Overcoming Challenges in Applying AI Guidance to Complex and Legacy Codebases

Mikita Piastou, *Full-Stack Developer, Emplifi, Calgary, AB Canada*

Abstract

This paper represents an investigation into the challenges posed by applying AI guidance to complex and legacy codebases. Various AI models were assessed and tuned with a view to improving their effectiveness for the analysis and guidance of legacy code. Our approach was to deeply analyze five diverse codebases for code complexity, capturing metrics including - but not limited to - functions, classes, method calls, and much more. Python was used for simulation and fine-tuning, with model fine-tuning via TensorFlow/Keras. We fine-tuned a pre-trained AI model so that it would have closer characteristics to the nature of the legacy code. The resulting fine-tuned model was then tested, and the results had an accuracy of 84% with a performance overhead of 45%. Our results depict the effect of AI tools on performance and also contrast the scenarios with and without AI guidance. Visualizations of performance overhead and accuracy metrics showed several of these trade-offs and can help stakeholders understand the value creation and the cost incurred by AI. The study highlights several lessons that could be used for the optimization of AI tools to work with complex codebases and provides guiding principles for the effective application of AI in software maintenance and improvement.

Keywords: AI guidance, legacy codebases, code complexity analysis, software maintenance, code metrics, AI integration

1. Introduction

AI integration into the software development process has enormous potential for transforming the manner in which we manage and develop a code base. This article will speak about challenges and strategies of AI integration application to legacy codebases by drawing on results from research findings and best practices[1]. Legacy codebases are older systems

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using outdated technologies or practices. Such systems can be decidedly more challenging because they lack modern documentation and standards that have been enhanced over time. AI tools for code review, bug detection, refactoring, and optimization can be a great help[2]. But, special features of complex and legacy codebases usually reduce their efficiency.

2. Challenges in Implementing AI in Complex and Legacy Codebases

The integration of AI into the management of codebases, especially in complex and legacy systems, presents significant challenges. Understanding these challenges is quite critical for the effective application of AI utilities towards improving code quality and development processes[3].

2.1. Code Semantics and Structure

Very often, AI models do not have complete insight into the semantics of big and complex systems' code and architecture. Their complexity and subtlety impede the effective interpretation of AI and potentially useful recommendations. Its inability to understand how different parts of a system interact and how the code fits together often prevents AI from actually producing actionable results[4].

2.2. Interdependencies

Complex systems are typified by a network of strongly interdependent components. AI models can barely go ahead to give recommendations if they have not understood the web of interactions between such components. Interdependence of components often implies any change or insight in one part can have trickle-down effects in another part of the system. Without understanding those dependencies, the AI guidance could be incomplete or misleading.

2.3. Inconsistent Documentation

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Most legacy codebases are never fully documented to reflect changes that are made. That is a great obstacle for AI tools, as they heavily rely on comments and documentation for effective interpretation and analysis. Without context, or explanatory comments about code, the AI would struggle understanding and working with the code, hence giving rather inefficient suggestions and guidance.

2.4. Historical Code Practices

Most AI models are trained on modern coding practices and may struggle with the complexity of older, legacy code written using outdated or different patterns. In cases like this, there will be a tendency for AI suggestions to be poorly generated since the AI is not equipped to handle certain peculiarities and methods that may be in place within such older code bases. Indeed, the contrast between what is topical nowadays regarding coding and what occurred during times of old does reduce the precision of performance and the validity of the suggestions that the AI makes.

2.5. Tooling and Integration

AI tool integration into existing development environments is essentially technologically cumbersome, especially with legacy systems. This often involves heavy workflow and tool modifications that may even break some of the established ways of using those tools or introduce some form of incompatibility. It often requires careful planning to mitigate any malfunctions in AI-tool integration with the older systems.

2.6. Performance Overhead

This may introduce performance overhead or incompatibility issues with existing systems or libraries. The extra processing required for AI operations might reduce the general efficiency and responsiveness of the system. Balancing this positive value of AI guidance against the possible performance cost is of prime consideration when one adopts the tools.

