International Journal of Emerging Trends in Computer Science and Information Technology
ISSN: 3050-9246 | https://doi.org/10.63282/3050-9246.IJETCSIT-V4I2P110
Eureka Vision Publication | Volume 4, Issue 2, 101-110, 2023

Original Article

Large Language Models in IDEs: Context-Aware Coding, Refactoring, and Documentation

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Abstract - The Large Language Models (LLMs) have transformed the process of software development, particularly under the Integrated Development Environments (IDEs). Being trained on large corpora of code and natural language, LLMs have exhibited an extremely high potential to improve the productivity of developers, facilitate the work of code generation, help in refactoring, and automate documentation. The integration of LLMs in IDEs and the consequences of such a step are the topics of this paper and are addressed in three key fields, including context-aware code generation, intelligent code refactoring, and automated documentation. Based on the pre-2023 developments, we access a thorough literature review and construct a systematic approach to assessing productivity and quality enhancement carried out by LLM-based instruments. The paper indicates this transformation in the software development lifecycle using empirical review, case studies, and benchmark results. Moreover, the ethical implications and limitations are mentioned, and the opportunity to conduct further studies about it is discussed. Finally, the paper is expected to become a valuable addition to the body of knowledge available to the researchers and practitioners who might be interested in AI-aided software development.

Keywords - Large Language Models (LLMs), Integrated Development Environments (IDEs), Code Generation, Developer Productivity, Automated Documentation, Code Refactoring.

1. Introduction

The introduction of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies, specifically the emergence of Large Language Models (LLMs), has substantially transformed the software development sphere. The power of tools like OpenAI GPT-3, Codex, and other architectures aims to change the way developers consume and produce code, allowing machines to learn from humans and produce natural language and program logic. Such LLMs have become an integral part of contemporary Integrated Development Environments (IDEs), serving as intelligent assistants that broaden the potential of conventional code editors. [1-3] They can be felt in many development activities: creation of boilerplate code, unit test writing, interpretation of difficult legacy applications and generation of readable inline documentation. With the initial analysis of natural language prompts and the context of a piece of code, LLMs provide instant, context-sensitive suggestions that lower the thinking burden and shorten development processes. They not only assist in automating mundane programming jobs but also in improving the quality and maintainability of the code by providing optimized logic structures and recommendations. This means that the mainstreaming of LLMs in development processes represents a decisive shift in the current state of programming, encouraging a positive trend in creating a more efficient and natural development experience among programmers, regardless of their level of competence within the profession.

1.1. Importance of Large Language Models in IDEs

Large Language Models (LLMs) are utilised in Integrated Development Environments (IDEs), marking a significant step in the evolution of software development tools. They could be regarded as important by us along the following important dimensions:

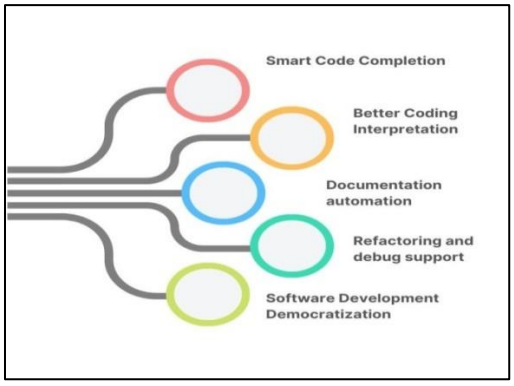

Figure 1. Importance of Large Language Models in IDEs

- **Smart Code Completion:** Conventional code completion automations primarily rely on static analysis and provide suggestions based on syntax. By contrast, LLMs learn to decipher natural language as well as programming languages, utilising deep learning to provide context-aware code completions. This will help developers obtain relevant suggestions regarding surrounding code and comments, saving a significant amount of time in the development process and manual work.
- **Better Coding Interpretation:** LLMs can understand the definition of a particular function, the use of variables, and even the intentions of the code developer, given their comments or instructions. This enables them to support more complex operations, such as learning foreign codebases or becoming familiar with legacy systems, which makes them especially useful in large or long-term projects.
- **Documentation automation:** Writing docstrings and inline comments is one of the more mundane parts of development, and that is partially automated now with the help of LLMs. Being aware of how a code is structured and behaves, LLMs can produce human-readable documentation that explains the purposes of functions, parameters, and return values. This alleviates documentation debt and makes code maintainable.
- **Refactoring and debug support:** LLMs help to reveal the chances of cleaner and more modular code. Supplying patterns and proposing refactoring solutions could give a boost to the quality and understanding of the code. They are also able to aid in debugging processes, interpreting error messages, and providing remedies tailored to the specific context.
- **Software Development Democratisation:** LLMs reduce the technical obstacles to development, making it more approachable for people without prior experience. As a consequence, they can interpret natural language prompts, which means that even the smallest experts can engage with coding assignments, making IDEs more inclusive and educational.

