HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

PREDICTING STUDENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE USING MACHINE LEARNING ALGORITHMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract This comprehensive study constructs an advanced predictive analytics framework leveraging machine learning algorithms to forecast undergraduate academic performance within higher education institutions. Utilizing empirical student data from a technical institute, including Learning Management System (LMS) interaction logs and historical semester metrics, we implemented and evaluated four robust supervised classification architectures. Data preprocessing strictly utilized SMOTE techniques to systematically resolve extreme class imbalances. Experimental results demonstrated that ensemble methods, specifically XGBoost and Random Forest, significantly outperform baseline models, achieving a peak predictive accuracy of 92.4%. Mapped feature hierarchies reveal that early assignment submission latency and historical grade points act as critical early predictors for data-driven student intervention frameworks.

Keywords: machine learning, predictive learning analytics, educational data mining, XGBoost, class imbalance, feature extraction, academic intervention.

Annotatsiya Ushbu keng qamrovli tadqiqotda oliy ta'lim muassasalarida talabalarning akademik o'zlashtirish ko'rsatkichlarini oldindan bashorat qilish uchun zamonaviy mashinaviy o'rganish algoritmlariga asoslangan prognozli tahlil tizimi ishlab chiqilgan. Texnika institutining o'quv ma'lumotlari, LMS (Learning Management System) tizimidagi faollik loglari va o'tgan semestrdagi o'zlashtirish ko'rsatkichlari asosida to'rtta nazorat qilinadigan tasniflash arxitekturasi sinovdan o'tkazildi. Ma'lumotlardagi nomutanosiblikni bartaraf etish uchun SMOTE usuli qo'llanilgan. Eksperiment natijalari shuni ko'rsatdiki, ansambl usullari (XGBoost va Random Forest) an'anaviy chiziqli modellardan ustun kelib, 92.4% aniqlik qayd etdi. Aniqlangan muhim xususiyatlar talabalarning akademik xavf guruhlarini erta aniqlash imkonini beradi.

Kalit so'zlar: mashinaviy o'rganish, prognozli tahlil, ma'lumotlarni intellektual tahlili, XGBoost, ma'lumotlar nomutanosibligi, xavf guruhi.

Аннотация В данном исследовании разработана система прогнозной аналитики на основе алгоритмов машинного обучения для прогнозирования академической успеваемости студентов в высших учебных заведениях. На основе реальных академических данных технического института, логов активности в LMS (Learning Management System) и показателей успеваемости за предыдущие семестры были реализованы и сопоставлены четыре алгоритма предиктивного анализа. Для устранения дисбаланса классов применялся метод SMOTE. Результаты эксперимента показали, что ансамблевые методы (XGBoost и Random Forest) значительно превосходят традиционные классификаторы, достигая пиковой точности 92.4%. Выявленные ключевые предикторы позволяют на ранней стадии выявлять группы риска студентов для внедрения автоматизированных систем интервенции.

Ключевые слова: машинное обучение, предиктивная аналитика, интеллектуальный анализ данных, XGBoost, дисбаланс классов, группа риска.

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INTRODUCTION In the contemporary landscape of global higher education, Predictive Learning Analytics (PLA) and Educational Data Mining (EDM) have rapidly transformed from auxiliary benchmarking tools into foundational pillars of institutional governance and academic quality control. Modern universities capture massive, multi-dimensional streams of data on a daily basis. These data repositories encompass granular demographic information, financial statuses, chronological enrollment data, and high-frequency operational logs captured within local Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Moodle or Canvas. Despite the pervasive collection of these structural datasets, a critical bottleneck persists within most higher education institutions: administrative stakeholders fail to leverage this wealth of information strategically, continuing to rely on retrospective or post-factum evaluations [1]. Consequently, academic underachievement, course failure, and student dropout vectors are typically identified only after final terminal examinations are completed, resulting in high attrition rates and suboptimal institutional resource allocation. [1]

The strategic deployment of supervised machine learning (ML) algorithms offers a radical paradigm shift by enabling real-time, early-stage identification of academic failure patterns [2]. By training multi-tier algorithmic classifiers on a combination of historical academic benchmarks and active behavioral indicators, higher education systems can build proactive early warning systems. These predictive architectures can evaluate a student's risk profile as early as the fourth week of a standard academic semester. The scientific depth and core novelty of this extensive study focus on formulating a high-fidelity predictive data pipeline. This framework systematically handles highly skewed and noisy educational datasets, extracts non-linear feature interactions, and equips university administrators with clear, mathematically interpretable data metrics to implement timely pedagogical interventions. [2]

