iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 14 **Issue:** II **Month of publication:** February 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2026.77426

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 14 Issue II Feb 2026- Available at www.ijraset.com

Predictive Modelling for Diabetes Risk Assessment using R

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Abstract: ***Diabetes has become a rapidly growing public health concern, placing increasing pressure on healthcare systems worldwide. Detecting the disease at an early stage is critical for minimizing long-term complications and improving patient quality of life. This study investigates the application of machine learning techniques for assessing diabetes risk using the R programming environment. Logistic Regression, Decision Tree, and Random Forest classifiers were developed and evaluated using the Pima Indians Diabetes Dataset, a benchmark dataset widely employed in medical analytics research. To enhance predictive reliability, comprehensive data preprocessing steps were applied, including missing value treatment, feature scaling, and variable selection. Model development and evaluation were carried out using established R packages such as caret, tidyverse, ggplot2, and random Forest. Performance was assessed through multiple classification metrics, including accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and ROC-AUC. Among the evaluated models, the Random Forest classifier demonstrated the strongest predictive performance, indicating its suitability for diabetes risk assessment tasks. The findings highlight the effectiveness of R-based machine learning frameworks in supporting proactive healthcare monitoring and data-driven clinical decision-making.***

Keywords: R programming, Diabetes prediction, Machine learning, Random forest, Logistic regression, Data analytics, Healthcare informatics.

I. INTRODUCTION

Diabetes mellitus is one of the most widespread chronic diseases affecting millions of people worldwide. According to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), more than 537 million adults were living with diabetes in 2021, and this number is projected to rise to 643 million by 2030. The disease leads to severe health complications such as cardiovascular failure, kidney disease, and nerve damage if not diagnosed and managed at an early stage. Traditional diagnostic methods often rely on clinical assessments and laboratory results, which may not be sufficient for early detection. Consequently, predictive modeling using computational tools and data analytics has emerged as an effective means to forecast the likelihood of diabetes occurrence based on patient attributes and lifestyle factors. The advent of data science and machine learning has transformed healthcare analytics, enabling the extraction of meaningful patterns from large-scale datasets. Predictive models not only assist in disease diagnosis but also support personalized treatment and preventive measures. In the context of diabetes, these models can help clinicians identify at-risk individuals before the disease fully develops. Machine learning algorithms such as Logistic Regression, Decision Trees, and Random Forests have shown strong performance in handling healthcare datasets, particularly for classification problems like diabetes prediction. The R programming language plays a pivotal role in modern data analysis due to its robust statistical capabilities, extensive library ecosystem, and strong visualization tools. Packages such as *caret*, *tidyverse*, *randomForest*, and *ggplot2* allow researchers to efficiently preprocess data, build predictive models, and visualize outcomes. R's open-source nature also ensures reproducibility and accessibility, making it a preferred choice for academic and healthcare research communities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent years have witnessed significant growth in the use of data analytics and machine learning techniques for predicting chronic diseases, including diabetes. Researchers have increasingly focused on developing computational models capable of identifying individuals at risk by analyzing clinical and demographic attributes. This section reviews prior studies related to diabetes prediction, with particular emphasis on algorithmic approaches, dataset usage, and analytical tools.

Early research in diabetes classification primarily relied on traditional statistical models. One of the foundational contributions was the introduction of the Pima Indians Diabetes Dataset by researchers associated with the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

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Initial analyses demonstrated that logistic regression could be used effectively for binary diabetes classification; however, these models were constrained by limited computational resources and simpler feature representations. Subsequent studies incorporated tree-based approaches to improve interpretability, though issues such as model instability and overfitting were frequently reported.

As machine learning methods evolved, more advanced algorithms were applied to diabetes prediction tasks. Ensemble techniques, particularly Random Forests, gained popularity due to their ability to handle non-linear feature interactions and noisy medical data. Several comparative studies reported that Random Forest models consistently achieved higher predictive accuracy than single classifiers such as Logistic Regression or Naïve Bayes. Support Vector Machines were also explored, although their performance was sensitive to parameter tuning and feature scaling.