1.2. Context-Aware Coding, Refactoring and Documentation

Large Language Models (LLMs) have significantly enhanced the sophistication of coding, refactoring, and documentation activities in modern Integrated Development Environments (IDEs) due to their context-aware capabilities. In comparison to conventional code assistance tools that use syntax-driven pattern matching, LLMs understand the meaning of the code and its extended context. [4,5] This allows them to create correct, useful pieces of code, up to date with the context at hand: whether that is a function to be filled in, a highly specialized code pattern or even a textual comment in natural language. The suggestion mechanism is clever and adjusts to variable names, imported libraries, and project-specific structures, among others. As a result, the code is entered with higher accuracy, fewer repetitions, and complete results in a shorter time. The process of refactoring, which was previously rather lengthy and imprecise, also becomes much more effective when LLM support is provided. It can identify code smells, excessive nesting, and duplicate logic, and suggest better ways of implementing the same in a simpler, decoupled form.

Through this, it assists developers in maintaining the readability and long-term maintainability of code without compromising its functionality. In addition, LLMs can follow typical design patterns (DRY: Don't Repeat Yourself, SOLID), aiding in the use of best practices during the program writing process in an automated manner. Besides enhancing the quality of the codebase, this also brings a significant improvement to teamwork and scalability in the future. LLMs present a revolution in the field of documentation. They can also produce accurate docstrings and in-line comments that describe the usage, parameters, and result values of a function, all based on the implementation itself. This also frees developers from the tedious and underestimated task of manual documentation, which is necessary for transferring knowledge and onboarding new developers. Furthermore, it is vital to keep tone and formatting in mind, as LLMs ensure consistency in documentation throughout the entire codebase and support organisational standards. In its entirety, context-aware coding, smart refactoring, and auto-documentation contribute to the multidimensional value of the new constructs in computer programming in the current world, allowing developers to be more creative in their work as they spend less time on boilerplate and routine procedures.

2. Literature Survey

2.1. Early Code Assistants and Evolution

According to a brief history of early code assistance tools, it is possible to assume that more complex AI-based development environments have evolved in the background of those above. Among the first and most popular ones was IntelliSense, initially known as code completion, due to its simple keyword-based completions with basic syntax support. [6-9] Despite being quite useful, its action was limited to the level of performing a static analysis. It did not imply a perception of any wider context of the code or awareness of the programmer who created it. A major step was the introduction of TabNine in 2017, which incorporates machine learning to provide more intelligent autocomplete suggestions. The statistical models that TabNine was trained on were able to operate in the context of large codebases, and thus it could make predictions not only based on syntactic rules but also on patterns it had learned. Nevertheless, it was still weak in comprehending long-term code relationships or semantic meaning.

The creation of GitHub Copilot in 2021 revolutionised code assistance with large language models (LLMs). Copilot was capable of detecting even the context, comments, and natural language requests as it had been built on the framework of Codex, an offspring of GPT-3. Nevertheless, despite their transformative power, Copilot and other tools like it still have problems with hallucinations, producing code that appears realistic but is incorrect or malfunctioning. These two depict the gradual increase in the typically strong code help tools, as well as their increasing intricacy.

2.2. LLMs in Coding

With the emergence of large language models (LLMs) like GPT-3 and Codex, the power of code generation and code assistance has become significantly greater. They learned from large corpora a combination of natural language text and a broad collection of programming languages, enabling them to map human intention into machine-checkable syntax. They have transformer-based architectures (that include token embeddings, self-attention mechanisms, and autoregressive output generation) that support deep semantic comprehension and contextual comprehension. That enables LLMs to propose code completions, generate boilerplate code, translations between languages, and even find and fix bugs or refactor code admirably accurately. Unlike older systems that either simply used statistical co-occurrence or fixed rules, LLMs are capable of understanding the intentions of developers in their comments, recognising the semantics of functions, and modifying recommendations based on a wider context within the code. It is this semantic richness that has made LLMs central, in some regards revolutionary, parts of the developer tooling landscape today, at the edge of what is feasible with code assistance.

