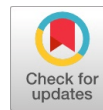


Using Supervised and Unsupervised Machine Learning Models to Analyze Students Academic Performance



Osondu Everestus Oguike, Emmanuel Chukwudi Ukekwe, Gabriel Abiodun Elufidodo

Abstract: Examination result repositories generated by most universities can serve as machine learning datasets for training various models to gain insights from the data. These datasets can train multiple linear regression models to determine a student's cumulative grade point average (CGPA), or the score that a student will get in specific courses. Additionally, classification-based supervised machine learning models can use these datasets to provide insights into the class result that a student will obtain. These insights can be invaluable for academic advising and early intervention. Moreover, these datasets can train clustering-based unsupervised machine learning models, such as the K-means clustering model, to understand how student results are grouped into various clusters. This information can be crucial for planning and evaluating the quality of the university. This paper uses the dataset of undergraduate students' examination results from the Department of Computer Science at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to train three supervised machine learning models and one unsupervised machine learning model, utilizing Jupyter Notebook as the Python IDE. The training results showed acceptable accuracies of 91.5% for the Naïve Bayes model and 95.1% for the Decision Tree model. The linear regression model demonstrated a negligible root mean square error of 8.23×10^{-18} , while the K-means clustering model exhibited an acceptable Silhouette metric of 0.12.

Keywords: Naïve Bayes model, decision tree model, K-means clustering model, linear regression, students' academic performance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The grade point grading system has generated extensive records of students' results in university examination units. Traditionally, these results are only used to prepare transcripts for students when needed. Machine learning, a branch of artificial intelligence, offers new methods for uncovering hidden insights in accumulated data. Consequently, repositories of students' examination results data can be transformed into machine learning datasets, allowing various machine learning models to reveal these insights, [18].

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In addition to determining the class of degree and CGPA, a student achieves, these datasets can be used to predict the grades or scores a student might receive in specific courses to attain a particular class of degree. This information can assist academic advisers in setting realistic goals for students and providing early intervention. Additionally, the data can be used to cluster students' performance into different groups, which can aid in planning and evaluating the quality of the university or department.

A. Statement of the Problem

Using machine learning models to gain insights from students' examination performance results can solve many problems. Uninformed academic advising, due to lack of insight from this study will hurt the student. Such negative impacts include poor academic performance, late intervention in guiding the students, etc. Therefore, this paper addresses the following problems:

- Poor student academic performance due to uninformed academic advising.
- Difficulty in knowing when and how to intervene to improve a student's academic performance.
- Difficulty in making effective plans due to a lack of insights from trends in students' performance.
- Difficulty in rating the quality of a department or university based on the overall performance of students over many years.

B. Aim and Objectives

This study aims to analyze students' examination results in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, using a dataset of their results. This analysis will provide insights for proper academic advising and planning. The specific objectives of this study are:

- To prepare a machine learning dataset from the available repositories of student results in the Department of Computer Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- To train the following machine learning models using the dataset of student results: Naïve Bayes, Decision Tree, Multiple Linear Regression, and K-means clustering.
- To analyze, predict, and visualize the student results dataset.
- To evaluate the trained models and tune their parameters to improve performance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different studies have utilized various datasets with different attributes to train machine learning algorithms for predicting student performance. This section summarizes and synthesizes these studies.



