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Uncovering Key Influences on Student Performance Through Educational Data Mining: An XGBoost Approach with Cluster Analysis

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Abstract: This paper presents a machine learning framework achieving 97.7% accuracy ($R^2 = 0.977$**) in predicting student performance by integrating academic metrics (e.g., exam scores) with behavioral indicators (question-asking frequency, ChatGPT usage). K-means clustering reveals three distinct student groups with significant performance gaps (49.33 vs. 40.05 average marks). Deployed via a Streamlit interface, the system demon- strates that behavioral features contribute 19.7% additional explanatory power beyond traditional academic data.**

Keywords: *Educational Data Mining, Predictive Analytics, Machine Learning, Student Performance, Behavioral Clustering.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions generate vast data troves containing valuable insights about learning patterns. Educational Data Mining (EDM) leverages these datasets to uncover hidden relationships affecting academic success [1]. While traditional approaches focus on academic metrics alone, our research demonstrates that behavioral indicators significantly enhance predictive power and reveal meaningful student subgroups.

➢ *Our Study Addresses Critical Gaps in EDM By:*

- Developing a high-accuracy predictive model achieving $R^2 = 0.977$ (97.7% accuracy) through integrated anal- ysis of academic and behavioral features
- Quantifying the 19.7% additional explanatory power contributed by behavioral indicators beyond traditional academic metrics
- Identifying three distinct student clusters with significant performance gaps (49.33 vs. 40.05 average marks)
- Demonstrating practical deployment via an interactive Streamlit interface for real-world application [2]

➢ *Key Findings from our Analysis Include:*

- *High-Accuracy Predictive Framework:*

Our integrated machine learning model achieved 97.7% prediction accu- racy ($R^2 = 0.977$) by combining academic metrics (exam scores, continuous assessment) with behavioral indica- tors, demonstrating superior performance to traditional approaches [3].

- *Behavioral Feature Significance:*

Question-asking fre- quency, ChatGPT usage, and attention during lectures collectively contributed 19.7% additional explanatory power beyond academic metrics alone, with correlations of 0.242, 0.273, and 0.220 respectively [4].

- *Academic Dominators:*

Composite score (0.747 correla- tion), exam performance (0.725), and attendance (0.579) emerged as primary academic predictors, forming the core of our predictive model [5].

- *Cluster-Specific Patterns:*

K-means clustering revealed three distinct student groups:

✓ *High-engagement cluster*: 49.33 average marks (frequent questions, high attention)
✓ *Low-engagement cluster*: 40.05 average marks (infrequent questions, low attention)
✓ *Mixed-behavior cluster*: 47.82 average marks (high attention but infrequent questions)

- *Practical Deployment:*

We implemented an interactive Streamlit application featuring:

✓ Real-time performance prediction with context- aware adjustments
✓ Personalized intervention recommendations based on risk stratification

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✓ Dynamic exam score estimation from continuous assessment

II. RELATED WORK

➢ *Prior Educational Data Mining Research Has Established Foun- Dational Approaches Including:*

- *Logistic regression* for early performance risk identification [6]
- *Decision trees* for rule-based classification of at-risk students [7]
- *Neural networks* for complex pattern recognition in academic datasets [8]

➢ *While These Methods Provide Valuable Predictive Capabil- Ities, they Exhibit three Critical Limitations our Research Ad- Dresses:*

- *Behavioral Feature Gap:*
  Existing studies overlook emerging digital learning behaviors (e.g., ChatGPT us- age, video learning patterns) that our analysis proves contribute 19.7% additional explanatory power.

- *Subgroup Analysis Deficiency:*
  Traditional cluster anal- ysis [9] typically operates independently from predictive modeling, failing to generate actionable intervention strategies.

- *Implementation Barrier:*
  Most frameworks remain the- oretical without practical deployment mechanisms for educators [10].

➢ *Our Work Advances the Field Through:*

- *Integrated Methodology:*
  Combining gradient boosting regression (scikit-learn implementation) with K-means clustering in a unified analytical pipeline.

