"ScoreA" - Online Tutoring Programme in Malaysia

Husaina Banu Kenayathulla, Mojgan Afshari, Norlidah Alias,
Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani, Mohammed Sani Bin Ibrahim

University of Malaya, Faculty of Education,
Department of Educational Management, Planning and policy, Malaysia
husaina@um.edu.my

Abstract: In many societies, parents are willing to provide additional resources to ensure that their children excel in their education. An example of such an investment is private tutoring, which has increasingly become an important component of educational investments. Unlike other countries that have attempted to ban private tutoring, it is legally allowed in Malaysia. "ScoreA" is an online tutoring programme that is endorsed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. This is a fully interactive programme to help students prepare for the examinations and equips the younger generation with knowledge and skills in information technology. This paper describes the features of ScoreA programme as an online tutoring tool in education.

Keywords: online tutoring; impact on education; Malaysia

Introduction

In many parts of the world, households are willing to spend a great deal for private tutoring. For instance, in Korea, household expenditures for private tutoring amounted to 2.9 percent of GDP in 1998 (Kim and Lee, 2001). Similarly, in Turkey, households spent more than 1.4 percent of GDP for private tutoring (Tansel and Bircan, 2006). Likewise in Singapore, households spent about S$820 million (US$680 million) on center and home-based private tutoring in 2008. This was an increase from the S$470 million a decade earlier (Basu 2010). Private tutoring is often seen as an additional investment for their children's education. Private tutoring is commonly defined as additional coaching in academic subjects that is given to students outside school hours for a fee (Foondun, 2006).

In Malaysia, private tutoring is becoming a common phenomenon. It is used not only for remedial purpose but it is often used to boost the performance of students who are already well-performing. Though parents do not have any strong evidence of the effectiveness of tutoring, there is a strong shared belief in the efficacy of tutoring. Tan (2011) surveyed 1,600 students in eight schools in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur and found that 88.0% had received tutoring during their primary schooling.

Unlike other countries in the world (such as South Korea and Mauritius) that have attempted to ban private tutoring on the premise that it fosters social inequalities, it is legally allowed in Malaysia. The Malaysian government has adopted a moderate approach to monitor and control the quality of private tutoring (Kenayathulla, 2012).

There are various forms of face-to-face tutoring: individualized, small group and large group tutoring. The payment differs according to the type of tutoring and the place of tutoring. If the tutoring is conducted in the student's home, the fees will be higher since it includes tutor's travelling fees. Another type of tutoring that is becoming famous is online tutoring. Such tutoring may be conducted live, using Skype and other softwares, or it may be in the form of self-service lessons. Online tutoring is not bounded by geographic locations. The tutors and their clients may be in different countries or even continents. For example, TutorVista, a new age consumer Internet company in education services space caters to over 20,000 students in US and UK and employs over 3000 tutors across India (Blakely 2007; Venture and Jang, 2010). Tutor Vista offers its services at US$2.50 per hour of tutoring for a student opting for 2 hours a day and 5 days a week. The online tutoring is considered much cheaper compared to face-to-face tutoring. For instance, the typical face-to-face tutoring in the US is US$100 per hour and online tutoring is US$40 (which is offered in US) (Vora and Dewan, 2009).

In Malaysia, ScoreA programme was launched on the 3rd March 2006 by the former Malaysia's Minister of Education, Dato Sri Hishammuddin Bin Tun Hussein. ScoreA programme is a fully interactive programme based on the official government syllabus that helps students to learn at their own pace. It emphasizes both input and output based learning. The latest innovation is the i-teacher. The students are given option to choose their

intelligent Avator. The i-teacher will help them to answer the questions. In addition, there are interactive diagrams, comprehensive notes as well as notes in the form of power points (KISB, 2012).

Previous studies both in Malaysia and international literature mainly focus on face–to-face tutoring. Not many studies have examined the online tutoring services and its impact on students learning. This paper describes the features of Scores A programme in Malaysia as the online tutoring tool.

Literature Review on the effect of tutoring

There have been variations in the results of studies that focus on the effects of private tutoring on students' academic achievement. For instance, in Vietnam, Ha and Harpham (2005) find that attending private tutoring does not result in significant increases in 8-year-old childrens' writing and numeracy test scores; however, it doubles those same children's reading test scores On the other hand, a seminal study in Singapore finds that private tutoring has a negative effect on secondary students' grades (Cheo and Quah, 2005). The authors claim that such a finding might be due to excessive studying in Singapore, which might result in diminishing returns.