A. Analysis Based on Supervised Machine Learning Models

The available literature reveal that classification-based supervised machine learning models have been widely used to predict students' academic performance in tertiary institutions, using secondary school CGPA data for early intervention [1], [2], [9], [10] [12], [14], [15]. For instance, [1] utilized various classification-based supervised machine learning algorithms, such as Naïve Bayes, KNN, Support Vector Machine, XGBoost, and Multi-Layer Perceptrons, to predict student performance, while [2] employed only logistic regression to predict whether a student would be successful or not. Similarly, [9] used Random Forest, Naïve Bayes, Multi-Layer Perceptron (MLP), and Decision Tree (J48) to predict student performance, whereas [9] applied Decision Trees (DT), K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN), Naive Bayes (NB), Linear Discriminant Analysis (LDA), and LogitBoost (LB). While [1] and [2] used secondary school data before entry into tertiary institutions, [9] used datasets of university graduates collected online, and [10] utilized two real educational datasets, enhancing the quality of predictions through feature selection methods like the Enhanced Whale Optimization Algorithm, Sine Cosine Algorithm, and Logistic Chaotic Map. To improve the accuracy of classification-based supervised machine learning algorithms such as Decision Tree (DT), Support Vector Machine (SVM), Logistic Regression (LR), Naïve Bayes (NB), and K-nearest neighbor (KNN), ensemble classifiers like Extreme Gradient Boosting (XGB), Random Forest (RF), and Heterogeneous Ensemble Method (HEM) were used in [5] to predict engineering students' performance. Their dataset included demographic, cognitive, and non-cognitive attributes. Additionally, a hybrid of two ensemble classifiers—random forest and simulated annealing—was used in [7] to predict student performance. These classifiers were combined as the Improved Random Forest Classifier (IRFC). The dataset included attributes such as individual basic information (birthplace, gender, place of entrance examination, and direct contact), individual education information (student grade level, teaching semester, teaching classroom, student major, faculty members, and course scores), and individual behavior information. Regarding accuracy, a review study [6] [23] asserted that the limited research in various machine learning approaches contributes to inaccuracies in predicting student performance despite the large volume of educational data. They identified six commonly used models: support vector machine (SVM), linear regression (LinR), decision tree (DT), artificial neural networks (ANNs), K-nearest neighbor (KNN), and Naive Bayes (NB). The common attributes used in predictions included academic, demographic, internal assessment, and family/personal attributes. Given that performance depends on dynamic knowledge, [8] used recurrent neural networks (RNN) suitable for dynamic time series. They utilized six public datasets and generated a seventh dataset, all related to mathematical problem examinations. While most reviewed literature focused on predicting examination performance, [11] determined the importance of different factors affecting student performance using classifiers such as random forest (RF), support vector machines (SVM), logistic regression (LR), and artificial neural network (ANN). The factors

considered in the dataset included behavioral information, individual information, and student scores collected from teachers through one-to-one surveys and online data, the results obtained showed that ANN had the best performance on the training data. Among the reviewed studies, only a few, such as [13] and [16], used deep learning to predict academic performance/results. [13]. used course data, demographic data, socio-economic information, and student course grades, while [16] employed CGPA datasets to train deep learning models, reporting high accuracy after evaluation.

B. Analysis Based on Unsupervised Machine Learning

A review article, [17] reported that both machine learning and clustering are useful in predicting students' academic performance. The study highlighted that clustering is particularly effective for categorizing students according to their performance. The most common unsupervised machine learning models used to analyze student results are clustering models, as demonstrated in [3] and [4]. In [3] [19][20][21][22], the K-means clustering model was used to group students' academic performance into various clusters. In [4], IFCM was utilized to cluster students' performance data during the COVID-19 lockdown. Both studies visualized the clusters obtained, which helped understand the general performance of students over many years, aiding in planning and decision-making.

C. Identified Gaps in Literature

Although numerous studies have explored the use of different machine learning models to predict students' performance, most focused on predicting overall performance for early intervention, typically using CGPA as the target/class label. To our knowledge, none has attempted to predict students' specific performance in particular courses to achieve a certain CGPA, i.e., using a course score as the target/class label. Furthermore, while various datasets have been used in the literature to predict academic performance, none have utilized the private examination result dataset from the Department of Computer Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This study aims to address these gaps.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Description of Dataset

The dataset used to train various machine learning models consists of students' examination results and CGPA from the Department of Computer Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. It covers all levels from the 2013/2014 to 2019/2020 academic sessions and includes only students with a minimum of forty-one examination scores. The dataset contains forty-four attributes (columns) and 1786 instances (rows). Of the forty-four attributes, forty-one attributes represent the various scores, one attribute represents the student ID, another attribute represents the CGPA, and the last attribute represents the class of the result. Scores for a student in a particular course range between 0 and 100, while CGPA values range between 0 and 5. The dataset is structured with the following attributes:

[ID, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, SC7, SC8, SC9, ..., SC41, CGPA, Degree_Class]

Using multiple linear regression to predict the score that a student will obtain in a particular course, the score for that course will be the class/target attribute, while to predict the CGPA, the CGPA attribute will be the class/target attribute. Furthermore, using any of the classification models to predict the class of degree a student will obtain, the Degree_Class will be the class/target attribute, which can take the values: 'First Class', 'Second Class Upper', 'Second Class Lower', 'Third Class', or 'Pass'

B. Multiple Linear Regression Model

Multiple linear regression is a supervised machine learning algorithm that predicts a continuous variable as the class/target attribute, like CGPA or course score. It assumes a linear relationship between the target attribute and each of the non-target attributes. This assumption can be verified by estimating the correlation coefficient between the target attribute and each non-target attribute. After training the multiple linear regression model that predicts the score that a student will obtain in a particular course, the learner's output, which is the multiple linear equation used for prediction, takes the form shown in Equation (1).

$SC41 = A0 + A1 * SC1 + A2 * SC2 + \dots + A_{c_{gpa}} * CGPA$ (1)
A0, A1, A2, ..., A_{c_{gpa}} are the regression coefficients, which will be determined after the training of the linear regression model, using the dataset. To predict the CGPA, the regression equation obtained after training is shown in Equation (2).

