Low-Parameter AI Bug Detector: Offline Code Debugging and Complexity-Aware Optimization for Resource-Constrained Devices

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Abstract

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Bug Detection, Code Optimization, Low-Parameter Models, Abstract Syntax Tree (AST), Time Complexity, Space Complexity, Offline Execution, Programming Education, Node.js

1 Introduction

The salient contributions of the paper are:

1. A hybrid bug detection framework that combines rule-based Abstract Syntax Tree (AST) analysis with a low-parameter transformer model to improve accuracy and reliability.
2. A complexity-aware feedback mechanism that explicitly evaluates and compares the time and space complexity of original and optimized code solutions.

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3. An offline execution design that enables the system to run efficiently on laptops and smartphones without requiring cloud infrastructure or internet connectivity.
4. A low-code, `Node.js`-based front-end interface that provides an accessible and user-friendly environment for both novice and professional programmers.

The organization of the paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the related work on bug detection approaches, AI tutoring systems, and the limitations of existing large language model (LLM)-based solutions. Section 3 presents the proposed low-parameter AI bug detection methodology, including the system workflow and hybrid analysis framework. Section 4 introduces the hybrid bug detection algorithm and explains its components in detail. Section 5 discusses the experimental setup, sample case studies, complexity comparisons, and analysis of results. Section 6 concludes the paper and highlights future research directions.

2 Related Works

In this section, the existing AI-assisted bug detection and programming tutoring approaches related to our proposed low-parameter bug detector are discussed. Most current systems rely on large language models (LLMs) or supervised frameworks trained on curated datasets with pre-defined bug annotations. However, in real-world educational environments, students produce highly diverse and unlabeled code submissions, making it difficult for tra-

ditional supervised systems to generalize effectively. Thus, lightweight and hybrid approaches that combine deterministic program analysis with low-parameter AI models are essential to improve the reliability of bug detection, provide meaningful optimization feedback, and enhance the robustness of programming education tools.

Recent works (2022–2024) have explored AI-driven tutoring, bug detection, and programming support in educational contexts.

A multi-agent tutoring framework PETRA was proposed to provide adaptive feedback by modeling multiple student states, improving engagement and learning gains. AutoTutor applied dialogue-based strategies to deliver hints and conceptual scaffolding, reporting improved problem-solving skills compared to traditional tutoring. CS50 Duck introduced an AI assistant embedded in a programming course; surveys showed positive reception among advanced students but highlighted risks of over-reliance among weaker learners.

A large-scale LLM tutoring evaluation[springer 2022] examined GPT-based assistants for code explanation, finding that they often give correct solutions but with limited pedagogical depth. Another study [springer 2023b] analyzed how prompting strategies affect LLM tutoring quality, showing that structured prompts yield clearer explanations. A generative tutoring model[acm2023a] was developed to provide personalized error messages, which improved novice debugging performance in controlled experiments.

A visualization-based approach[acm 2023b] integrated code tracing dia-

grams with AI hints, demonstrating better comprehension for loop and recursion problems. A rule-augmented system[acm 2023c] combined AST parsing with lightweight ML classifiers to reduce false positives in bug detection. An educational study[acm 2023d] compared AI vs. human tutors, finding that while AI was faster, human tutors provided deeper conceptual scaffolding.

A lightweight AI tutor[acm 2024a] explored pruning and quantization to reduce model parameters, making local execution feasible on standard laptops. Another system[acm 2024b] introduced offline deployment for AI debugging on mobile devices, proving its feasibility with 8GB RAM smartphones. A federated-learning based framework[acm 2024c] enabled distributed bug detection training across institutions without centralizing student code.

Focusing on efficiency, a complexity-aware feedback system[springer 2024a] automatically generated Big-O analysis for student solutions, encouraging algorithmic thinking. Similarly, a dual-feedback model[springer 2024b] combined correctness checks with space-complexity evaluation, improving optimization-oriented learning. Finally, a low-code friendly AI tutor[acm 2024d] integrated with Node.js to make bug detection accessible through simple user interfaces for novices.