The results from these two studies should be interpreted with caution as these studies did not explicitly test for the possible endogeneity of private tutoring. If unobserved factors, such as parental taste, concern for their children's education and students' motivation for studies, are not controlled in regression analysis, they will contribute to the error term, rendering inconsistent parameter estimates (Dang and Rogers, 2008; Ireson, 2004). After controlling for community and school characteristics, Dang (2007) finds that for both primary and lower secondary students in Vietnam, higher spending on private tutoring decreased the probability that students performance would be in either the poor or average categories but increased the probability that the students would be in either good or excellent academic rankings.

Kuan (2011) examined the impact of private tutoring on mathematics achievement of 10,013 grade 9 students in Taipei, China. After controlling for students' socio-economic status, ability, and attitude, he found that student who had attended tutoring were more achieving and from higher social classes. But the gains in achievements were small. Bray (2012) contends that in this study, tutoring is treated as a single variable, and distinction was not made between one- to- one tutoring and large classes. In addition, he argues that the data that is used in that study was limited to a single semester of grade 9, and this prevents long term inferences.

On the other hand, studies have shown that supplemental tutoring programs can be effective at increasing academic achievement, especially for low income students and low achieving students (Zosky and Crowford, 2003). A report from the National Longitudinal Study of No Child Left Behind (2007) finds that, on average, across the seven districts examined, the average effect of supplemental education services in both reading and math are positive and statistically significant. The report also states that students participating in supplemental education for multiple years experienced gains twice as large as those experienced by students participating for a single year. In terms of specific subgroup populations, African-American students, Hispanic students, and students with disabilities also experienced positive gains in achievements (Zimmer et al, 2007).

Online tutoring

Traditionally, tutoring is conducted in face-to-face settings in which the tutor and tutee meet at a specified place and time. However, with the advancement in communication and technology, and the increase in access to the internet, it is possible for tutoring to be conducted via the internet (Fleisher, 2006). In this case, tutoring is not limited to a particular place or time. The tutor can be any expert with online connections. Although both face-to-face and online tutoring enables interaction between the tutor and the tutee, online tutoring allows partial anonymity in communication.

Online tutoring supports both synchronous (real time) and asynchronous (delayed) communication. However, the nature of interactions and the type of instructor support permitted by those environments differ. In a synchronous environment, real-time interaction allows the simulation of a real classroom learning situation and immediate, interactive clarification of meaning (Goodyear, Jones, Asenio, Hodgson and Steeples, 2005). In contrast, asynchronous communication requires that the sender wait for a response in a time delayed fashion. Although there is ample research on face-to-face tutoring environments, research on online tutoring especially at the school level is scarce.

One key study examined the effect of online-tutoring (Kersent, Dogbey, Barber and Kephart, 2011) on college algebra students' outcome (achievement, attitude and retention). Students in the experimental groups were provided access to online tutoring unlike the students in the control group. Collected data included algebra content knowledge test, attitude survey, online tutoring logs, and retention data. The findings indicated that content knowledge gain scores of students in the experimental group who used the online tutoring service (*E-Users*) were significantly higher than the students in the experimental who did not use the service (*ENon-Users*). E-Users reported better attitudes about help seeking than ENon-Users. The findings suggest that more students in the experimental group persisted and remained in the course than the students in the control group.

The features of ScoreA programme

ScoreA programme consists of various interactive features that helps to enhance students' understanding. It is expected that online tutoring such as ScoreA can help students who are weak and motivate them to study at their own pace. ScoreA programme is considered cheap compared to face-to-face tutoring. For a student in Malaysia, the charge is about RM66 per month for a family with two children. This is much cheaper compared to fees for a typical face-to-face tutoring which is RM50 per hour for each child (KISB, 2012).