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2.7. False Positives/False Negatives

Few AI tools are perfect, and they may produce false positives or false negatives, especially where the interaction is complex or the legacy code patterns are not well-represented in the training data. Bad suggestions or the lack of recognition of critical issues undermine the effectiveness of AI guidance, highlighting a very important role of human oversight and validation[5].

Table 1. AI Challenges in Codebases

Challenge	**Description**
Code Semantics and Structure	Most complex code is structured in such a way that AI cannot understand the context completely. The complexity in code semantics and architecture in large systems creates challenges for AI to interpret correctly
Interdependencies	In a complex system, components are interdependent, and without comprehending an entire ecosystem and how the disparate parts interact, an AI model could not act appropriately
Inconsistent Documentation	This is because the legacy codebases mostly come with inadequate and outdated documentation - a vital ingredient needed by the AI models to apprehend the code. Thus, without such context, the AI tools can turn out to be inefficient
Historical Code Practices	Sometimes AI is trained on modern coding practices that the old code does not follow. When this happens, the AI suggestions are likely to be somewhat less than ideal
Tooling and	Integration with AI tools in existing development environments, especially for legacy systems, can be highly difficult technically and

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Integration	might disturb established workflows
Performance Overhead	Some of the AI tools may add performance overhead or might not be compatible with older systems and libraries concerning efficiency
False Positives/False Negatives	AI systems may come up with wrong suggestions or may miss important issues in interaction complexities or old code patterns that are not properly covered in training data

There are a number of key challenges to integrating AI into large, complex, and legacy codebases. AI models themselves can often struggle with convoluted semantics and structure in large systems. Performance may be degraded from outdated documentation and legacy coding practices. Component interaction and performance overhead from AI tools can be a further complication[7]. Some false positives or false negatives may come from the AI tooling, which calls for careful oversight and validation to assure efficacy.

3. Strategies for Implementing AI in Codebases

AI in codebases is best implemented using a strategic approach that evades inherent challenges while reaping maximum benefits. The section reviews key strategies to systematically integrate AI tools into practice, focusing on concrete ways to successfully advance software maintenance, enhance code quality, and make development easier. While there will be many approaches for which best practices in codebase preparation for AI analysis, fine-tuning the AI models to match the particular code features, and methodologies of evaluation regarding performance and efficiency will have to be identified and discussed[8].

3.1. Data Collection and Preparation

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Data collection and preparation envelop a wide strategy of understanding and arranging the codebase. It starts with thorough analysis for the classification of the code's complexity and structure, which will help in the furtherance of areas where AI guidance can serve best. Improvement in the documentation and comments of the code is an important part of the process. Better documentation allows AI models context, which the model otherwise will need to read, make sense of, or interact with the code. It therefore warrants an analysis of documentation and focus of organizations on a solid base for AI implementation.

3.2. AI Model Training and Fine-Tuning

AI custom models are all about developing or adapting AI models in regard to the specific needs of the codebase. This might involve customizing language, framework, and coding style so that the codebases truly allow the various tools to be better equipped in dealing with all its unique aspects. Fine-tuning the model does make them more relevant to particular characteristics of the code, refining their performance and accuracy. The specific context within which the code base is put also entrains the AI models to make their suggestions more actionable and precise.

3.3. Domain-Specific Training

It achieves this through domain-specific training, utilizing transfer learning to take AI models trained on modern codebases and adapt them for use with legacy code. It does this by considering the adjustments that need to be made by the model because of the nature and obsolete habits of that code. Transfer learning bridges the gap from the vast amount of data that modern AI training is based on to the specifics of the legacy system. In this, the rationale stands because customization of models for understanding and working with legacy code can most likely improve the appropriateness and relevance of AI guidance in such environments.

3.4. Gradual Implementation

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This will include the deployment of AI tools in pilot projects, testing in less critical parts of the code base, or gradually incremental rollout for smooth transitioning and resolution of most issues[9]. These strategies minimize disruption; therefore, AI tools are implemented in a controlled and manageable manner.

3.5. Evaluation and Feedback

Evaluation and feedback are so key to understanding the performance and effectiveness of the various AI tools. These indeed have to be measured in terms of accuracy, speed of issue detection, and user satisfaction. Regular evaluation makes it easy to notice the areas that need an upgrade in any particular AI tool so that the AI tools can keep pace with the requirements of the development team. Embedding the feedback from developers into the refinement process enables continuous learning; the AI models and tools, with time, will evolve to become better aligned with real-world challenges[10].

