course), and that message was about the author being away. The low online presence of the author in that week could have had an impact on the learners’ progress in the course. As soon as the author returned and made a post about the two-week extension period, the remaining learners made steady progress. Eight of the nine learners who completed the course in this period did so in the first week itself.

Feedback from the learners (Tables 1 and 2) is positive and encouraging. Multiple-choice question 1 which asks learners to rate their knowledge of writing proposals rated at an average of 4.0 out of 5.0 (on a scale of 1 to 5) with a standard deviation of 0.84. This suggests that the course was effective in teaching this skill. The majority of learners (85%) agreed that the learning materials were suitable for their needs. Regarding question 3, which asks learners if they would recommend the course to others, 95% of the learners responded positively. The feedback forms, which included both open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions, indicate that the learners found the course to be useful. The majority of learners (85%) agreed that the course was helpful in improving their knowledge and skills. The feedback also suggests that the e-learning platform was user-friendly and easy to navigate.

The objectives of the pilot course were achieved: the completion rate was high and the learners gave positive feedback. Therefore, e-learning can be said to be a viable option for teaching research skills. The success of the course can be attributed to the following: (1) providing a preparatory course and learning guidelines before starting the course at a gentle pace, (2) presenting content that sustained the learners’ interest and was appropriate for their language level, and (3) keeping in touch with the learners throughout the course by answering questions promptly, writing about current and upcoming topics, and passing on those falling behind.

A training programme is successful if the learners accomplish something by applying their learning. Workshops (and courses) that are run by AuthorAID aim to equip researchers with the knowledge and skill to publish in peer-reviewed journals. AuthorAID workshops have indeed led to increased publications, and it is hoped that online courses will too.

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Abstract
Webometrics has emerged as a discipline to assess the circulation of information on the Internet. One of the metrics employed by webometrics is the so-called Web Impact Factor (WIF). A website is highly-visited if it contains information of high interest/audience, provides high-quality services and is mentioned on more influential websites. A high journal Web Impact Factor (JIF) itself may attract many links to a journal website. However, many other factors influence journal visibility and its impact on website layout, speed and ease of finding information, structure of website and hyperlinks. Despite some positive applications of webometrics, it is still not clear whether web links can be used for scholarly purposes. Usage data change over time. Search engines cover only a small proportion of information. It is thus important to take into account both quantitative and qualitative aspects of webometrics.

Keywords
Webometrics; periodicals as topic; link analysis; impact factor.

Current academic publishing is switching towards online format and distribution of information by means of electronic journals. Webometrics, informetrics, bibliometrics, blogometrics, scientometrics and cybertics are all relatively new disciplines quantitatively assessing the use of the contents of the cyberspace. Webometrics is concerned with the circulation of information on the Internet and is quantitatively assessing the use of information, amongst many other bibliometric and informetric tasks.6 This relatively new discipline measures usage and structure of the websites, its papers, keywords, links and citations.

Impact of websites
Despite its seemingly chaotic organisation, the web has regular features enabling mathematical characterisation of its functions.7 This is why it is possible to assess the rank of websites, the number of visits and links to the sites.6

Webometrics employs variables to investigate website usage: type of domain (ie.com, edu, org), variation in the uniform resource locator (URL), daily visits (eg page visitor counts), number of inbound links (ie number of external web pages or sites pointing to the elements of a given site) and number of pages per website.

There are three main types of applications: search engine results analysis, link relationship mapping and link impact evaluation.8 Search engine results analysis aims at assessing the comprehensiveness and consistency of commercial search engines’ results, in particular for their importance as an information retrieval tool by web users. Link relationship mapping is the analysis of the relationship between similar websites (eg measuring the number of links between pairs of sites). It includes link-based maps of topic areas intended to reveal content similarities; this technique is primarily focused on website content. Link impact evaluation is important for websites, pages of academic institutions and electronic journals.9

Ingersoll proposed the so-called Web Impact Factor (WIF).10 To calculate WIF the sum of all links at least once over a page to be included in the database: the site and the links used for navigational purposes, and WIF can be used as a good measure of a website’s usability. WIF takes into account the use of hyperlink links measured by search engines. The highly popular Journal Impact Factor (JIF) measures citations over a certain timeframe (2 or 5 years). In contrast, WIF is a “snapshot” of the search engines at the time of measurement.9 The number of inbound links to electronic journals correlates well with JIF: websites with high JIFs tend to attract more links to their websites.7

There is a branch of webometrics specifically focusing on electronic journals. Webometric analyses may identify relevant articles, map a field of interest and evaluate research work. Hyperlinks can be used for citation analyses. A number of studies have investigated the use of hyperlinks or downloads to e-articles to find out whether they can be used to predict citations. It was shown that download counts relate to the number of future citations of these articles, and thus downloads can be used as surrogates for measuring impact of e-articles and journals.11

Is there anything beyond a link?
Links to a website may indicate how useful is the website and which pages, or resources are the most popular. The number of inbound links and their annual increment can help predict the evolution of pages.7 Though the number of links may reflect the quality of the web resources,11 it still needs to be considered in large studies. A UK-based study on university websites showed that the proportion of website links relates to a university size and prestige rather than the quality of displayed information.12

Website survival can be assessed by a set of quality criteria.13 The quality criteria for a medical website were listed by the Health on the Net Foundation (HON), British Healthcare Internet Association (BHIA) and the American Medical Association (AMA).14

Webometrics in practice
According to the Internet statistics, there were more than 2 billion users in 2011. However, millions of the users mostly visit a few selected websites.

Webometrics can be useful in practice to rationalise your efforts. For example, Webometric Analyst or Yahoo! Site Explorer can help the users to search and find most useful information.16 Webometric Analyst allows to obtain “Web Impact Report” of the number of times each set of words, phrases or documents have been mentioned online, a “Link