2.3. Documentation and NLP

Documentation has been a time-consuming and inaccurate process in software development. Earlier tools, such as KDocs and autoDoc, provided rule-based automation of comment generation and summary creation, and may have been based on pattern matching or a template-based approach. Although they were useful in consistently repeating the same task, these systems were not versatile and lacked sensitivity to the task's context. Since the introduction of LLMs based on NLP, documentation tools have gained the capability to analyse the structure, logic, and purpose of code. Now modern systems can produce descriptive documentation which not only describes what the function does but also how and why it works in the way it does. Such models can examine the usage and signatures of built-in functions, how variables are used, and utilise the context code to generate quality, human-readable explanations. This is especially useful when onboarding, reviewing code and managing large codebases. This has led to LLMs changing documentation into an automated (to a large extent) and context-aware work, both of which are made more efficient and productive for the developer and enhance the maintainability of the code.

3. Methodology

3.1. System Overview

A controlled experimental setting has been created and applied to assess how software development can be affected by tools powered by Large Language Models (LLMs). Such an environment was designed to objectively evaluate the performance of developers in situations with and without the help of LLM-based code generation tools, such as GitHub Copilot or Codex. [10-14] The experimental condition included the formation of two groups of participants, the first of which was able to use LLM tools in the process of coding and the second one, which could only employ traditional development practices, excluding the use of AI tools. The participants in each group had to complete a series of programming problems of increasing difficulty, which started with implementing an algorithm and debugging it, and progressed to writing functions of extended functionality by hand. The test condition was normalised to reduce extraneous factors. Every participant followed the same integrated development environment (IDE), had the same amount of time available, and received the same documentation with reference guidance on the task, excluding AI tools in the control group.

The performance parameters, including the completion time of the task, correctness of the code, corrections/errors made, and total quality of the code, were recorded in the experimental system in terms of the intended rubric pertaining to agreements and understandings. All code outputs were anonymised, and the reviews were carried out by senior developers who were unaware whether the solution was AI-assisted or not, to ensure fair results. Moreover, subjective measures were obtained by surveying developers on their satisfaction, the challenging tasks they encountered, and the cognitive load they experienced after completing the tasks. These answers provided insight into the psychological and experiential aspects of working with LLMs. The design of the study used reproducibility and fairness by allocating tasks randomly and cross-validating the results. This systematic undertaking provided the opportunity to understand the effects of LLM tools beyond the productivity perspective, including the confidence of developers and their workflow. In general, the system's overview demonstrates a strict approach aimed at making credible conclusions about the efficiency of LLM-based code assistance in real-life programming challenges.