ScoreA consists of various online evaluation mechanisms. **eTopic** is a revision module that allows students to do short regular exercises and provides instant Output Learning to assess a student's understanding of a particular topic taught in school. With eTopic, answers are corrected instantly to allow the student to learn from their mistakes. Each question allows the student four attempts to find the right answer. When the wrong answer is selected, the student will be informed instantly, thus the student is forced to re-read the question before his or her 2nd, 3rd or 4th attempt. This instills the habit of reading the question carefully and understanding it before attempting an answer. Parents will be able to monitor their children's academic progress and identify their children's strength and weaknesses so that timely measures can be taken to correct any shortcomings (KISB, 2012) (Appendix 1)

eAssessment™ allows students to perform exercises as needed and provides instant Output Learning to assess children's understanding of a particular subject taught in school. Children can select a subject at any one time and instantly find out if they have understood what they have learnt and review their understanding of that subject. Parents will be able to identify their child's strength and weaknesses so that timely measures can be taken to correct any shortcomings before the actual examinations (KISB, 2012) (Appendix 2).

ePastYearExam consists of 13 years past examination questions for centralized examinations at the primary (UPSR), lower secondary (PMR) and secondary (SPM) level. This type of questions provides students the opportunity to practise on actual past years' examination papers. Students are trained to answer the questions within the allocated time (KISB, 2012) (Appendix 3).

eTrial Exam™ module is designed to simulate actual exam environment for UPSR, PMR and SPM. It further enhances children's exam readiness. This module will train children to complete the questions under exam pressure and within the limited time. Students will have to submit it for correction or grading after they have completed it. The grading is instant (KISB, 2012)(Appendix 4)

ePmogress is a monitoring chart that allows parents keep track of their children's performances on eTopic. This feature is an effective monitoring tool that is designed to keep parents informed of their children's work schedule; ensuring parents that their children eTopic exercises are done and completed accordingly. Parents would be updated on the number of attempts their children has done on each topic, thus specifically emphasizing the "difficult topics" faced by their children. This information will help parents identify specific topics in a subject that their children have difficulties in, instead of generalising weaknesses by subjects (KISB, 2012) (Appendix 5).

eReport Card™ records all your children's output learning sessions, be it eAssessment or eTrial Exam. This feature gives parents unprecedented 1st hand knowledge of their children's strong and weak subjects. It records and displays their children's average scores for each subject for that month (KISB, 2012) (Appendix 6).
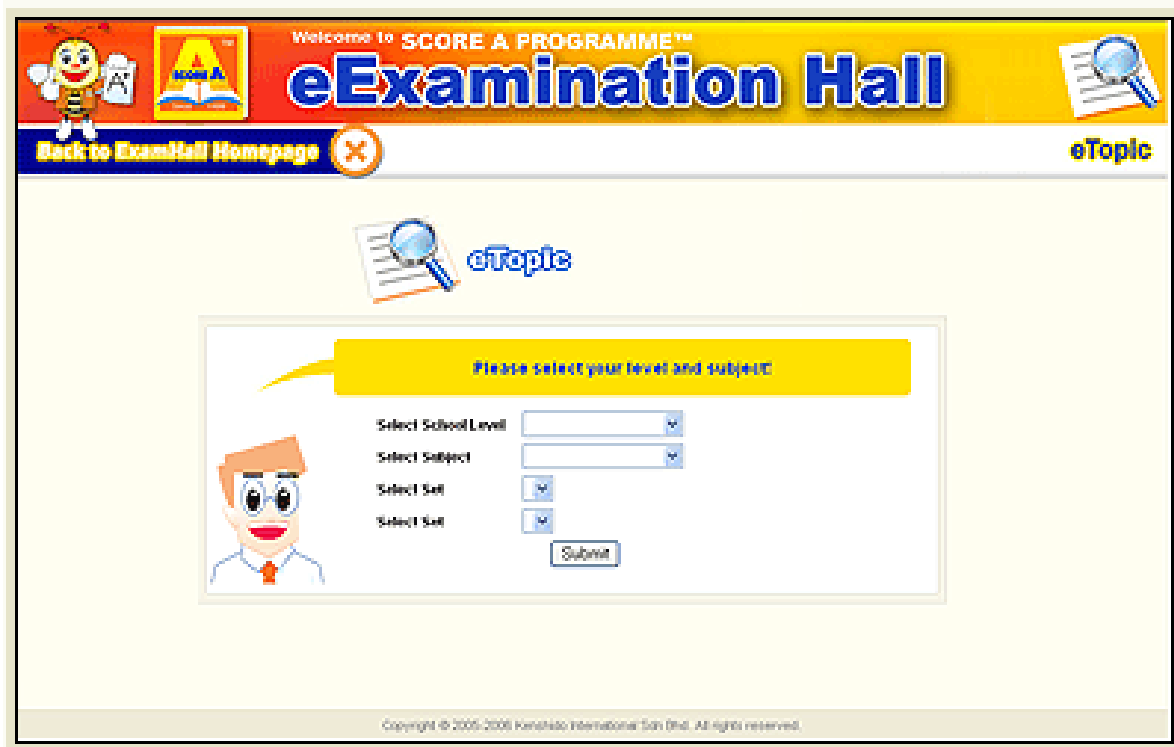
Conclusion