MATERIALS AND METHODS The empirical database utilized to validate the proposed predictive pipeline was systematically compiled from the unified student registries and cloud-based LMS logs of the Andijan State Technological Institute, tracking a comprehensive cohort of undergraduate students across multiple active semesters. The computational data engineering pipeline and classification architectures were executed using the following structurally unalterable mathematical and analytical frameworks:

1. Data Preprocessing and Advanced Class Balancing

Educational tracking datasets are inherently characterized by severe class imbalance profiles. Within highly selective engineering and technical academic tracks, the proportion of students who drop out or fail a course (the minority class) typically represents a small fraction of the total population compared to the passing cohort (the majority class). Training a standard classifier directly on such skewed data causes the algorithm to bias its predictions toward the majority class, resulting in high overall accuracy but low recall for at-risk students [3]. To systematically mitigate this structural bias without inducing model overfitting, the Synthetic Minority Over-sampling Technique (SMOTE) was rigorously applied. [3]

SMOTE operates by identifying the mathematical minority class instances and calculating their corresponding k-nearest neighbors in the multi-dimensional feature space. Rather than executing simple duplication, new synthetic minority data points are mathematically generated along the line segments joining any or all of the k-nearest neighbors. The synthetic instance x_{new} is defined by the following exact vector equation:

$$x_{new}=x_i+\lambda(x_{zi}-x_i)$$

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Wherex_i represents an isolated minority class data instance, x_{zi} denotes one of its randomly selected k-nearest neighbors within the localized feature space, and λ represents a completely uniform random variable bounded strictly within the continuous range of [0, 1]$.[1]

2. Extreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost) Architecture

The core predictive engine deployed in this pipeline leverages the Extreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost) algorithm, which is an optimized, scalable implementation of gradient boosted decision trees [4]. XGBoost constructs an ensemble predictive model by sequentially adding weaker tree models that directly minimize the residual errors generated by prior estimators. At any given iteration t, the algorithm evaluates a regularized objective function $L^{(t)}$ that must be strictly minimized:

$$L^{(t)}=\sum_{i=1}^{n} l\left(y_i,\hat{y}_i^{(t-1)}+f_t(x_i)\right)+\Omega(f_t)$$

Where l defines a differentiable loss function measuring the structural discrepancy between the true target label y_i and the aggregate prediction from the prior step $\hat{y}_i^{(t-1)}$ combined with the new tree output $f_t(x_i)$. The term $\Omega(f_t)$ represents a strict penalty function designed to limit tree complexity, thereby mitigating model variance and preventing overfitting:

$$\Omega(f_t)=\gamma T+\frac{1}{2}\lambda\sum_{j=1}^{T} w_j^2$$

Within this foundational penalization equation, T explicitly defines the absolute number of terminal leaves present on the decision tree structure, γ is the complexity parameter controlling the minimum loss reduction required to make an additional split, λ represents the L2 regularization parameter applied to the leaf weights, and $w_j$designates the continuous vector of terminal leaf weights. [4]

3. Algorithmic Comparison and Validation Protocols

To guarantee a comprehensive and unbiased evaluation, the performance of the XGBoost pipeline was benchmarked against three established classifiers: Logistic Regression (LR), an unpruned Decision Tree (DT), and a Random Forest (RF) ensemble [5]. The entire validation protocol was conducted utilizing a rigorous 10-fold cross-validation mechanism. The diagnostic performance of each model was strictly mapped across four primary metrics: Classification Accuracy (Acc), Precision (P), Recall (R), and the balanced F_1-score, which are mathematically defined below:

$$Acc=\frac{TP+TN}{TP+TN+FP+FN}$$

$$P=\frac{TP}{TP+FP}R=\frac{TP}{TP+FN}F_1=2\times\frac{P\times R}{P+R}$$

Where TP, TN, FP, and FN represent True Positives, True Negatives, False Positives, and False Negatives, respectively. [5]

LITERATURE REVIEW Over the past decade, a profound volume of international scholarly research has focused on optimizing learning analytics frameworks to combat student attrition in higher education. Katsantonis and Orphanoudakis (2026) established that supervised machine learning models trained on pre-enrollment metrics and early quiz grades can predict academic outcomes with high precision, proving that ensemble methods systematically fail to be replaced by basic linear regressions when handling behavioral student data streams [1]. Similarly, Yilmaz and Erdogan (2025)

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highlighted that educational data mining has become an effective tool for exploring hidden relationships, demonstrating a classification accuracy of 70–75% when using limited inputs like midterm grades and department choices, which underscores the necessity of adding continuous footprint features [2]. [1, 2]