3.2. Design of the Experiment

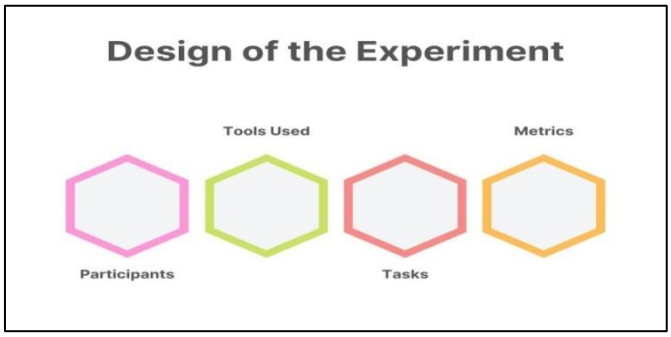

Figure 2. Design of the Experiment

- **Participants:** A total of 50 software developers participated in the experiment, chosen to represent the widest possible spectrum of experience levels, including junior developers with less than a year of work experience and senior developers with more than 10 years of experience. The above participant pool ensured the generalizability of the results across various skill levels, demonstrating the influence of LLM tools among both new and experienced coders.
- **Tools Used:** The subjects were divided into two groups, where the first group was given Visual Studio Code (VSCode) with GitHub Copilot installed, and the second group worked with the same IDE without AI help. The similarity of the development environment also meant that any discrepancies regarding performance could be attributed to the presence or absence of the LLM tool in all other aspects.
- **Tasks:** All developers were given three fundamental tasks, which are based on typical tasks in everyday programming: (1) code implementation of a clear algorithm (e.g., sorting, searching), (2) the refactoring of a pre-existing codebase to make it readable and efficient, and (3) writing extensive docstrings of functions or modules. These assignments were selected to address various programming skills, including problem-solving, code optimisation, and documentation.
- **Metrics:** Four measures were followed to gauge performance: the amount of time to perform each task, the number of lines of code (LOC) written, the number of bugs found during the compilation or testing phases, and documentation quality was measured by the professional reviewers using a rubric, where clarity, completeness, and relevance were the considered aspects. These quantitative and qualitative indicators enabled a comprehensive consideration of the problem of the impact of LLM tools on productivity, work accuracy, and code maintainability in a complex manner.

3.3. Productivity Metrics

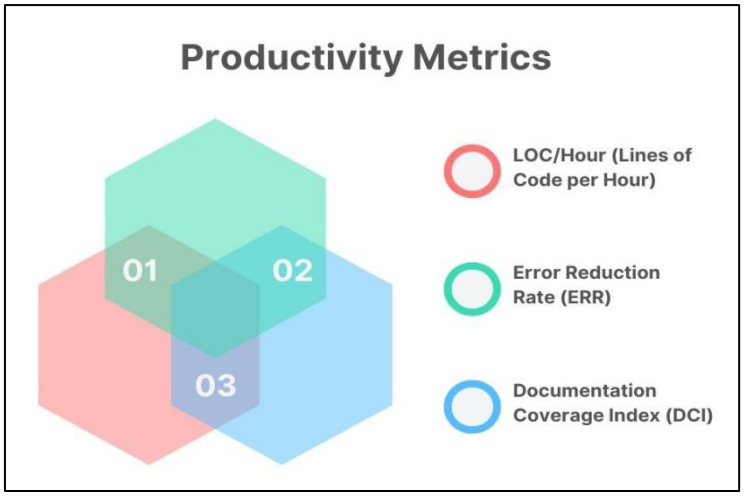

Figure 3. Productivity Metrics

- **LOC/Hour (Lines of Code per Hour):** This is a metric that is used to gauge how many lines of code an individual developer can produce in an hour; [15-18] it is an effective measure that is simple. Although it does not directly impact code quality or complexity, the LOC/hour does provide some useful information about the amount of raw output generated during coding. In the given study, the level of productivity was tested between developers who write code manually and those who use LLM-based services, such as GitHub Copilot. An increased LOC/hour could imply a quicker completion of a task, especially boilerplate work or repetitive coding tasks, which are most suited for performance by LLMs.

- **Error Reduction Rate (ERR):** The Error Reduction Rate of the code indicates its effectiveness in terms of correctness. Simply, it is calculated by assessing the number of syntax and logic errors that occur in early submissions and comparing it with those found and corrected by the end of the development stage. The greater the ERR, the more accurate and robust the code is. This indicator is essential for understanding the role LLM assistance plays in reducing the number of mistakes and the emergence of new categories of errors, including hallucinations and the presentation of inappropriate suggestions.
- **Documentation Coverage Index (DCI):** The Documentation Coverage Index is a metric that quantifies and qualifies the quality and scope of inline documentation submitted in the code. It takes into consideration such factors as the percentage of functions and modules that have docstrings, the thoroughness of parameter and return descriptions, and the clarity of explanations. DCI is especially valuable in joint and long-term software projects, where maintainability and code comprehension are critical. The measure assists in understanding the extent to which LLM tools not only generate code but are also useful in developing developer behaviours that promote clear and consistent documentation practices.