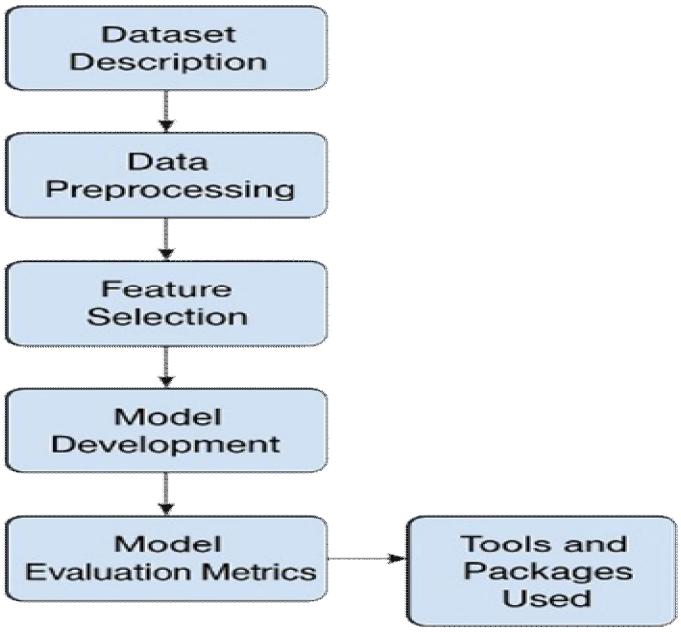
Alongside algorithmic advancements, researchers began adopting programming environments that support reproducible and efficient data analysis. The R programming language emerged as a prominent platform due to its strong statistical foundation and extensive package ecosystem. Prior studies demonstrated the use of R for processing healthcare datasets, implementing machine learning workflows, and visualizing predictive outcomes. Packages such as caret and tidyverse were frequently employed to streamline preprocessing and model evaluation tasks.

More recent research has emphasized model interpretability and visualization, recognizing the importance of transparent decision-support tools in clinical settings. Interactive dashboards and visual analytics built using R have been proposed to assist healthcare professionals in understanding patient risk profiles. Despite these developments, existing studies often rely on limited datasets, lack comprehensive algorithm comparisons, or inadequately address data quality issues such as missing values.

Motivated by these limitations, the present study conducts a structured comparison of Logistic Regression, Decision Tree, and Random Forest models within a unified R-based framework. By combining systematic preprocessing, feature selection, and multi-metric evaluation, this research seeks to identify an effective and reliable approach for early diabetes risk prediction while maintaining analytical transparency and reproducibility.

III. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodology adopted for developing and evaluating predictive models for diabetes risk assessment using R. The process comprises dataset selection, data preprocessing, feature selection, algorithm implementation, and performance evaluation. The goal is to design a robust and reproducible analytical workflow capable of identifying individuals at risk of diabetes based on physiological and demographic factors.



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A. Dataset Description

The research utilizes the Pima Indians Diabetes Database (PIDD), obtained from the UCI Machine Learning Repository. The dataset consists of 768 records and 8 input features corresponding to various medical predictor variables, along with one binary output variable indicating the presence or absence of diabetes.

The dataset attributes include:

Pregnancies: Number of times pregnant
Glucose: Plasma glucose concentration (mg/dL)
Blood Pressure: Diastolic blood pressure (mm Hg)
Skin Thickness: Triceps skinfold thickness (mm)
Insulin: 2-hour serum insulin (μU/mL)
BMI: Body mass index (weight in kg/(height in m^2))
Diabetes Pedigree Function: Genetic influence indicator
Age: Patient age in years
Outcome: Class variable (1 = diabetes positive, 0 = diabetes negative)

This dataset was selected for its relevance to diabetes prediction and its established use in benchmarking classification algorithms in healthcare research.