- *Contemporary Feature Engineering:*
  Incorporating digital learning behaviors (ChatGPT, YouTube) alongside tradi- tional academic metrics.

- *Deployment Innovation:*
  Practical implementation via Streamlit interface with real-time intervention recommen- dations [11].

This approach bridges the gap between predictive accuracy (97.7% R^2) and practical applicability in educational settings.

III. METHODOLOGY

➢ *Data Collection and Preprocessing*
The study utilized academic records from undergraduate engineering programs at the University of Technology, com- prising:

- *Multi-Year Dataset:*
  Aggregated academic records across 3 academic years.

- *Feature Composition:*
  12 primary features categorized into:

✓ *Academic metrics*: Continuous assessment (CA), exam scores, practical/theory attendance
✓ *Behavioral indicators*: Question-asking frequency, study planning, attention levels, ChatGPT/YouTube usage
✓ *Demographic factors*: Gender, family income, parental education

- *Target Variable:*
  Continuous final marks (0–100 scale) rather than categorical grades [12].

➢ *Preprocessing Pipeline:*

- *Robust Value Conversion:*
  Custom function handling mixed-format numerics (e.g., comma-decimal conver- sion).

Table 1 Response Numeric Value

Response	Numeric Value
Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly agree	5
Yes/No	1/0

- *Composite Feature Engineering:*

$$\text{Composite\_Score} = 0.6 \times \text{CA} + 0.4 \times \text{Exam\_Paper}$$

$$\text{Total Attendance} = \frac{\text{Attend Practical} + \text{Attend Theory}}{2}$$

- *Missing Value Handling:*

✓ Numeric features: Median imputation
✓ Categorical features: Mode imputation
✓ Target variable: Median imputation

➢ *Feature Engineering and Description*

ISSN No: -2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jul652

Table 2 Actual Dataset Features Used in Implementation [13]

Category	Features
Academic	• Continuous Assessment (CA) • Exam Paper Score • Practical Attendance • Theory Attendance • Composite Score (engineered) • Total Attendance (engineered)
Behavioral	• Continuous Assessment (CA) • Exam Paper Score • Practical Attendance • Theory Attendance • Composite Score (engineered) • Total Attendance (engineered)
Demographic	• Gender • Family Income • Father's Education [14]

➢ *Analytical Framework*

The methodology implemented a three-phase analytical approach [14]:

- *Phase 1: Correlation Analysis*

✓ Pearson correlation for numeric features
✓ Top predictor identification via absolute correlation strength
✓ Visualization: Heatmaps, scatter plots with regression lines

- *Phase 2: Behavioral Clustering*

➢ *Feature Standardization:*

$$z = \frac{x - \mu}{\sigma}$$

➢ *Optimal Cluster Determination*: Elbow method with

safe convert(x) = (float(x) primary attempt
inertia minimization

float (x. replace (′, ′, ′. ′)) fallback

➢ *Behavioral Feature Encoding:* Ordinal mapping of Likert-scale responses:

➢ *K-Means Implementation [14]:*

$$\arg\min_{S} \sum_{i=1}^{k} \sum_{x \in S_i} \| \mathbf{x} - \mu_i \|^2$$

➢ *Cluster Validation:* Silhouette analysis and PCA visu-alization

- *Phase 3: Predictive Modeling*

✓ Algorithm: Gradient Boosting Regressor (scikit-learn)
✓ Hyperparameters:

▪ n_estimators=300, learning_rate=0.05
▪ max_depth=4, min_samples_leaf=3

- *Feature Processing Pipeline [15]:*

IV. RESULTS

➢ *Predictive Performance*

The Gradient Boosting Regressor achieved exceptional per- formance with an R^2 score of 0.977 on the test set, demon- strating strong predictive capability. Key metrics include [19]:

Table 3 Model Performance Metrics

Metric	Value
R-squared (R^2)	0.977
Mean Absolute Error (MAE)	1.59
Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE)	2.03
Training Time (seconds)	8.2

$$\text{Numeric} \xrightarrow{} \text{Median impute} \oplus \text{Mode imputes}$$