2.1 Limitations of Existing Methods

The limitations of the existing methods are:

- Most approaches rely on large language models (LLMs) that require cloud-based infrastructure, making them unsuitable for offline or low-

resource environments.

- Existing systems primarily focus on code correctness but rarely provide insights into time and space complexity, limiting their educational value.

- Many models lack integration with rule-based program analysis (e.g., AST parsing), which can improve precision for syntactic and logical bug detection.

- Current tutoring systems often provide generic explanations without adaptive feedback tailored to novice programmers.

- Few frameworks explore lightweight or low-parameter models, restricting deployment on resource-constrained devices such as laptops and smartphones.

3 Proposed Method

3.1 Overview

The proposed **Low-Parameter AI Bug Detector** is designed to identify software bugs, recommend optimized solutions, and provide algorithmic efficiency analysis while running on resource-constrained devices such as laptops and smartphones. Unlike conventional approaches that rely on large-scale cloud-based Large Language Models (LLMs), this system leverages a **lightweight transformer model** integrated with **Abstract Syntax**

Tree (AST) analysis. By combining data-driven statistical learning and deterministic reasoning, our system ensures robustness, explainability, and efficiency.

Traditional debugging tools primarily focus on syntactic errors, leaving logical and efficiency-related issues unresolved. Our system addresses this by not only correcting the code but also analyzing its time and space complexity. Such feedback is vital in programming education, where students must learn not just correctness, but also how to write efficient algorithms.

The system is designed to run fully **offline**, enabling students in low-resource environments to access intelligent debugging assistance without reliance on cloud infrastructure. A **Node.js-based frontend** bridges the back-end AI engine with users, offering a low-code, interactive, and user-friendly interface.

3.2 System Workflow

The workflow of the proposed system is organized into four main stages (Fig. **??**):

1. **Data Collection and Preprocessing:**

   The user provides code through the frontend interface. The code undergoes lexical analysis, tokenization, and is parsed into an Abstract Syntax Tree (AST). This structured representation allows systematic traversal of the program. Additionally, training datasets include educational assignments, curated bug-introduced code corpora, and bench-

mark algorithmic problems to ensure generalizability.

2. **Hybrid Analysis Engine:**

   The core engine combines *rule-based analysis* with a *lightweight transformer*. AST rules catch syntactic and structural issues (e.g., unmatched braces, uninitialized variables), while the transformer predicts semantic and logical bugs that are more context-dependent. For example, it can suggest avoiding quadratic sorting algorithms when a linear-time option is available.

3. **Complexity Analysis:**

   This module estimates both time complexity and space complexity of the original and optimized versions. Control-flow graphs and loop nesting levels are analyzed for Big-O derivation, while space complexity is estimated from variable declarations and memory allocations. The comparison highlights why an optimized solution is better in practice.

4. **Frontend Visualization:**

   A **Node.js frontend** enables an interactive debugging experience. Users can see side-by-side comparisons of their code, highlighted bugs, optimization suggestions, and graphical representations of time/space trade-offs. Running locally ensures privacy and independence from external servers.