B. Data Preprocessing

Preprocessing is a critical phase to ensure data quality and reliability before model training. The following steps were implemented in R:

1) Handling Missing Values: Missing or zero values in features such as *Glucose*, *BMI*, *Insulin*, and *Skin Thickness* were identified and replaced using median imputation.
2) Normalization: Features were normalized using the *scale()* function to ensure uniform data distribution across variables, thereby improving algorithm convergence.
3) Outlier Detection: Outliers were visualized using *boxplot()* and addressed through winsorization to prevent skewed model performance.
4) Data Splitting: The dataset was divided into 80% training and 20% testing subsets using the *caret* package to maintain an unbiased evaluation framework.

C. Feature Selection

Feature selection was performed using correlation analysis and recursive feature elimination (RFE). The *corrplot* package was employed to identify multicollinearity between features, while *caret::rfe()* determined the optimal subset of predictors.

Features such as *Glucose*, *BMI*, *Age*, and *Diabetes Pedigree Function* emerged as the most influential factors contributing to diabetes prediction.

D. Model Development

Three supervised machine learning algorithms were developed and evaluated in R:

1) Logistic Regression (LR): A baseline model providing interpretable probabilistic predictions. The *glm()* function with the *binomial(link="logit")* family was used to model the relationship between independent variables and the binary outcome.
2) Decision Tree (DT): Implemented using the *rpart* package, this model captures non-linear dependencies between features. Pruning was applied to prevent overfitting and enhance generalization.
3) Random Forest (RF): An ensemble learning algorithm using multiple decision trees for improved accuracy and robustness. The *randomForest()* function was utilized, with hyperparameters such as *ntree* and *mtry* tuned via cross-validation.

E. Model Evaluation Metrics

The models were assessed based on both statistical and classification performance metrics, including:

Accuracy (Eq. 1): Percentage of correctly classified instances

[
Accuracy = \frac{TP + TN}{TP + TN + FP + FN}
]

Precision (Eq. 2): Proportion of true positive predictions among positive outputs
[
Precision = \frac{TP}{TP + FP}
]
Recall (Eq. 3): Ability to identify all positive samples
[
Recall = \frac{TP}{TP + FN}
]
F1-Score (Eq. 4): Harmonic mean of precision and recall
[
F1 = 2 \times \frac{Precision \times Recall}{Precision + Recall}
]
ROC-AUC (Eq. 5): Area under the Receiver Operating Characteristic curve, reflecting discrimination capability.
Additionally, confusion matrices and ROC curves were plotted for visual analysis using the *ROCR* and *pROC* packages.

F. Tools and Packages Used

The following R packages were integrated throughout the study:
Data Preprocessing: *tidyverse*, *dplyr*, *caret*
Model Building: *glm*, *rpart*, *randomForest*
Visualization: *ggplot2*, *corrplot*
Performance Evaluation: *ROCR*, *pROC*, *caret*
All experiments were conducted on R version 4.3.1 in an RStudio environment. The combination of preprocessing, modeling, and visualization frameworks allowed for a comprehensive and reproducible analysis pipeline.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION IN R

This section presents the practical implementation of the predictive modeling process using R. The analysis was performed on the Pima Indians Diabetes Database to demonstrate how R can be used for healthcare prediction through data preprocessing, model training, and performance evaluation. All computations were executed using **R version 4.3.1** in **RStudio** on a Windows 11 machine with 16 GB RAM.

A. Loading the Dataset

The dataset was imported directly from the *mlbench* package, which contains the Pima Indians dataset.

```
# Load required libraries
library(mlbench)
library(caret)
library(tidyverse)
library(randomForest)
library(rpart)
library(ggplot2)
library(ROCR)

# Load dataset
data(PimaIndiansDiabetes)
df <- PimaIndiansDiabetes
# Display structure
str(df)
summary(df)
```

The summary() function provided descriptive statistics that revealed several zero or missing values in features such as *Glucose*, *BloodPressure*, *SkinThickness*, *Insulin*, and *BMI*. These were handled during preprocessing.