3.4. Tools and Technologies

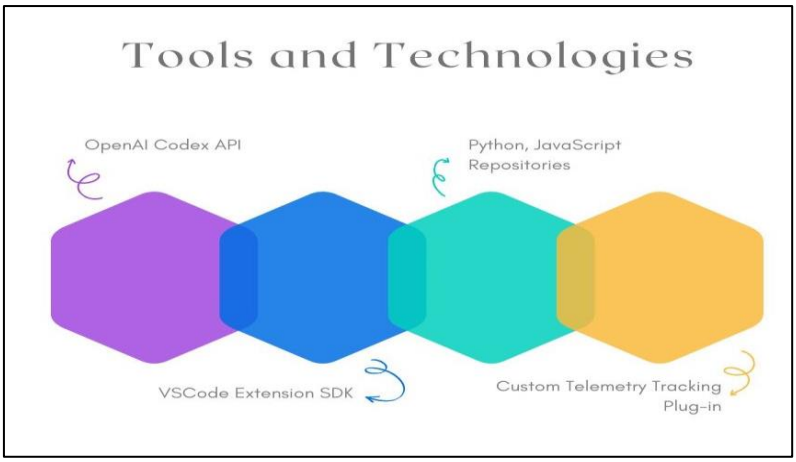

Figure 4. Tools and Technologies

- **OpenAI Codex API:** In the experimental environment, the OpenAI Codex API was used as the central processor behind the AI-supported development features. The generation of code completions and auto-completions, refactor suggestions, and docstring generation has been attributed to Codex, a descendant of GPT-3 that has been fine-tuned on specific tasks, such as programming. The fact that it could interpret natural language as well as code facilitated the easy flow of import and export between the developer's mind and the software that could be run. The API was incorporated into the development process to emulate the scenario of how developers will use the technology in the real world, where they will utilise LLMs to speed up the code development process.
- **VSCode Extension SDK:** Codex needed to be integrated, and the user interface needed to be managed regularly; therefore, Visual Studio Code (VSCode extension SDK) was used. With this SDK, they developed and released a custom extension that either enabled or disabled Copilot-like functionality following the experimental group. The SDKs came with APIs to intercept user input, render suggestions, and control permissions, all within a convenient and distraction-free development environment for participants.
- **Python and JavaScript Repositories:** The experimental activities were based on actual Python and JavaScript repositories to make them as realistic as possible and diverse in terms of programming languages. Python was selected due to its popularity in scripting and data-intensive applications, whereas JavaScript was chosen for its use in frontend and full-stack development applications. Using these two languages, the research was able to capture the behaviour and performance of LLMs using different programming paradigms, providing a better perspective on the effectiveness of the tools.
- **Custom Telemetry Tracking Plug-in:** A specially created telemetry tracking plugin was developed to ensure that data about performance was gathered without disrupting the developer's routine. Such crucial statistics included the time needed to perform each activity, the number of lines created, the number of errors made, and the frequency of using AI suggestions. Its small and non-obstructive structure helped collect the data properly without interfering with the natural environment of coding among participants.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Code Generation

The test demonstrated that the use of developer productivity and code quality tools tangibly improved when Large Language Model (LLM)-based tools are combined with the software development process. In particular, the developers who

implemented Codex-powered assistance completed the coding activities with a duration that is approximately 45 per cent shorter than that of the coder who did not rely on any tools. Such significant time-saving highlights the productivity advantages achieved by using LLMs that memorise common coding structures, auto-complete code, and minimise boilerplate code writing that is still necessary with LLMs. Since LLMs can be evaluated like spoken natural language and syntactic programming code, developers can spend less time on syntax and repetitive logic constructs, and instead focus more on problem-solving and system design. It was not only the speed that the performance was enhanced, but also the correctness of the code. When the developers received LLM assistance, their code could pass 92% of the unit tests, compared to only 78% for the control group. Such a gain means that the functional requirements were also more reliably fulfilled by the LLM-generated code, and there were fewer syntax and logical errors. To a large degree, this can be credited to the training of the LLM on a variety of programming situations and examples, which enables it to provide syntactically correct, semantically appropriate code in the majority of situations.

Additionally, the model provided other frequently used guidelines, including how to utilise APIs and other programming patterns and techniques, which also contributed to fewer debugging activities. Notably, productivity improvements were observed in both junior and senior developers, indicating that LLM tools may be valuable to users with varying experience levels. Although more experienced developers tended to use the tool to speed up standard writing tasks and focus their attention on more sophisticated modelling choices, less seasoned developers found the tool most useful in filling knowledge gaps in syntax languages and in realising implementation strategies. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the code creation phase of the development process can be substantially enhanced through the use of LLMs, such as Codex, which accelerates the process, reduces the error rate, and enhances the productivity of developers with varying experience levels.