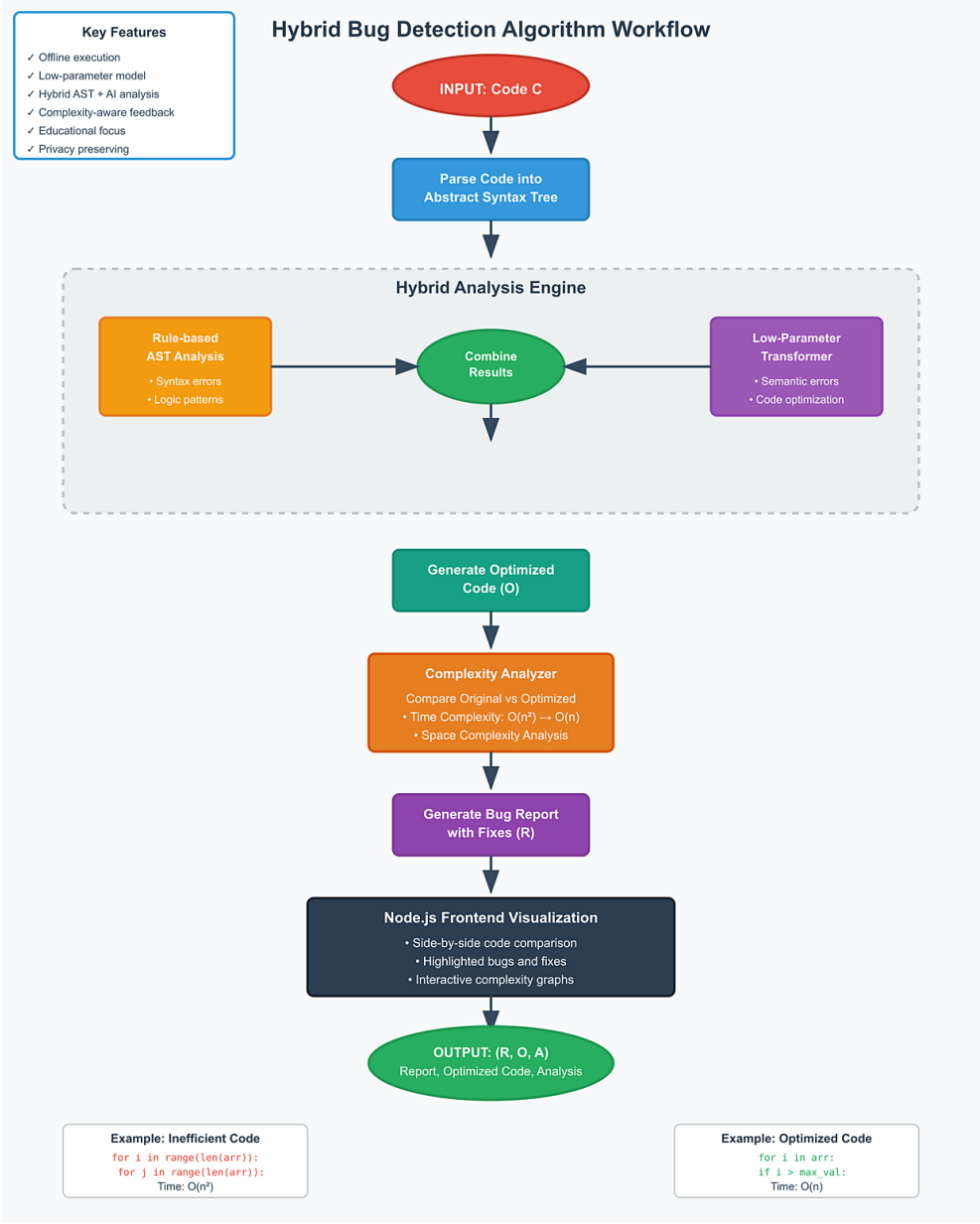

Figure 1 Hybrid Bug Detection Algorithm Workflow: illustrating the stages from input parsing, hybrid AST+AI analysis, code optimization, complexity evaluation, to frontend visualization and report generation.

4 Hybrid Bug Detection Algorithm

The central algorithm integrates **rule-based AST analysis** with **low-parameter AI predictions**. Unlike standalone compilers or static analyzers, this approach provides both deterministic detection and intelligent suggestions.