According to the latest Malaysian Educational Blueprint 2013-2025, the Malaysian education system needs to be transformed to prepare future generations that fit the needs of the 21st century. A key component of this blueprint is to maximise the usage of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) to scale up quality learning across Malaysia (MOE, 2012). However, it is important to conduct further studies to analyze the impact of ScoreA programme on academic achievement. Such investment is worthwhile if it results in positive effect on academic outcome. Another issue that needs to be addressed is equity aspect. Students from lower income households might not have internet access at their home and might not be able to benefit from such program. Thus, it is essential for the Malaysian government to sponsor such program at school so that all the children regardless of their socio-economic background have equal opportunity for quality education.

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Appendix 1: **eTopic**

Source: KISB(2012)

Appendix 2: **eAssessment**
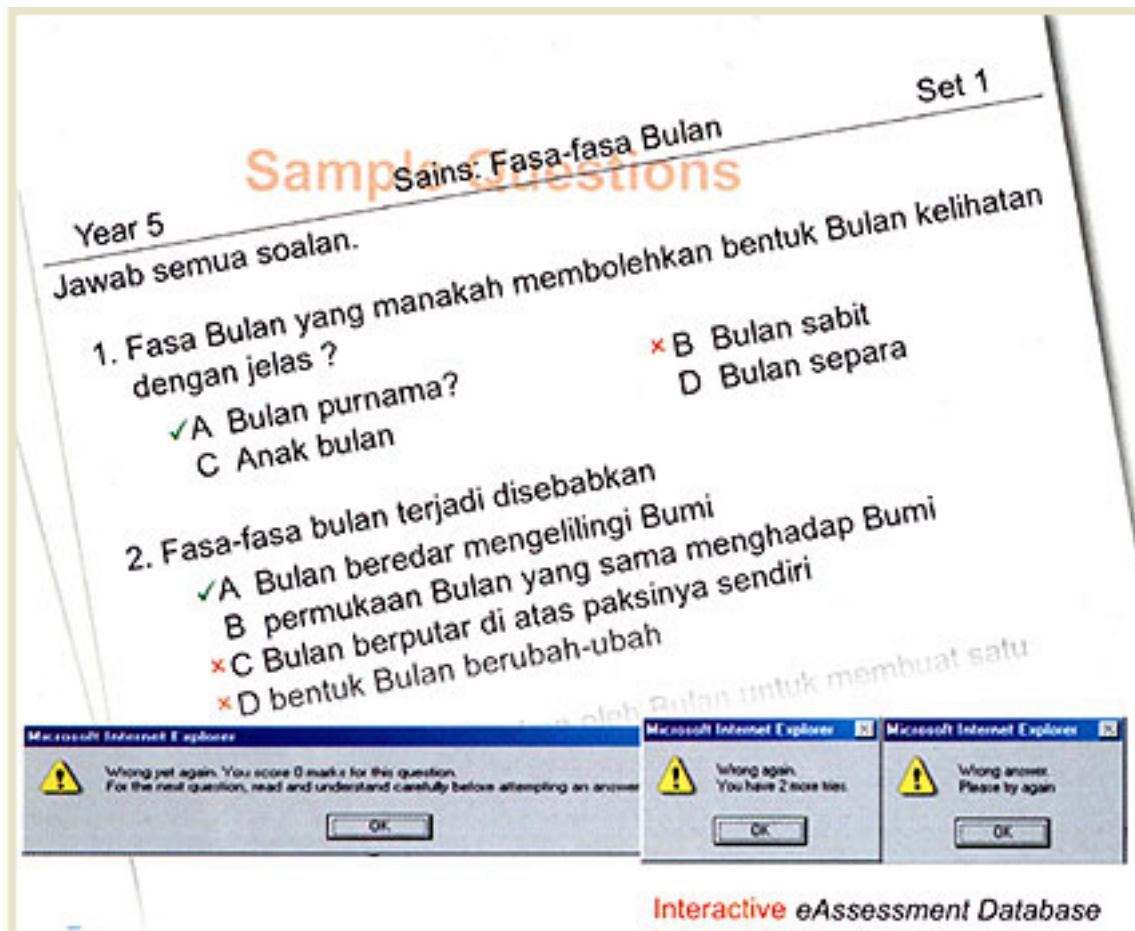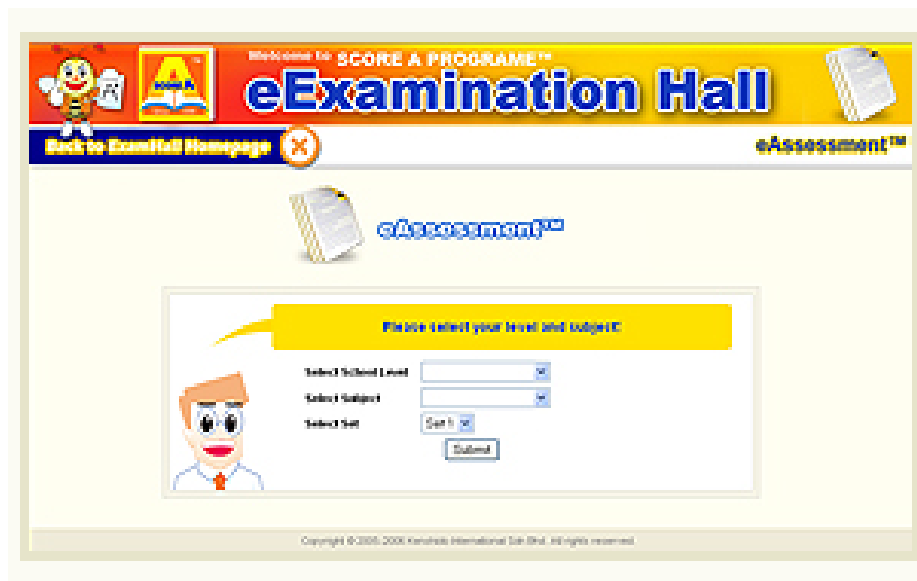
Source: KISB (2012)

