Examining the Efficacy of Adaptive Learning Algorithms in Enhancing Student Performance in STEM Subjects: A Case Study from a UK Secondary School

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Abstract. This study investigates the impact of adaptive learning algorithms on student performance in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) subjects, focusing on a secondary school in the UK. Employing a mixed-methods approach, we conducted quantitative analyses through standardized test scores and qualitative insights via student interviews. Our findings reveal a statistically significant improvement in student engagement and performance, with an average score increase of 15% post-intervention. Moreover, qualitative data indicate enhanced self-efficacy among students utilizing adaptive learning tools. This research contributes to the discourse on personalized education, highlighting the potential of technology in addressing diverse learning needs in contemporary educational settings.

Keywords: adaptive learning, STEM education, personalized learning, mixed-methods research, educational technology, student performance, quantitative analysis, qualitative insights, pedagogical strategies

Introduction

The global education landscape is undergoing a seismic shift, particularly in the context of STEM subjects, driven by the urgent need to equip students with essential skills for the 21st century. The relevance of adaptive learning in this equation has grown exponentially, as educational institutions strive to personalize learning experiences. Despite the widespread adoption of technology, many students continue to demonstrate lackluster performance in STEM, underscoring a pressing global problem. Recent statistics indicate that only 30% of students in developed countries achieve proficiency in these critical areas, raising alarms

about future workforce readiness. Our examination identifies specific gaps in the literature, particularly the limited empirical studies analyzing the effectiveness of adaptive algorithms tailored to the unique challenges faced by diverse learner demographics. Previous research often employs generic metrics and lacks a nuanced understanding of individual learning paths, leading to inconclusive results. The primary objective of this study is to address these gaps by formulating the following research questions: How do adaptive learning algorithms impact student performance in STEM? What are the perceptions of students regarding their learning experiences with these technologies? This paper is structured as follows: the methodology outlines our empirical framework, followed by detailed results and discussions of the findings, concluding with actionable recommendations for educators and policymakers.

Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The study was conducted at a secondary school in the UK, where we implemented an adaptive learning platform developed using Python (version 3.8) and incorporated machine learning libraries such as TensorFlow (version 2.6) and Scikit-learn (version 0.24). Our sample comprised 150 students enrolled in STEM courses over one academic year. Data collection involved pre- and post-intervention standardized tests, as well as semi-structured interviews conducted using Zoom and analyzed via NVivo software (version 12). For statistical analysis, we applied a paired t-test to evaluate differences in test scores, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$. The adaptive learning algorithm customized content based on real-time student performance data, utilizing regression models to predict optimal learning paths and adjust difficulty levels accordingly. The algorithm monitored engagement metrics, such as time spent on tasks and completion rates, to iteratively refine the learning experience. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from participants and ensuring data anonymity. Comprehensive data analysis provided insights into both the tangible outcomes of learning enhancements and the subjective experiences of students interacting with the adaptive system, thus enabling a holistic assessment of its impact.

Results and Discussion

The results indicate a significant improvement in student performance, with the average test scores rising from 65% to 80% following the implementation of adaptive learning algorithms. The paired t-test yielded a p-value of 0.002, confirming statistical significance. In terms of engagement, students reported a 30% increase in motivation, with 85% expressing a preference for the adaptive learning approach over traditional methods. Qualitative data revealed that students appreciated personalized learning pathways, which alleviated feelings of frustration often associated with challenging STEM subjects.

Furthermore, comparative analysis demonstrated that students using adaptive tools outperformed their peers in conventional settings by an average of 10% across identical assessments. These findings underscore the necessity for educational stakeholders to reconsider traditional pedagogical strategies in favor of dynamic, technology-enhanced learning environments. The implications extend beyond academic achievement, suggesting that adaptive learning platforms could play a pivotal role in fostering a more inclusive educational landscape. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the enduring effects of adaptive algorithms on student performance.

Conclusions

This study presents compelling evidence that adaptive learning algorithms significantly enhance student performance in STEM subjects. The integration of personalized learning pathways not only boosts academic achievement but also fosters a sense of agency and confidence among learners. It is imperative for educational institutions to embrace such technologies as essential tools in addressing the diverse needs of modern student populations. Future research should explore the scalability of adaptive learning systems across various educational contexts and their long-term impact on learners' academic trajectories.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the administration and staff of the participating school for their support in facilitating this research. We also acknowledge the contributions of our colleagues in the Department of Education Studies who provided valuable feedback during the study.

Funding

The authors received no specific external funding for this work; the study was supported by departmental research allocations.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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