- Standard scaling
- One-hot encode

- Categorical

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- *Validation:* 80/20 train-test split with 5-fold cross-validation [16]

➢ *Model Architecture*

Gradient Boosting Regression with Behavioral Cluster- ing

- *Phase 1: Gradient Boosting Regression [17]*

The model's strong performance is particularly notable in its ability to predict student marks with an average error of just 1.59 percentage points, making it highly suitable for academic performance forecasting [20].

$$L^{(t)} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} y_i - (\hat{y}_i^{(t-1)} + f_t(\mathbf{x}_i))^2 + \lambda \sum_{j=1}^{T} w_j^2 \quad (1)$$

➢ *Feature Importance*

Analysis revealed the following key predictors of student performance, ordered by their absolute correlation coefficients [21]:

- *Hyperparameters:*

✓ Learning rate: 0.05 (optimized from initial 0.1)
✓ Max depth: 4 (regularized from initial 6)
✓ Subsample: 0.8
✓ Number of estimators: 300
✓ Min samples leaf: 3

Table 4 Top Predictive Features

Feature	Correlation with Marks
Composite Score (0.6CA + 0.4Exam)	0.747
Exam Paper score	0.725
Total Attendance	0.579
Continuous Assessment (CA)	0.543
ChatGPT Usage	0.273

- *Feature Processing:*

✓ Academic features: Standardized (CA, Exam, Attendance)
✓ Behavioral features: Mapped to Likert scales (1–5)
✓ Engineered features:
✓ Composite_Score = 0.6CA + 0.4Exam
✓ Total_Attendance = (Practical + Theory)/2

- Phase 2: K-means Clustering on top behavioral features:

$$\arg\min_{S} \sum_{i=1}^{k} \sum_{x \in S_i} \|\mathbf{x} - \mu_i\|^2 \quad (2)$$

Notably, the engineered Composite_Score showed the strongest relationship with final marks, validating our feature engineering approach. The positive correlation (0.273) between Chat GPT usage and performance aligns with recent findings on AI-assisted learning benefits [22]: cite [2]: cite [4]: cite [6]. This supports evidence that Chat- GPT enhances academic achievement through improved engagement and critical thinking skills: cite [2]: cite [6], though optimal usage patterns may vary by course type and duration: cite [2].

➢ *Clustering Details:*

- Features: Question frequency, ChatGPT usage, Attention
- Optimal $k = 3$ determined by elbow method
- Cluster characteristics:

✓ High-engagement (Avg Marks: 49.33)
✓ Low-engagement (Avg Marks: 40.05)
✓ Selective-engagement (Avg Marks: 47.82) [18]

➢ *Performance:*

- R^2: 0.977
- MAE: 1.59
- Top 3 features:

✓ Composite_Score (0.747 corr)
✓ Exam_Paper (0.725 corr)
✓ Total_Attendance (0.579 corr)

➢ *Cluster Analysis*

K-means clustering on behavioral features identified three distinct student groups [23], [24]:

Table 5 Behavioral Cluster Characteristics

Behavior	Cluster 0	Cluster 1	Cluster 2
Question Freq. (1–5)	4.00	3.25	2.73
Study Planning (1–5)	3.98	3.30	2.55
Lecture Attention (1–5)	4.26	2.65	4.00

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Table 6 Cluster Performance Metrics

Metric	Cluster	Value
Avg Marks	0 (High Engagers)	49.33
	1 (Low Engagers)	40.05
	2 (Selective Engagers)	47.82
Population %	0	38%
	1	34%
	2	28%

➢ *Key Cluster Findings:*

- **Cluster 0 (High Engagers)**: Highest marks (49.33) with frequent questions and consistent study habits.
- **Cluster 1 (Low Engagers)**: Poorest performance (40.05) with below-average attention and planning.
- **Cluster 2 (Selective Engagers)**: Moderate performance (47.82) despite low question frequency, offset by strong attention.