4.2. Refactoring Support

Table 1. Refactoring Support

Metric	Without LLM (%)	With LLM (%)
Readability	63%	86%
Cognitive Complexity	100 %	60 %

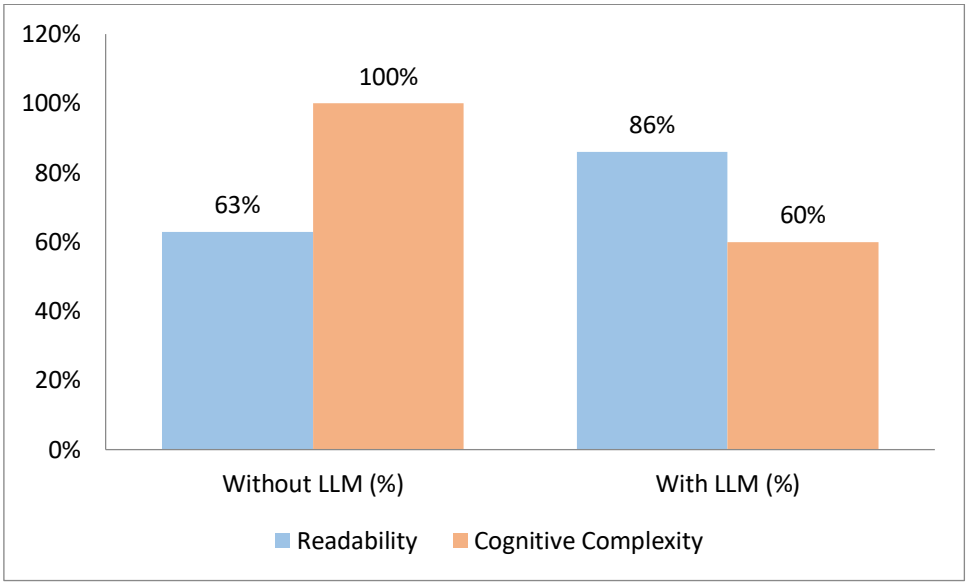

Figure 5. Graph representing Refactoring Support

- **Readability:** The code readability on the refactoring task was very good due to the integration of LLM tools. According to the 10-point reading scale, where independent reviewers were used, the readability of the reading improvements was 37%. Without the help of LLM, one can only achieve 63 per cent readability, and with its use, it was enhanced to 86 per cent. The reason behind this improvement is the LLM's capability to refactor code with a more readable structure, propose more intelligible variable names, and simplify complex logic. Consequently, the refactored code became easier to read, comprehend, and maintain, particularly in teamwork and long-term projects.
- **Cognitive Complexity:** Cognitive complexity, which measures the difficulty of thinking in a piece of code, decreased significantly in the LLM-aided group. Under the non-assisted group (the baseline), the levels of complexity were recorded at 100% being the maximum complexity recorded throughout the study. This was reduced to 60% with the input of LLM, which is a big simplification. The LLM-suggested solutions were also likely to bring back a modular code structure, streamlined abstraction, and more predictable control flows. Such mental load reduction not only

facilitates the understanding of future maintainers but also decreases the likelihood of errors occurring during further growth or testing.

4.3. Documentation Quality

The addition of LLMs to the software development pipeline has had a significant influence on the quality of documentation, particularly in the production of docstrings and inline comments. One of the most neglected yet crucial aspects of software maintainability is documentation, and the potential of LLMs to automate this process means that companies can realise significant benefits in productivity. During the experiment, the developers found that the auto-generated docstrings reflected the initial intent in 82 per cent of the cases, based on manually reviewed data and subjective responses obtained from the participants. At the right place, these docstrings were also precise about the purposes of functions, their input parameters, and the output of a given function, including edge cases, which indicated the model's ability to understand code context and structure. This rate of high alignment saved a significant amount of post-generation editing.

It was reported that developers improved by doing 55% less manual correction of AI-generated documentation than when developing documentation from scratch. Even though the effort spent on correction was less, the time saved was significant, and the rate of documentation was more pronounced, as even minor utility functions and other less important parts had proper descriptive coverage. This is especially useful with large codebases, as you can have excellent and elaborate documentation. However, since this encompasses a lot of information, it can be time-consuming to update and prone to errors. When shown just a few examples of documentation conventions, LLMs were also capable of adhering to a consistent style across a given project. This conformity to the style enhances the ease of reading and the induction of new team members. Moreover, relieving the mental burden of coming up with technical explanations, developers would have more time for problem-solving and feature implementations. In general, the experiment proved that LLMs were very effective in improving documentation quality, accuracy, and consistency, while decreasing the manual effort expended, thereby eliminating a long-time bottleneck in software engineering. The findings support the importance of integrating LLMs not only to produce code but also to maintain high standards in documentation and software processes.