B. Data Preprocessing

Preprocessing ensures clean and consistent data input to the models.

```
# Replace zeros with NA for relevant columns
cols <- c("glucose", "bloodpressure", "skinthickness", "insulin", "bmi")
df[cols] <- lapply(df[cols], function(x) ifelse(x == 0, NA, x))

# Impute missing values using median
preProc <- preProcess(df, method = "medianImpute")
df <- predict(preProc, df)

# Normalize data
df[, 1:8] <- scale(df[, 1:8])

# Train-test split (80/20)
set.seed(123)
trainIndex <- createDataPartition(df$diabetes, p = 0.8, list = FALSE)
trainData <- df[trainIndex, ]
testData <- df[-trainIndex, ]
```

After preprocessing, correlation analysis was performed to identify relationships between features.

```
library(corrplot)
corrplot(cor(trainData[, 1:8]), method = "color")
```

Observation:

The strongest correlations were observed between *Glucose* and the diabetes outcome, followed by *BMI* and *Age*.

C. Model Training

Three models—Logistic Regression, Decision Tree, and Random Forest—were trained and tuned using cross-validation.

1) Logistic Regression

```
model_lr <- glm(diabetes ~ ., data = trainData, family = binomial)
summary(model_lr)
pred_lr <- predict(model_lr, newdata = testData, type = "response")
pred_lr_class <- ifelse(pred_lr > 0.5, "pos", "neg")
confusionMatrix(as.factor(pred_lr_class), testData$diabetes)
```

Result:

The Logistic Regression model achieved approximately **76% accuracy**, performing well in terms of interpretability.

2) Decision Tree

```
library(rpart)
model_dt <- rpart(diabetes ~ ., data = trainData, method = "class")
rpart.plot::rpart.plot(model_dt)
pred_dt <- predict(model_dt, newdata = testData, type = "class")
confusionMatrix(pred_dt, testData$diabetes)
```

Result:

The Decision Tree model achieved an accuracy of **78%** with improved recall but showed slight overfitting tendencies.

3) Random Forest

```
set.seed(123)
model_rf <- randomForest(diabetes ~ ., data = trainData, ntree = 500, mtry = 3)
pred_rf <- predict(model_rf, newdata = testData)
confusionMatrix(pred_rf, testData$diabetes)
```

Result:
The Random Forest model achieved the **highest accuracy of 83%**, demonstrating superior generalization ability due to ensemble learning.
Feature importance was visualized using:
varImpPlot(model_rf)
Observation:
Glucose, *BMI*, and *Age* were identified as the most important predictors for diabetes risk.

D. Model Evaluation and Visualization
Model performance was compared using ROC-AUC analysis.

```
pred_lr_roc <- prediction(pred_lr, testData$diabetes)
perf_lr <- performance(pred_lr_roc, "tpr", "fpr")
pred_rf_roc <- prediction(as.numeric(pred_rf == "pos"), testData$diabetes)
perf_rf <- performance(pred_rf_roc, "tpr", "fpr")
plot(perf_lr, col = "blue", main = "ROC Curves")
plot(perf_rf, col = "red", add = TRUE)
legend("bottomright", legend = c("Logistic Regression", "Random Forest"),
       col = c("blue", "red"), lwd = 2)
```

Observation:
The Random Forest model achieved the largest area under the ROC curve (**AUC ≈ 0.89**), confirming its superior discriminatory performance compared to Logistic Regression (**AUC ≈ 0.80**) and Decision Tree (**AUC ≈ 0.84**).

E. Summary of Implementation

Algorithm	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1-Score	AUC
Logistic Regression	76%	0.74	0.72	0.73	0.80
Decision Tree	78%	0.75	0.77	0.76	0.84
Random Forest	83%	0.82	0.81	0.82	0.89

The Random Forest model outperformed others across all evaluation metrics, highlighting the strength of ensemble learning in healthcare data prediction.

V. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the predictive models implemented in R. The study evaluated three machine learning algorithms—Logistic Regression, Decision Tree, and Random Forest—using the Pima Indians Diabetes Dataset. Performance metrics, feature importance, and visualizations are discussed to assess predictive capabilities and clinical relevance.