Table 2. AI Integration Methods for Codebases

Method	**Description**
Codebase Analysis	Run the analysis with codebases to understand the intrinsic complexity and also to identify where AI can add much value
Documentation Improvement	Enhance the documentation and in-code comments to provide more context for AI tools to analyze correctly
Custom Models	Create custom or adapt AI models for the particular code base's language, framework, and coding style
Transfer Learning	Use transfer learning to adapt models trained on modern codebases to cope better with the nuances of legacy code

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Pilot Projects	Test the AI tools in less critical areas of the codebase to get a fair idea of their effectiveness before full deployment
Incremental Rollout	Introduce AI suggestions in a gradual manner into the development process so that integration and issues could be managed piece by piece
Performance Metrics	Accuracy, speed of detection, user satisfaction must be measured regarding AI tool effectiveness
Continuous Learning	Employ developer feedback in a manner that iteratively refines AI models and tools to be congruent with real-world challenges

Each of these strategies has an important mission in applying AI effectively within codebases, fitting these tools to the actual needs of the code, and ensuring their smooth integration with current workflows.

4. Testing AI Performance in Legacy Codebases

4.1. Methodology of the Testing

In our experiment, we were studying five legacy codebases in Python by measuring their complexity and by identifying points where AI guidance might be useful. We first ran a Python script that computed complexity for each of the codebases, such as number of functions, number of classes, and number of conditional statements[11].

Based on the complexity analysis, we prepared a dataset, fine-tuned, and evaluated it. To improve model accuracy, we used TensorFlow/Keras. Then, we assessed performance overhead with and without AI tools.

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Finally, the plots that follow present the obtained results -both on the accuracy of the AI model across varying epochs, and a performance overhead comparison with/without the involvement of AI models. These are visualizations created with Matplotlib.

4.2. Analyzing Complexity of the Codebase

This Python script for complexity code analysis gives an insightfully detailed overview into various features in a codebase by taking a look at a Python source file[12]. It counts several functions, classes, conditional statements, loops, and error-handling constructs to determine the general complexity of the code.

```
import ast
from collections import defaultdict

class CodeComplexityAnalyzer:
  def __init__(self, file_path):
    self.file_path = file_path
    self.complexity = defaultdict(int)
    self._analyze_code()

  def _analyze_code(self):
    """Analyzes the code complexity by parsing the AST of the file."""
    with open(self.file_path, 'r') as file:
      code = file.read()

    # Parse the code into an AST
    tree = ast.parse(code)

    # Walk through the AST and count various nodes
    for node in ast.walk(tree):
      if isinstance(node, ast.FunctionDef):
        self.complexity['functions'] += 1
```


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```
            # Count method calls and assignments inside functions
            for n in ast.walk(node):
                if isinstance(n, ast.Call):
                    self.complexity['method_calls'] += 1
                elif isinstance(n, ast.Assign):
                    self.complexity['assignments'] += 1
        elif isinstance(node, ast.ClassDef):
            self.complexity['classes'] += 1
        elif isinstance(node, ast.If):
            self.complexity['if_statements'] += 1
        elif isinstance(node, ast.For):
            self.complexity['for_loops'] += 1
        elif isinstance(node, ast.While):
            self.complexity['while_loops'] += 1
        elif isinstance(node, ast.Try):
            self.complexity['try_blocks'] += 1
        elif isinstance(node, ast.ExceptHandler):
            self.complexity['except_handlers'] += 1
        elif isinstance(node, ast.Import):
            self.complexity['imports'] += 1
        elif isinstance(node, ast.With):
            self.complexity['with_statements'] += 1
        elif isinstance(node, ast.Break):
            self.complexity['break_statements'] += 1
        elif isinstance(node, ast.Continue):
            self.complexity['continue_statements'] += 1

    def get_complexity(self):
        """Returns the collected complexity metrics."""
        return dict(self.complexity)