$CGPA = A0 + A1 * SC1 + A2 * SC2 + \dots + A41 * SC41$ (2)
The metrics for evaluating multiple linear regression models include Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE), Mean Squared Error (MSE), and Mean Absolute Error (MAE).

C. Naïve Bayes Model

The Naïve Bayes model is a classification-based machine learning model used to predict a class or category as the target attribute. After training the Naïve Bayes model with an appropriate dataset, the learner's output is a table of conditional probabilities based on Bayes' theorem, as given in Equation (3).

$$P(H | E) = \frac{P(E | H) P(H)}{P(E)} \quad (3)$$

P(H|E) is called the posterior probability, while P(H) is called

the prior probability and $\frac{P(E | H)}{P(E)}$ is called the likelihood ratio. Bayes' theorem can be rephrased as "Posterior probability equals the likelihood ratio multiplied by the prior probability."

D. Decision Tree Model

The Decision Tree model is another classification-based machine learning model that predicts class or category as the target attribute. After training with a specific dataset, the learner's output is a tree diagram, which can be traversed from various nodes to the leaf of the tree. The nodes represent the non-target attributes of the dataset, while the edges or branches represent the various values the attribute can assume. The model uses the concept of Information Gain (IG) to determine the attribute for each node. The attribute

with the highest information gain forms the node, as computed using Equations (4) and (5).

$IG = Entropy(attribute) - Weighted(Entropy(Children))$ (4)
The children are the various values of an attribute.

$$Entropy(attribute) = \sum_{i=1}^k - p_i \log_2 p_i \quad (5)$$

E. K-Means Clustering Model

K-Means clustering is a widely used clustering-based unsupervised machine learning model that groups a dataset into various clusters of similar data. The model splits a dataset into K arbitrary clusters. Each cluster has a central value, called the centroid, which changes in each iteration of the algorithm. The initial choice of K clusters and the assignment of data into these clusters can be done arbitrarily. Data items are then reassigned based on the cluster that has the minimum Euclidean distance from the data point to the centroids. This process continues until the current assignment is the same as the previous assignment. The Silhouette metric can be used to evaluate the K-Means clustering model.

F. Training the Machine Learning Models

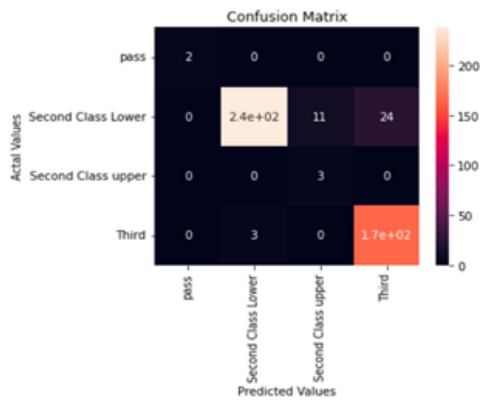
Training the models started with data cleaning using the Python library pandas. The cleaning phase began with checking for missing values. Columns with more than 80% missing values were discarded. For the remaining columns, missing values were replaced with the mean. After cleaning, the dataset distribution was viewed using histograms to check for skewness. For classification-based supervised machine learning algorithms, the categorical data in the class column, Degree_Class, which can have any of the following values, (First Class, Second Class Upper, Second Class Lower, Third Class, and Pass) were encoded into numerical values using an ordinal encoder. The dataset was then divided into feature variables (X) and target variable (Y) and split into training and testing datasets in a 75:25 ratio. Both training and testing features were scaled using the standard scaler module to reduce patterns and disparities in the data. The scaled dataset was used to train the various machine learning models, and the testing dataset was used to evaluate the performance of the models. For classification models, the confusion matrix and accuracy score were used for evaluation. For regression analysis, the root mean square error was used. For the K-Means clustering algorithm, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to form relevant attributes. Using 80% of the cumulative explained variance, 24 components were created from the 43 attributes of the dataset, as shown in Figure 1.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis, the Naive Bayes classification model produced an accuracy of 91.5%, implying that for every 100 instances of the data, the model can predict at least 91 instances correctly. However, this accuracy alone is not sufficient to fully justify the performance of the model.

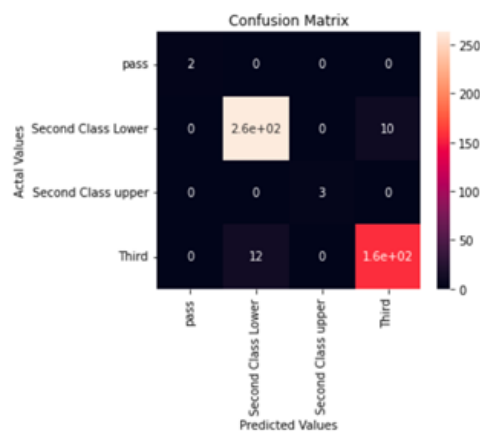
Therefore, another evaluation metric called the Confusion Matrix was used, and the results are shown in Table I below.