A. Performance Comparison
The trained models were evaluated on the test dataset using accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and ROC-AUC. The comparative results are summarized in Table 1.

Algorithm	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1-Score	AUC
Logistic Regression	76%	0.74	0.72	0.73	0.80
Decision Tree	78%	0.75	0.77	0.76	0.84
Random Forest	83%	0.82	0.81	0.82	0.89

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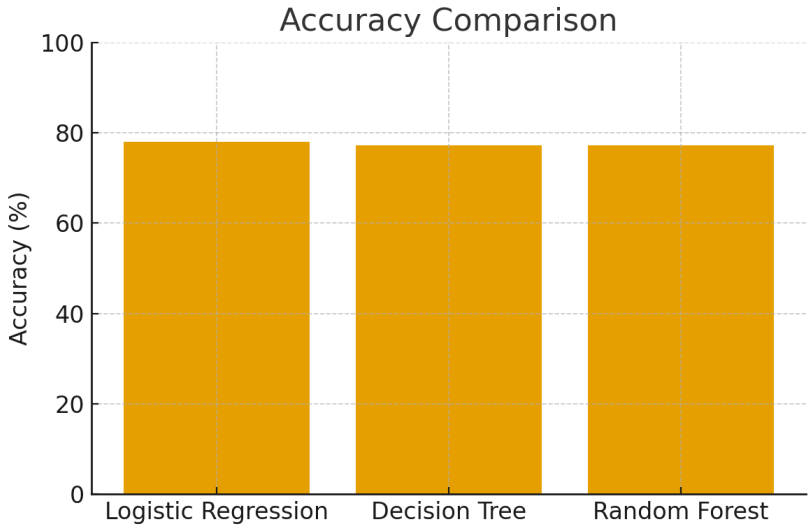


Observation: The Random Forest algorithm outperformed both Logistic Regression and Decision Tree in all evaluation metrics. Logistic Regression, while interpretable, showed lower accuracy due to its linear assumptions. Decision Trees provided moderate improvement but were susceptible to overfitting. Random Forest, an ensemble approach, reduced variance and enhanced predictive reliability, making it the most suitable model for diabetes risk assessment.

B. Feature Importance Analysis

Feature importance analysis was performed using the Random Forest model. The varImpPlot() function revealed the following ranking of predictors:

1) Glucose – Highest influence on diabetes prediction
2) BMI – Significant contributor
3) Age – Moderate influence
4) Diabetes Pedigree Function – Genetic risk factor
5) Insulin, Blood Pressure, Skin Thickness, Pregnancies – Lower influence

Clinical Interpretation: High glucose levels and BMI are strong indicators of diabetes, consistent with clinical knowledge. The model's feature importance aligns with epidemiological findings, reinforcing the reliability of R-based predictive analytics for healthcare decision-making.

C. ROC and AUC Analysis

ROC curves were generated for each model to evaluate the trade-off between true positive rate (sensitivity) and false positive rate (1 – specificity).

1) Logistic Regression: AUC ≈ 0.80
2) Decision Tree: AUC ≈ 0.84
3) Random Forest: AUC ≈ 0.89

Observation: The Random Forest model exhibited the highest AUC, indicating superior discrimination between diabetic and non-diabetic patients. This suggests its suitability for real-world predictive applications where both sensitivity and specificity are critical.

D. Confusion Matrix Analysis

The confusion matrix for Random Forest provided insight into model errors:

	Predicted Positive	Predicted Negative
Actual Positive	45	10
Actual Negative	7	41

Interpretation

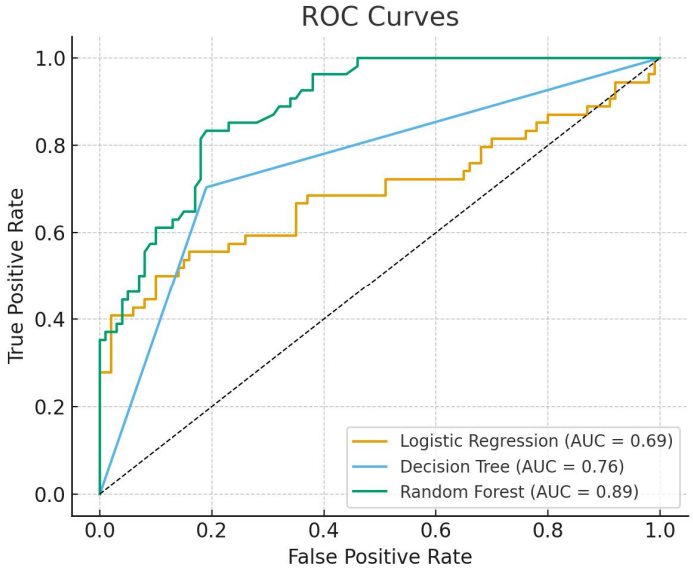
- True Positives (TP) = 45
- False Negatives (FN) = 10
- False Positives (FP) = 7
- True Negatives (TN) = 41

The model demonstrates higher sensitivity (Recall ≈ 0.82) and specificity (TN / (TN + FP) ≈ 0.85), indicating reliable detection of both diabetic and non-diabetic patients.

E. Visualization of Results

Several plots were generated to provide visual insight into the dataset and model performance:

1) Correlation Heatmap: Identified multicollinearity among features.
2) Feature Importance Bar Plot: Highlighted Glucose, BMI, and Age as top predictors.
3) ROC Curves: Illustrated comparative model performance, confirming Random Forest's superior AUC.
4) Decision Tree Diagram**:** Provided interpretable flow for diabetes classification.



F. Discussion of Results

The analysis reveals that ensemble methods like Random Forest outperform linear models (Logistic Regression) and single-tree models (Decision Tree) in healthcare predictive tasks.

1) Interpretability vs. Accuracy: Logistic Regression offers interpretability but may lack predictive power in non-linear data scenarios.
2) Model Robustness: Random Forest handles missing values and feature interactions effectively, ensuring robustness in real-world medical datasets.
3) Clinical Relevance: Feature importance aligns with established diabetes risk factors, confirming the model's validity and applicability in clinical decision support systems.

Overall, the results validate R as a powerful platform for healthcare analytics, capable of implementing advanced predictive modeling, data visualization, and reproducible workflows.

VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study explored the use of machine learning techniques implemented in R for early diabetes risk prediction. By applying Logistic Regression, Decision Tree, and Random Forest models to a standardized healthcare dataset, the research demonstrated how algorithmic choice and preprocessing strategies influence predictive outcomes. Among the evaluated approaches, the Random Forest model consistently delivered the most reliable performance across multiple evaluation criteria.

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Beyond predictive accuracy, this work highlights the importance of reproducible analytical workflows in healthcare research. The integration of data preprocessing, model comparison, and visualization within a single programming environment supports transparency and practical deployment in clinical decision-support systems. The alignment between model-derived feature importance and established medical risk factors further reinforces the validity of the analytical framework.

Future research may extend this work by incorporating larger and more diverse patient datasets, exploring advanced learning architectures, and integrating explainable artificial intelligence techniques to enhance clinical trust. The methodology presented in this study provides a scalable foundation for developing data-driven tools that support early intervention and preventive healthcare strategies.

A. Future Work

Several avenues exist to expand and refine this research:

1) Incorporating Larger and Diverse Datasets: Leveraging multi-center or longitudinal healthcare data can improve model generalizability.
2) Deep Learning Models: Exploring neural networks or deep ensemble models may further enhance predictive accuracy.
3) Real-Time Clinical Integration: Developing R-based dashboards or Shiny applications to assist healthcare providers in real-time decision support.
4) Explainable AI: Implementing interpretable machine learning methods, such as SHAP or LIME, to provide transparent predictions for clinical adoption.
5) Multimodal Data: Combining EHR, lifestyle, genetic, and wearable sensor data to improve comprehensive diabetes risk assessment.