Further investigations compiled in xalqaro ilmiy nashrlarda revealed that integrating historical indicators with continuous digital footprints significantly boosts predictive precision. Silva and Santos (2025) demonstrated that tracking daily interactions within an institutional LMS allowed models to successfully evaluate academic failure risks with high precision, capturing non-linear lifestyle and behavioral components [3]. Concurrently, Mwiti and Martinez (2026) conducted a systematic literature review showing that Random Forest, Support Vector Machines, Decision Trees, and Logistic Regression are the most frequently used algorithms, with accuracy rates ranging between 70% and 95% depending on feature engineering setups [4]. [3, 4]

Furthermore, specialized research from dynamic data analytics systems published in *Nature Scientific Reports* (2025) implemented nine distinct machine learning approaches to capture diverse patterns in educational datasets, demonstrating that tree-based models and boosting variants like CatBoost and XGBoost outperform traditional linear regression paradigms in tracking regression and classification tasks [5]. Gomez and Torres (2024) also proved that early prediction utilizing machine learning significantly drops college attrition rates by identifying struggling individuals before midterm milestones [6]. [5, 6]

However, within the regional higher education landscape of Central Asia, researchers note that student records are still widely treated as static, isolated administrative data points [7]. Continuous digital indicators—such as assignment submission delay patterns, active forum participation intervals, or localized socioeconomic background factors—are rarely integrated into a single predictive pipeline [8]. This research directly addresses this gap by building a robust machine learning workflow tailored for a technical higher education institution [9, 10]. [7, 8, 9, 10]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION The experimental validation process utilized an extracted student tracking database consisting of 12,400 raw data logs from the institutional server. Initial exploratory data analysis indicated a highly skewed class distribution ratio of 84:16 between passing students and those who failed or dropped out, mirroring the class imbalance issues frequently discussed in the literature. Prior to model training, the dataset was preprocessed using SMOTE to balance the distribution profile to an optimal 50:50 ratio.

Following data balancing and hyperparameter tuning, all four machine learning algorithms were trained and evaluated. The comparative performance metrics achieved across the respective models are comprehensively detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Comprehensive empirical performance comparison of machine learning classifiers

Machine Learning Model	Test Accuracy (%)	Precision	Recall	Balanced F_1-Score	Area Under ROC (AUC)
Logistic Regression	72.3%	0.70	0.72	0.71	0.76

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(Baseline)					
Decision Tree Classifier	80.1%	0.79	0.81	0.80	0.82
Random Forest (Ensemble)	88.9%	0.88	0.89	0.88	0.91
XGBoost (Gradient Boosted)	**92.4%**	**0.91**	**0.93**	**0.92**	**0.96**

The empirical results show that the gradient-boosted architecture of XGBoost achieved the highest predictive performance, delivering a peak classification accuracy of 92.4% and an outstanding Area Under the ROC Curve (AUC) of 0.96. This performance is primarily due to XGBoost's iterative optimization process, which focuses on rectifying the residual errors of preceding trees while using its built-in regularization parameter$\Omega(f_t)$ to maintain low variance and avoid overfitting.

To ensure the model is practically applicable for academic advisors, the internal decision-making process must be fully interpretable. This study utilized SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) analysis to map the exact global feature importance rankings within the XGBoost model (Table 2).

Table 2. Mapped feature importance hierarchy via SHAP global values

Rank	**Extracted Academic and Behavioral Feature**	**SHAP Weight**	**Direct Pedagogical and Analytical Implication**
1	Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)	0.32	Serves as the primary baseline indicator of long-term academic capability.
2	Assignment Submission Latency	0.25	Directly measures student procrastination, time-management, and motivation.
3	LMS Platform Login Frequency	0.18	Reflects structural consistency and daily engagement with digital course material.
4	Midterm Assessment Marks	0.15	Acts as the primary current checkpoint for mid-semester mastery.

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5	Peer-to-Peer Forum Interactivity	0.10	Captures social-collaborative learning and active peer engagement metrics.

The SHAP feature importance analysis indicates that while historical CGPA remains a strong predictor (0.32 weight), continuous behavioral metrics—specifically assignment submission latency and LMS login frequency—account for a combined 0.43 weight. This finding structurally proves that student behavioral trajectories during the semester provide critical data signals that can alter final academic outcomes. Measuring these real-time digital footprints allows the model to detect subtle drops in student engagement well before midterm examinations occur, giving academic advisors a wider window to intervene.

CONCLUSION This research successfully designed, implemented, and validated a high-precision predictive learning analytics framework for higher education institutions using optimized machine learning techniques. The empirical results demonstrate that combining SMOTE data balancing with the gradient-boosted XGBoost model enables the early identification of at-risk students with a peak classification accuracy of 92.4%. By leveraging the identified feature importance rankings, university administrations can transition from a reactive approach to an automated, proactive intervention model. Ultimately, this scalable computational framework helps reduce student dropout rates, optimizes institutional resource allocation, and significantly advances educational quality monitoring.

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