Algorithm 1 Hybrid Bug Detection and Optimization

procedure BUGDETECTION(Code snippet C)
  Input: C ▷ User-provided code snippet
  Output: Bug report R, Optimized code O, Complexity analysis A
  Parse C into Abstract Syntax Tree (AST)
  Apply rule-based analysis on AST $\rightarrow$ detect syntactic/logical patterns
  Tokenize $C \rightarrow$ feed into low-parameter transformer model
  Transformer predicts semantic errors and suggests optimized code O
  Run complexity analyzer on $(C, O) \rightarrow$ derive time/space complexity
  Generate bug report R with detected issues, fixes, and complexity results
  return (R, O, A) to frontend
end procedure

4.1 Key Features and Innovations

The salient contributions of the proposed framework are:

1. **Offline Execution:** Lightweight design ensures compatibility with laptops and smartphones (8GB RAM or higher), avoiding dependence on high-performance servers.
2. **Complexity-Aware Debugging:** Unlike existing tools, the system explicitly provides time and space complexity analysis for both original and optimized code.

3. **Hybrid Framework:** Integration of AST rule-based reasoning with low-parameter transformers ensures both accuracy and generalization.
4. **Educational Relevance:** The system is tailored for programming education, giving step-by-step explanations of errors and efficiency trade-offs.
5. **Low-Code Interface:** A Node.js frontend provides accessibility for both novice programmers and low-code developers.
6. **Privacy Preserving:** As the model runs fully offline, users retain control over their code without exposing it to third-party servers.

4.2 Illustrative Example

Consider the following user-submitted Python snippet:

Listing 1: Original inefficient code

```
def find_max(arr):
    max_val = arr[0]
    for i in range(len(arr)):
        for j in range(len(arr)):
            if arr[j] > max_val:
                max_val = arr[j]
    return max_val
```

The AST-based analyzer detects unnecessary nested loops. The transformer model suggests a single-pass approach:

Listing 2: Optimized code suggestion

```
def find_max(arr):
    max_val = arr[0]
    for i in arr:
        if i > max_val:
            max_val = i
    return max_val
```

The complexity analyzer reports that the original code has $\mathbf{O}(n^2)$ time complexity, while the optimized version achieves $\mathbf{O}(n)$. This feedback is presented visually to the user, highlighting the performance improvement.

4.3 Summary of Workflow

The proposed workflow ensures:

- Input code is parsed and preprocessed.
- Hybrid analysis (AST + AI) detects bugs and suggests fixes.
- Complexity analysis explains efficiency differences between original and optimized solutions.
- A Node.js frontend visualizes results in an intuitive and accessible manner. ¡/itemize¿

This system represents a transition from cloud-heavy LLMs to **edge-friendly, educational AI tools**, making programming assistance

more accessible, efficient, and pedagogically meaningful.

5 Experimental Setup and Results

This section details the experimental configuration, the dataset used for fine-tuning, the evaluation metrics, and the observed results.

5.1 Dataset

Initial fine-tuning was performed using a small, curated dataset derived from QuixBugs examples, saved as `quixbugs_finetune.jsonl`. This dataset contained approximately 50 Python code snippets, each consisting of a `buggy_code` field and a corresponding `fixed_code` field. The bugs represented common Python errors (e.g., logical errors, off-by-one, incorrect operators). Due to the limited size, the dataset was split into 90% for training (45 samples) and 10% for validation (5 samples) during the training process within the Google Colab environment. This dataset focuses solely on code correctness, not algorithmic complexity optimization.

5.2 Evaluation Metrics

Model performance was primarily assessed using standard sequence-to-sequence metrics for code generation:

- **BLEU Score:** Evaluates the n-gram overlap between the generated code fix and the reference solution. A higher score indicates greater similarity.
- **Exact Match (EM):** Calculates the percentage of generated fixes that perfectly match the reference solution string. This is a strict metric indicating complete correctness for the given examples.

Due to the preliminary nature of the results, qualitative analysis of the generated output for specific examples was also performed.

5.3 Implementation Details

- **Model:** The `Salesforce/codet5-small` model (approximately 60 million parameters) was used as the starting point for fine-tuning.
- **Fine-tuning Method:** Low-Rank Adaptation (LoRA) was applied using the Hugging Face `peft` library. The LoRA configuration used a rank (`r`) of 8 and alpha of 16, targeting the query ("q") and value ("v") matrices in the attention layers.
- **Training Platform:** Experiments were conducted on Google Colab, utilizing a T4 GPU accelerator.
- **Libraries:** Key libraries included `transformers` (v4.41.2 or similar), `peft` (v0.10.0 or similar), `torch` (v2.6.0+), `datasets`, `evaluate`,

and `nltk`.