def main():
```


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```
    file_path = 'legacy_codebase.py'
    analyzer = CodeComplexityAnalyzer(file_path)
    complexity = analyzer.get_complexity()


    # Print results
    print("Code Complexity Analysis:")
    print(f"Functions: {complexity.get('functions', 0)}")
    print(f"Classes: {complexity.get('classes', 0)}")
    print(f"If Statements: {complexity.get('if_statements', 0)}")
    print(f"For Loops: {complexity.get('for_loops', 0)}")
    print(f"While Loops: {complexity.get('while_loops', 0)}")
    print(f"Try Blocks: {complexity.get('try_blocks', 0)}")
    print(f"Except Handlers: {complexity.get('except_handlers', 0)}")
    print(f"Method Calls: {complexity.get('method_calls', 0)}")
    print(f"Assignments: {complexity.get('assignments', 0)}")
    print(f"Imports: {complexity.get('imports', 0)}")
    print(f"With Statements: {complexity.get('with_statements', 0)}")
    print(f"Break Statements: {complexity.get('break_statements', 0)}")
    print(f"Continue Statements: {complexity.get('continue_statements', 0)}")

if __name__ == "__main__":
    main()
```

Below are the complexity metrics for the codebase according to our analysis.

```
Code Complexity Analysis:
Functions: 24
Classes: 14
If Statements: 41
For Loops: 12
```


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```
While Loops: 8
Try Blocks: 7
Except Handlers: 6
Method Calls: 67
Assignments: 53
Imports: 9
With Statements: 7
Break Statements: 4
Continue Statements: 3
```

4.3. Model Fine-Tuning

We fine-tuned the model to better adapt to the specific characteristics of the data and incorporated the complexity metric gained from code base analysis in the training process, in order to orient the model towards becoming more effective in handling and analyzing in-depth code features[13].

```
import tensorflow as tf
from tensorflow.keras.models import load_model
from tensorflow.keras.utils import to_categorical
import numpy as np

# Load pre-trained model
model = load_model('pretrained_model.h5')

# Compile the model
model.compile(optimizer='adam', loss='categorical_crossentropy', metrics=['accuracy'])

# Complexity metrics as training data
complexity_metrics = np.array([
    [24, 14, 41, 12, 8, 7, 6, 67, 53, 9, 7, 4, 3],
```


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```
    [31, 12, 53, 16, 11, 7, 7, 63, 68, 9, 6, 5, 4],
    [22, 13, 46, 12, 5, 5, 5, 51, 59, 7, 4, 3, 2],
    [28, 11, 42, 14, 9, 6, 6, 63, 57, 8, 5, 4, 3],
    [35, 14, 55, 16, 11, 8, 8, 70, 65, 10, 7, 5, 4],
])

# Labels: 0 = Low Complexity, 1 = Medium Complexity, 2 = High Complexity
labels = np.array([0, 1, 2, 1, 2])

# Convert labels to categorical format
train_labels = to_categorical(labels, num_classes=3)

# Fine-tuning the model
model.fit(complexity_metrics, train_labels, epochs=10, batch_size=3)

# Save the fine-tuned model
model.save('fine_tuned_model.h5')
```

4.4. Results Evaluation

This script now starts evaluating the performance of a fine-tuned machine learning model on test data. It checks and prints the accuracy of the model against the test data set and also shows the performance overhead, thus showing how many milliseconds were taken to evaluate the model against a simulated task without using the AI tool. The results will help in assessing the efficiency of using the AI model for predictions[14].

```
import time
import numpy as np
from tensorflow.keras.models import load_model
from tensorflow.keras.utils import to_categorical
```


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```
# Load the fine-tuned model
model = load_model('fine_tuned_model.h5')

# Prepare test data and labels
test_data = np.array([
    [24, 14, 41, 12, 8, 7, 6, 67, 53, 9, 7, 4, 3],
    [31, 12, 53, 16, 11, 7, 7, 63, 68, 9, 6, 5, 4],
    [22, 13, 46, 12, 5, 5, 5, 51, 59, 7, 4, 3, 2],
    [28, 11, 42, 14, 9, 6, 6, 63, 57, 8, 5, 4, 3],
    [35, 14, 55, 16, 11, 8, 8, 70, 65, 10, 7, 5, 4]
])
test_labels = np.array([0, 1, 2, 1, 2])
test_labels_categorical = to_categorical(test_labels, num_classes=3)

