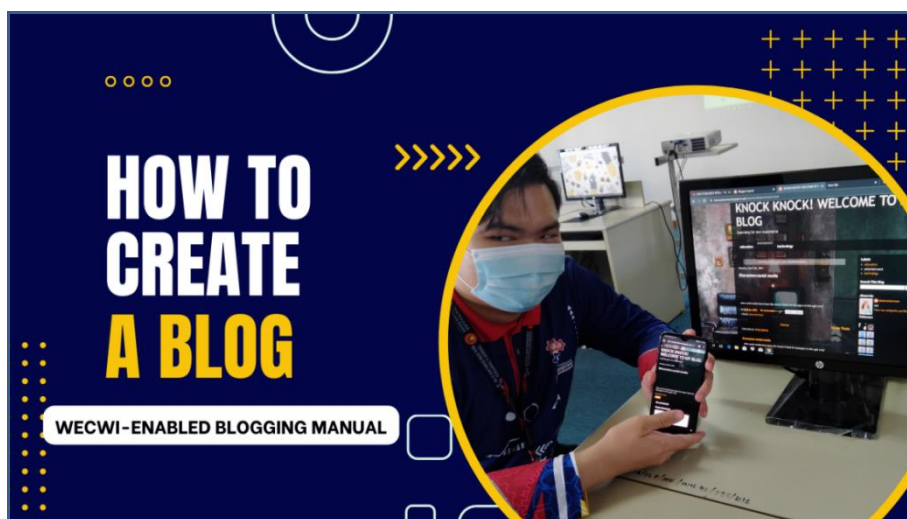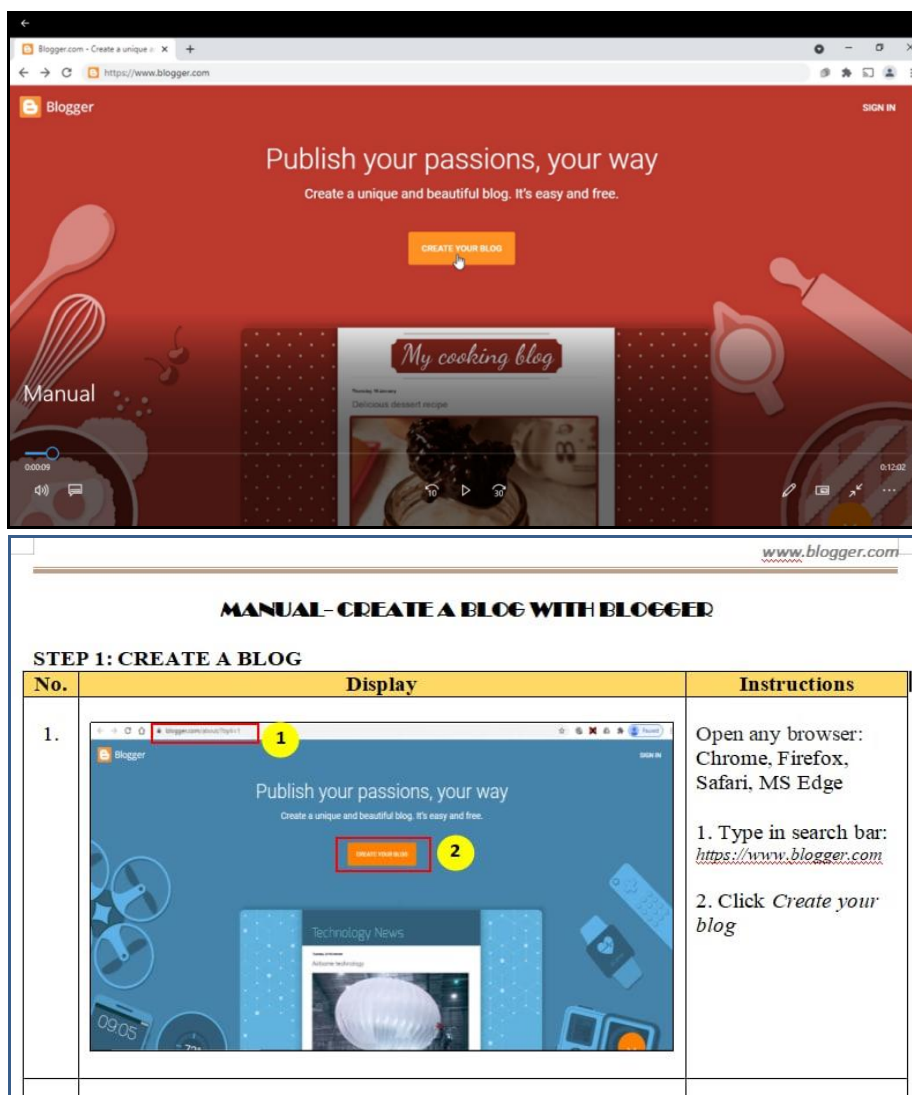
Figure 2: WeCWI-enabled Blogging Manual screenshots