Appendix 3: **ePastYearExam**

Source: KISB (2012)

Appendix 4: **eTrialExam**
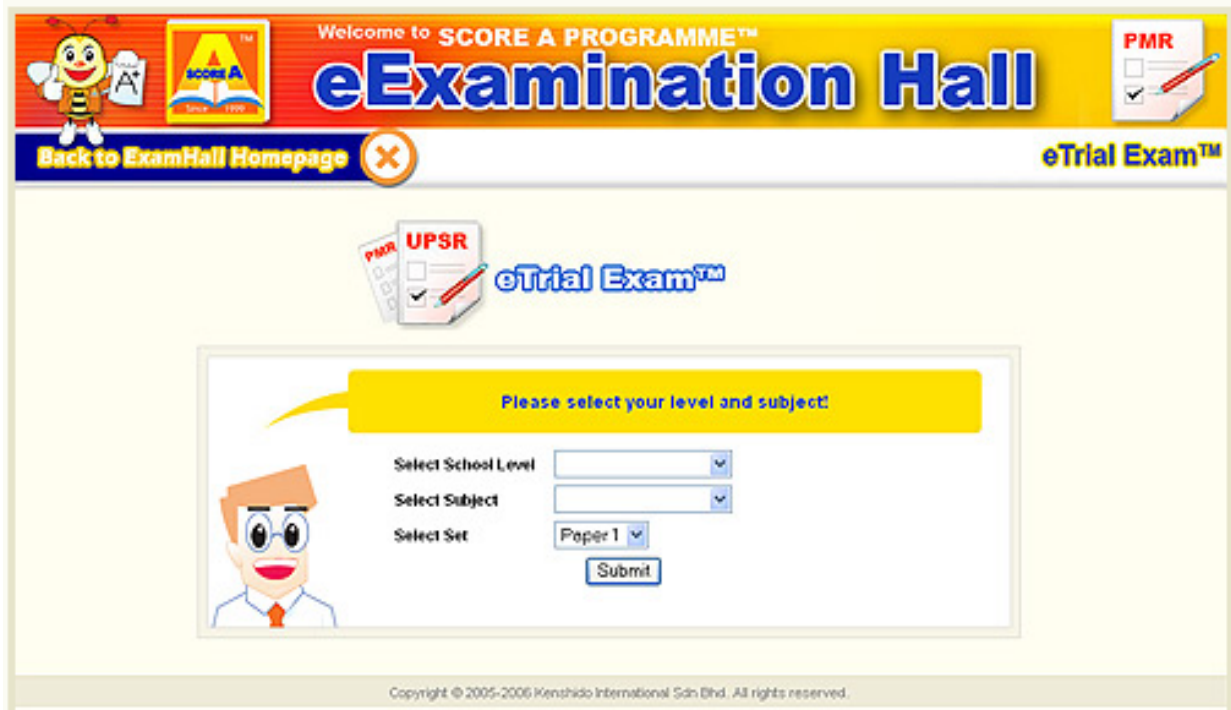