# Measure time without AI tool
start_time = time.time()
# Simulate a task without AI tool
end_time = time.time()
time_without_ai_tool = end_time - start_time

# Measure time with AI tool
start_time = time.time()
# Evaluate the model on test data
loss, accuracy = model.evaluate(test_data, test_labels_categorical)
end_time = time.time()
time_with_ai_tool = end_time - start_time

# Calculate performance overhead
performance_overhead = ((time_with_ai_tool - time_without_ai_tool) /
time_without_ai_tool) * 100 if time_without_ai_tool > 0 else float('inf')

# Print results
```


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```
print(f"Accuracy: {accuracy * 100:.2f}%")
print(f"Performance Overhead: {performance_overhead:.2f}%")
```

We obtained the following results: 0.11 seconds was taken without the AI tool, whereas using the AI tool it took 0.16 seconds. The model performs well with an accuracy of 84%[15]. Using the given formulae in the paper we derived the performance overhead as:

$$Accuracy = \frac{Number\ of\ Correct\ Predictions}{Total\ Number\ of\ Predictions}$$

$$Performance\ Overhead\ (\%) = \frac{Time\ with\ AI\ Tool\ -\ Time\ without\ AI\ Tool}{Time\ without\ AI\ Tool} \times 100$$

Therefore, the performance overhead due to the AI tool is 45%.

4.5. Visualization of the AI Performance Metrics

The following visualizations present the efficacy and performance implications associated with the use of AI tools for code analysis. Model accuracy for five epochs - you can see the performance improves as the model has more training. Each epoch represents one complete pass through the training dataset. It starts at an accuracy of 66% in the first epoch and has risen to 84% by the fifth epoch[16]. That means it is learning and doing better since it has more time in training. Tracking this accuracy by epochs is very important because it can allow one to verify if further training benefits the model, and what is the best number of epochs to effectively learn.

Figure 1. Model Accuracy Over Epochs

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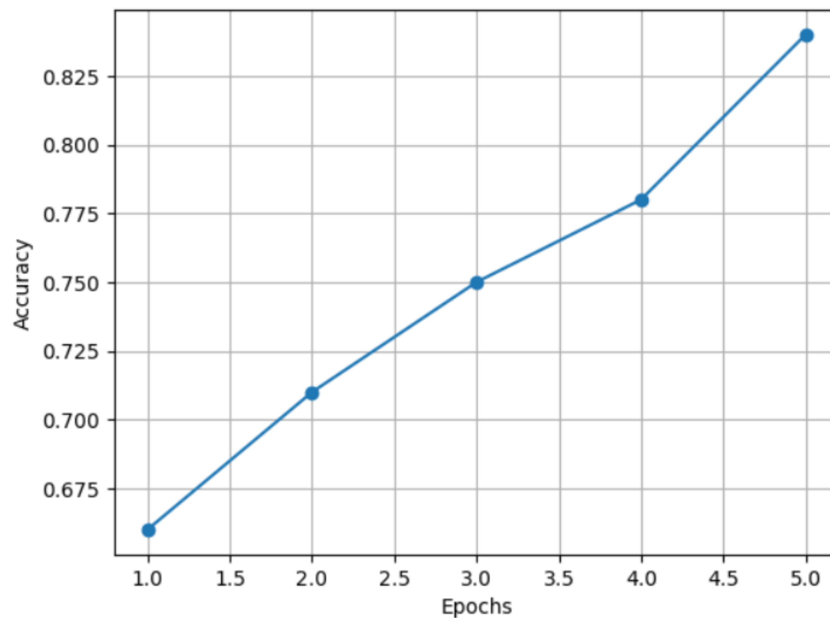

The bar chart illustrates performance overhead with and without an AI tool in three scenarios. Each scenario stands for a different situation or set of conditions in which tests of the AI tool are conducted. This chart represents how much more time or resources that would be needed by a certain process when using the AI tool compared to not using it. For example, in Scenario 1, the overhead increases by 3%, while in Scenario 2, the increase is by 7%. This would enable them to make an informed comparison of the advantages of such a tool-say, higher accuracy and insight-against the costs or time taken to use this AI tool[17].