To address the second research question, the nine questions in the questionnaire are categorised into interface design, content, and overall outcome. Respondents found the interface design of the manual attractive, and the formatting in the illustrations and numbering system effectively guides the respondents to create blogs. In terms of the content, the information is sufficient to guide the respondents in creating their blogs. Lastly, the overall outcome, most crucially, all respondents successfully started creating and designing the layout of the blogs, and the manual has been an excellent tool for them in meeting their expectations. Based on the administered questionnaire, students responded to the additional information to indicate the blog post tools to be included for a better presentation of the WeCWI-enabled manual. Hence, an initiative was taken to modify the manual by providing additional information and a detailed explanation of using every tool when publishing any post. A 12-minute auxiliary video on creating a blog using www.blogspot.com was created to guarantee a succinct manual as guidelines for novice bloggers. Additionally, a collection of students' blogs' links is saved and viewed in Wakelet for easy access. The online platform has given students excellent wondrous ways of learning (See Appendices).

6.   Conclusions and implications

Essentially, the data from the pilot test depicted positive and convincing findings. Therefore, it is reported that this pilot test shows a promising result for further studies to measure the efficacy of using blogs for academic purposes, for instance, reading and writing skills improvement. With the manual, respondents reacted that creating a blog is no longer a tough & time-consuming task. Everyone can own a blog because they are elated and enjoy being bloggers for academic purposes in the future. Besides, blogging has allowed bloggers to discuss with their friends virtually. It is an excellent platform for supporting lifelong learning, and they will continue to blog.

An obvious limitation of the manual is the platform used to share the manual with the respondents. Even though the manual was prepared in an offline Microsoft word, some reasons were discussed why Microsoft Word was selected to develop the manual. However, the drawback is Microsoft Word offline version might not be the best platform to create a manual as it can be substituted by using online tools, such as 365 Microsoft Office tools online, Google Workspace or Canva. Hence, a more accessible manual is needed to benefit the respondents.
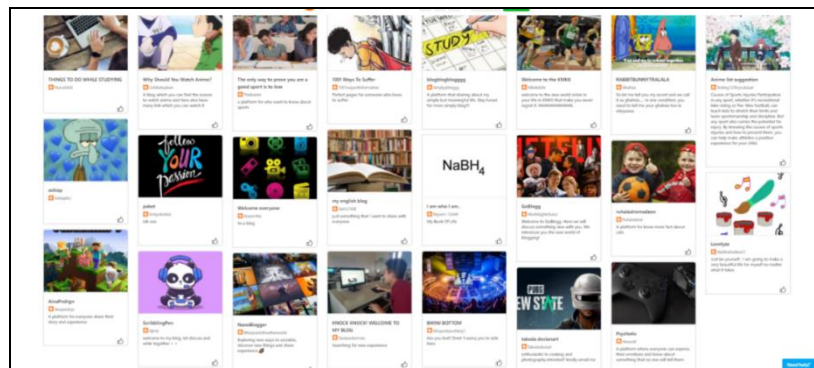
7.   Acknowledgments

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APPENDICES

1. A collection of students' blogs is saved in Wakelet for easy access (https://wakelet.com/i/invite?code=7f2ec5e).

2. 'How to create a blog' Manual Evaluation Form. The form can be accessed online (https://forms.gle/3XykiKqb23i4L6uo7)
Preview of the Form

3. Students creating the blog at the computer lab