Table I. Confusion Matrix for the Naïve Bayes Model



The confusion matrix illustrates the number of correctly and incorrectly predicted values. It indicates that 238 instances of the "Second Class Lower" grade were correctly predicted, while 35 were incorrectly predicted. Additionally, 166 instances of the "Third Class" grade were correctly predicted, with only 3 being incorrectly predicted. All other grades were correctly predicted. In comparison, the decision tree classifier achieved an accuracy score of 95.1%. The confusion matrix for this classifier is shown in Table II. This matrix reveals a slight difference from that in Table I: 10 instances of "Second Class Lower" were incorrectly predicted, and 12 instances of "Third Class" were also wrongly predicted. All other classes were correctly predicted.

Table II. Confusion Matrix for the Decision Tree Model



The performance of the regression analysis was evaluated using the Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE), which measures the closeness of predicted values to actual values. The RMSE value for the model was 8.23×10^{-18} , indicating that the predicted values are nearly identical to the actual values. For the K-Means clustering model, using the 24 components obtained from the Principal Component Analysis, as shown in the Cumulative Explained Variance Against Number of Components of Figure 1. The K-Means elbow method determined that 5 clusters were the optimal number of clusters, as shown in Figure 2. This naturally divides the dataset into five classes of results: First Class, Second Class Upper, Second Class Lower, Third Class, and Pass. The Silhouette metric for the K-Means clustering was 0.12. The number of data items in the five clusters is 594, 202, 464, 310, and 216, respectively, as visualized in Figure 3.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper analyzes the academic performance of students from the Department of Computer Science at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, using three supervised machine learning models—Multiple Linear Regression, Naïve Bayes, and Decision Tree—along with one unsupervised machine learning model, K-Means Clustering. These models provided various insights into the students' academic performance, including predictions of course scores, CGPA, and degree classification, as well as the clustering of student performance into different groups. These insights can be useful for early intervention aimed at improving student performance and for assessing the department and university.

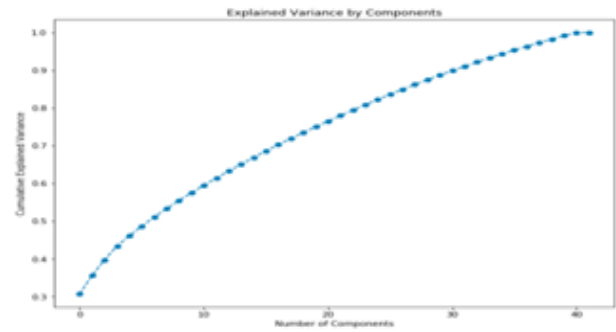


Figure 1. Cumulative Explained Variance Against Number of Components

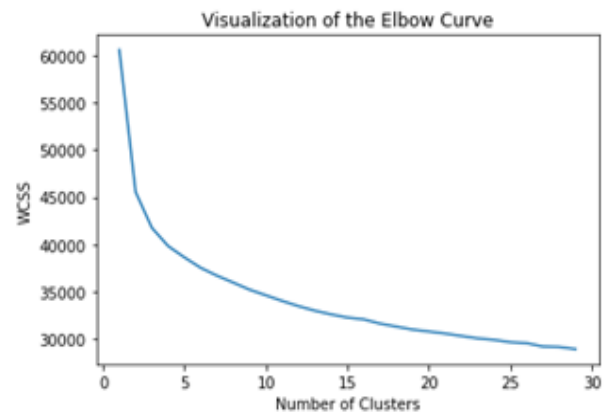


Figure 2. The Elbow Curve that Determines Optimal Number of Clusters

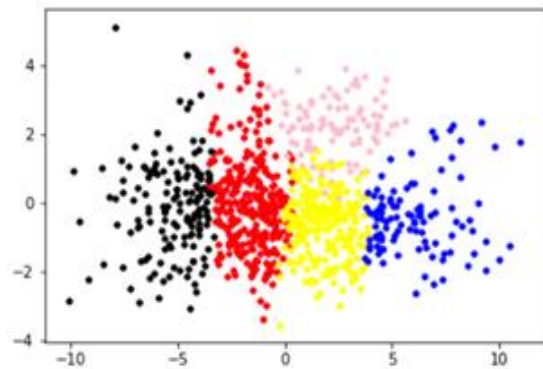


Figure 3. Visualization of the Clusters



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