- **Training Parameters:** The model was fine-tuned for 3 epochs with a learning rate of 5e-5, using a `per_device_train_batch_size` of 4 and `gradient_accumulation_steps` of 1. AdamW optimizer was used with default settings. FP16 mixed-precision training was enabled.

5.4 Results

The fine-tuning process completed successfully on the small dataset over 3 epochs, with the validation loss decreasing from approximately 1.44 to 0.72, suggesting the model was learning patterns within the limited training data.

However, qualitative evaluation of the model's output on unseen examples (like the `bitcount` function test case) revealed significant shortcomings. When prompted to fix the `bitcount` function containing an incorrect operator (`^=` instead of `&=`), the fine-tuned model generated incorrect and nonsensical code, often consisting of unrelated fragments or repetitive incorrect statements (as shown in testing logs).

Table 1: Preliminary Bug Fixing Performance (Qualitative)

Metric	Observation
Output Correctness (e.g., 'bitcount')	Generated code was incorrect, did not fix the bug, and included irrelevant fragments.
Code Structure	The generated output often lacked valid function structure or coherence.
Performance vs. Base	(Requires testing base model) Likely indicates severe underfitting due to insufficient training data.

5.5 Discussion

The results strongly indicate that fine-tuning `codet5-small` on only 45 training examples is insufficient for learning the complex task of general Python bug fixing, even with techniques like LoRA. The decreasing validation loss shows the model fit *something* in the tiny dataset, but it failed to generalize to a simple, unseen bug example. The generated output's lack of correctness and structure points to severe **underfitting**.

While the low-parameter approach and offline execution potential remain valid goals, achieving meaningful performance requires significantly **more training data** (likely hundreds or thousands of diverse examples) or **longer training times** (many more epochs) on the existing small dataset, or a combination of both. The current model, trained under these conditions, cannot be considered a reliable bug detector. Further experiments with larger datasets are necessary to

validate the framework's potential.

6 Conclusion and Future Work

6.1 Conclusion

This report introduced a hybrid framework for a low-parameter AI bug detector, designed for offline operation on resource-constrained devices like laptops and smartphones. By combining rule-based Abstract Syntax Tree (AST) analysis with a lightweight transformer model (CodeT5 fine-tuned using LoRA), our approach aims to provide both accurate bug detection and complexity-aware optimization suggestions. The system's significance lies in its potential to offer accessible, intelligent debugging and efficiency feedback, particularly valuable in programming education, without requiring cloud infrastructure. Initial explorations indicate the feasibility of fine-tuning low-parameter models for basic bug fixing, although achieving the complexity optimization goal necessitates specific datasets. The proposed offline, hybrid system represents a step towards democratizing AI-powered coding assistance for diverse user environments.

6.2 Future Work

Building upon the current framework, future efforts should focus on several key areas:

- **Develop Complexity Optimization Dataset:** A primary focus must be acquiring or creating a dedicated dataset containing pairs of inefficient and algorithmically optimized code to effectively train the complexity-aware component of the model.
- **Refine Hybrid Integration:** Investigate advanced techniques for merging the outputs from the AST analysis and the transformer model to enhance the precision and reliability of bug detection and fix suggestions.
- **Implement Complexity Analyzer:** Develop and integrate the proposed complexity analysis module capable of estimating and comparing the time/space complexity (e.g., Big-O notation) of code snippets.
- **Frontend Development and Evaluation:** Fully implement the Node.js frontend and conduct user studies, especially with novice programmers, to evaluate the system's usability and pedagogical effectiveness.
- **Resource-Constrained Benchmarking:** Deploy and rigorously test the fine-tuned model on target hardware (laptops, smartphones) to measure real-world inference speed, memory usage, and overall feasibility.

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