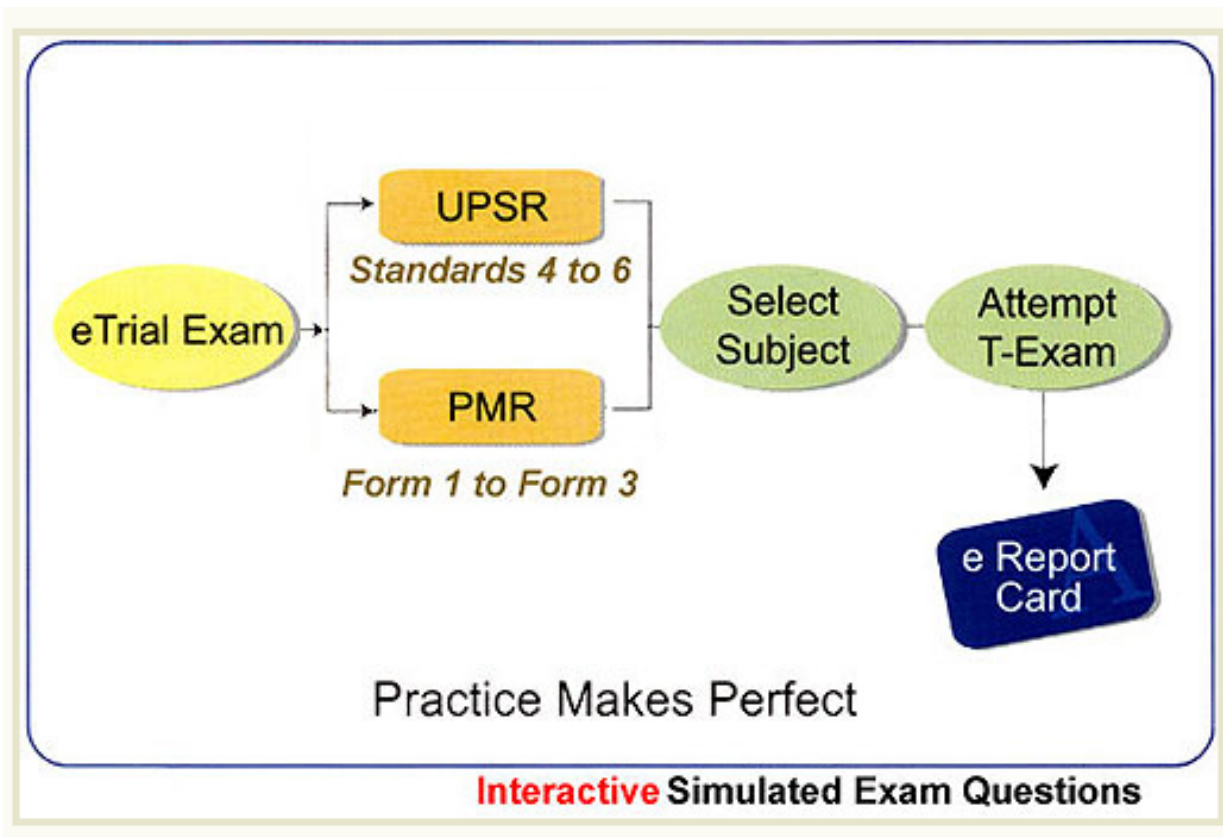
Source: KISB (2012)

Appendix 5: **eProgress**

Source: KISB(2012)

Appendix 6: **eReportCard**

Source: KISB(2012)