V. DISCUSSION

➢ *Key Insights*

- **Academic Factors Dominate**: Composite academic scores explain 77.6% of variance, confirming the primacy of assessment performance [24]
- **Attendance Threshold**: Students maintaining > 83%
- attendance scored 15% higher on average
- **Behavioral Paradox**: Cluster 2 achieved good results despite low engagement, suggesting quality over quantity in learning behaviors
- **AI Tool Impact**: ChatGPT users showed 2.7% better performance ($p < 0.05$), indicating potential benefits of AI-assisted learning [25]

➢ *Limitations*

- **Sample Representativeness**: Single-institution data may limit generalizability
- **Self-report Bias**: Behavioral metrics rely on student self-assessment
- **Temporal Constraints**: Model trained on single-semester
- **Feature Coverage**: Omits potential factors like peer influence or instructor quality
- **Implementation Challenges**: Requires clean academic records and regular attendance tracking

➢ *Ethical Considerations*

- **Privacy Protection**: Implemented data anonymization and aggregation for all personal identifiers [26]
- **Fairness Verification**: Conducted subgroup analysis showing consistent performance across gender groups ($|\Delta MAE| < 0.5$)
- **Transparency Measures**:

✓ Provided model documentation to stakeholders
✓ Clear explanation of prediction methodology
✓ Opt-out mechanism for students

- *Bias Mitigation:*

✓ Excluded protected attributes (race, disability status)
✓ Regular fairness audits of predictions

- *Responsible Use Policy:*

✓ Predictions used solely for academic support
✓ Prohibited use for punitive measures
✓ Human-in-the-loop for all interventions [27], [28]

VI. CONCLUSION

The Gradient Boosting model demonstrated strong predic- tive capability ($R^2 = 0.977$) for student performance, with composite academic scores and attendance patterns emerging as key determinants. Cluster analysis revealed three distinct behavioral patterns, suggesting the need for differentiated teaching interventions. While the model shows promise for academic early warning systems, its implementation requires careful consideration of the ethical framework presented. Fu- ture work should expand the diversity of institutional data and incorporate temporal dynamics [26], [27].

APPENDIX

Table 7 Gradient Boosting Regressor Configuration

Parameter	Value
Base Estimator	Decision Tree
Number of Trees (n estimators)	300
Learning Rate	0.05
Max Tree Depth	4
Min Samples per Leaf	3
Loss Function	Squared Error
Random State	42

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➢ *Feature Engineering*

- *Composite Score:*

$$0.6 \times CA + 0.4 \times Exam\_Paper \quad (3)$$

- *Total Attendance:*

$$\frac{Attendance\_Practical + Attendance\_Theory}{2} \quad (4)$$

- **Behavioral Scaling**: Likert-scale responses (1–5) standardized to *Z*-scores

$$Z = \frac{X - \mu}{\sigma} \quad (5)$$

- **IRB Approval**: Exempt Status (Category II) granted under Protocol #EDU-2023-014

- **Data Anonymization**:

✓ Direct identifiers removed prior to analysis
✓ Behavioral data aggregated by student cohort

- **Consent Process**: Opt-out design with 72-hour reconsideration period

Table 8 Cross-Validated Metrics (5-Fold)

Metric	Value
Mean R^2	0.974 ± 0.008
Mean MAE	1.62 ± 0.15
Mean RMSE	2.07 ± 0.18

Table 9 Behavioral Cluster Distribution

Characteristic	Cluster 0	Cluster 1	Cluster 2
Average Marks	49.33	40.05	47.82
Question Frequency (1–5)	4.00	3.25	2.73

➢ *Cluster Stability*

- *Code Repository*: https://github.com/amandaudani/Score-predicting-GBoost-Approach. It

- *Key Dependencies:*

✓ Python 3.9.12
✓ scikit-learn 1.0.2
✓ pandas 1.4.2

- **Training Time**: 8.2 seconds on AWS t3. xlarge (4 vCPUs, 16GB RAM)

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