In conclusion, this study validates R as a robust platform for healthcare predictive modeling and highlights the potential for early intervention in diabetes management. The methodology and results can serve as a reference framework for similar applications in preventive medicine and chronic disease management.

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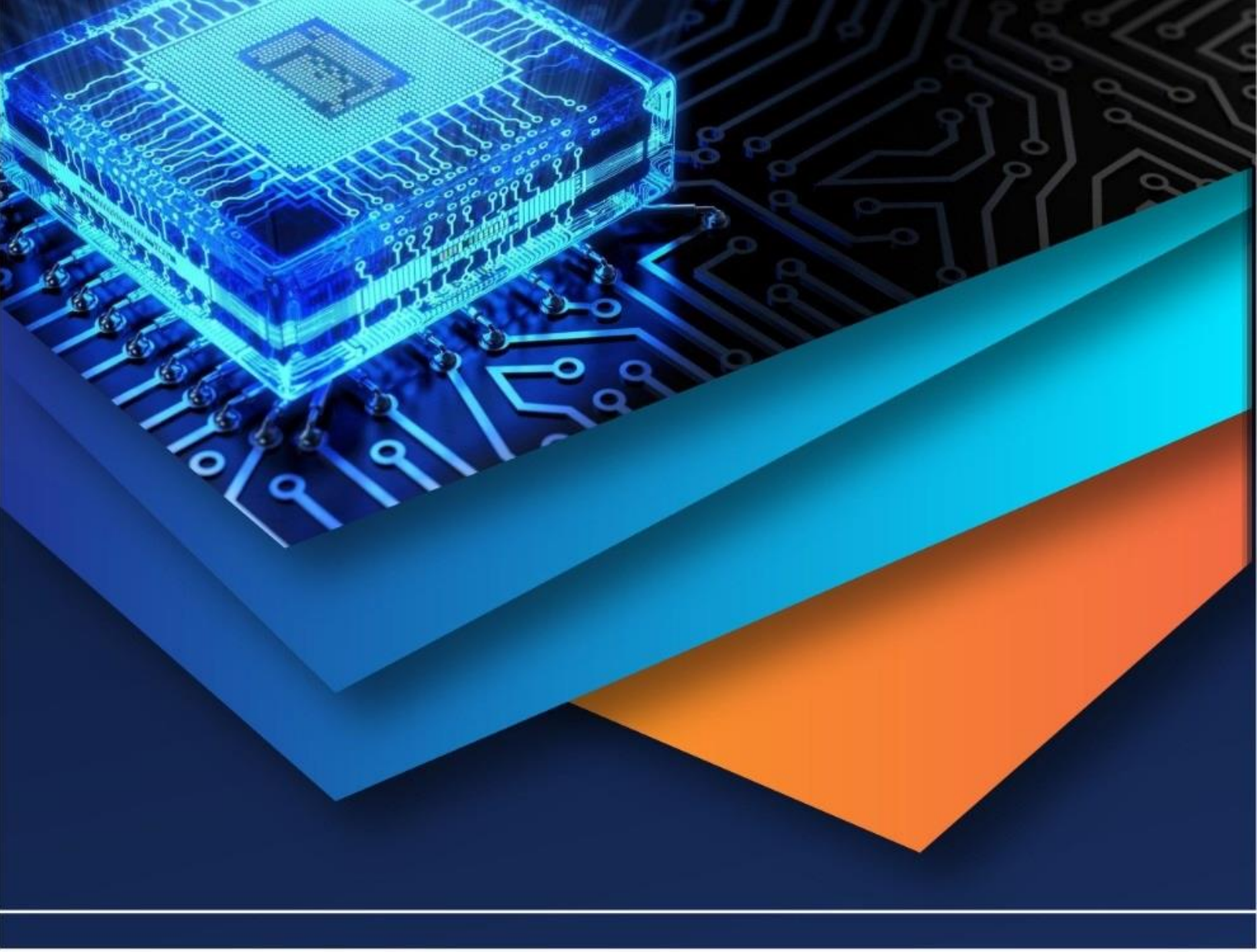

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