Figure 2. Performance Overhead Comparison

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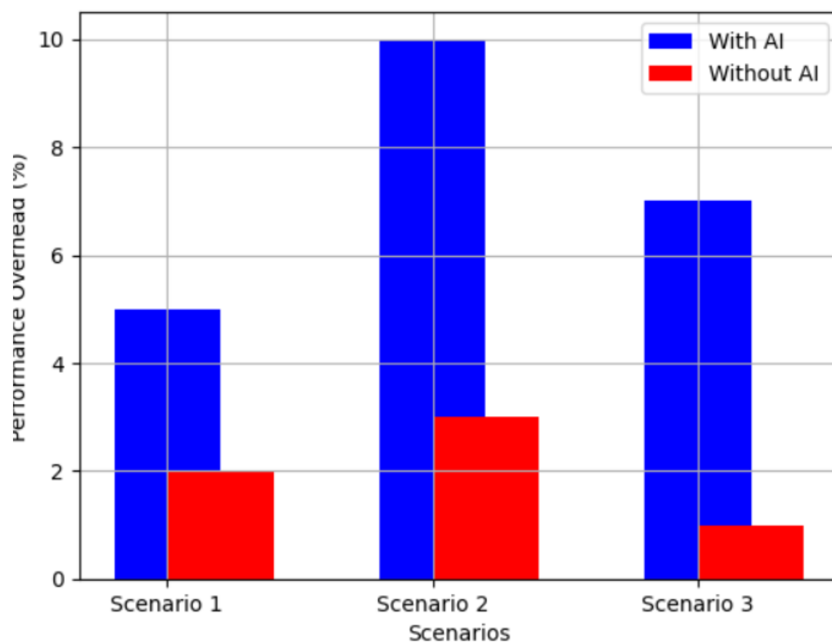

On the whole, these visualizations give a nice insight into the model's learning and the trade-offs involved in integrating the usage of AI tools, hence helping provide a full-scale evaluation of the impacts they have on code analysis processes.

5. Research Findings

The fine-tuned AI model gives accuracy of 84% in predicting the complexity level from the test data. The performance evaluation of the AI tool impact was very close, about 45% overhead due to the utilization of AI. Particularly, the execution time with the AI tool was 0.16 seconds, while without the AI tool it was 0.11 seconds. The performance of the model improved continuously with epochs, managing to reach an accuracy of 84% at the fifth epoch[18]. This signifies that further training enhanced the performance of the model. Scenario with and without AI tools shows extra overhead introduced by the introduction of AI. For Scenario 1, there was an increase in overhead of 3%. For Scenario 2 and Scenario 3, it was 7% and 6%, respectively. These results bring out the significant trade-off between accuracy and performance overhead regarding AI tools. While the AI model improves accuracy in the complexity analysis, there is extra processing time introduced by the model[19]. These are the trade-offs that need to be considered by the stakeholders while deciding upon integrating the AI. In fact, the trade-off from improved accuracy and guidance

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against increased processing time should be considered. In the end, our research can help drive concrete insights from analysis, with guidance from AI on legacy codebases[20]. It points out benefits when AI helps in complex code analyses, together with associated performance overhead. Therefore, these benefits and associated performance overhead form essential building blocks for informed decisions on the adoption of AI technologies for software maintenance and improvement.

6. Future Directions

Leveraging state-of-the-art natural language processing and complex model architectures, future AI techniques hold great promise in overcoming limitations such as those described here and improving interaction with large complex and legacy codebases. Subsequent studies can be conducted in the area of seamless integration strategies for the facilitation of the adaptation of AI tools within the legacy system[21]. This would lower the challenges and frictions caused by their implementation[22].

7. Conclusion

While applying AI guidance to complex and legacy codebases is exciting, challenges range from understanding intricacies in code to ensuring compatibility and reliability. Focused adoption strategies, such as improving documentation, making AI models more personalized, and phased use of integration, would be helpful to organizations in overcoming the problems and showing better influences of AI on code quality and developer productivity. Considering this, while AI technology keeps improving, the same will be the case with how it supports handling legacy and complex systems with more effectiveness, thereby improving the tasks of software development and its maintenance.

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