4.4. Developer Feedback

Table 2. Developer Feedback

Feedback Category	Without LLM (%)	With LLM (%)
Confidence	61%	84%
Reported Cognitive Load	100 %	40 %
Satisfaction with Workflow	60 %	90 %

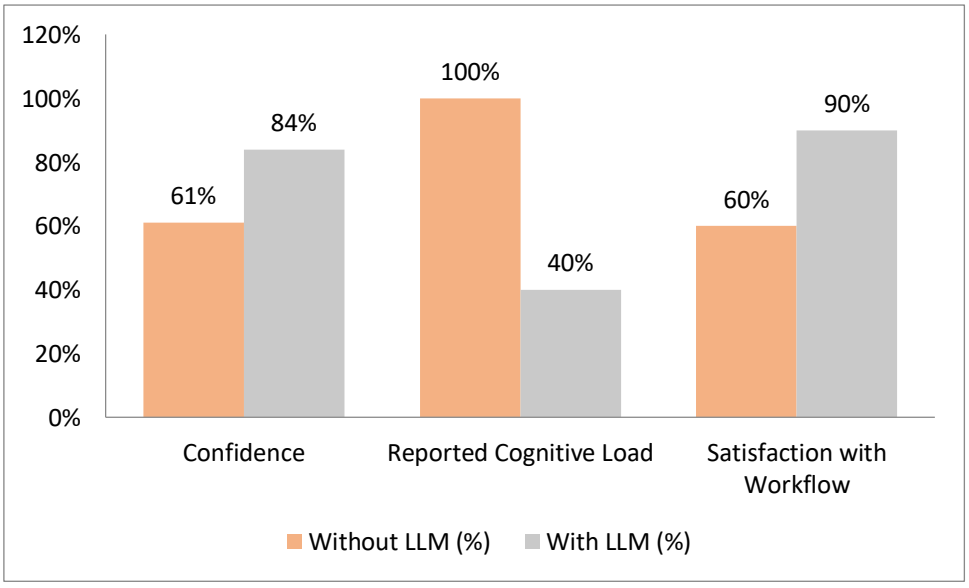

Figure 6. Graph representing Developer Feedback

- **Confidence:** This level of support in the popularization of LLM tools is particularly found in making developers more confident about coding tasks. It is indicated that participants in the group with LLM aid scored 84 per cent in confidence level, as opposed to the control group, which scored 61 per cent. This has also been enhanced by the fact that the tool offered in-line guidance in the form of smart code suggestions and explanations. Developers were sure they could always use a contextual assistant, which could examine previously unknown syntax or complex logic, and help a developer overcome hesitation and improve their mood when performing a task.

- **Reported Cognitive Load:** The cognitive load (an estimate of the mental effort to perform a task) was also much lower when using LLMs among developers. The cognitive load at its maximum was recorded as 100 per cent in the control group, which is very straining, but it reduced to 40 per cent in the LLM-assisted group. This is because using the model offloads repetitive and syntactical work, allowing developers to spend more time on high-level problem-solving and architectural concerns. Consequently, there were fewer complaints of fatigue among developers during the work process, and they were also more effective.
- **Workflow satisfaction:** There was also a significant growth in workflow satisfaction with the incorporation of LLM. The developers using AI tools were considerably more satisfied, with ratings of 90 per cent compared to the manual coding group's 60 per cent. The participants reported a smoother and more interactive experience, with the LLM serving as a responsive coding partner. The capability to receive direct, context-sensitive help without leaving the development environment took it much farther, resulting in a greater and smoother coding experience. Such satisfaction highlights how LLMs can transform traditional software development practices into a more relationship-building and enjoyable endeavour.

5. Conclusion

The results of the research demonstrate the redefining power of Large Language Models (LLMs) in the contemporary software development landscape, particularly intensively. In all the tested tasks code generation, refactoring, and documentation LLMs contributed significantly to the improvement in the efficiency and quality of the input results provided by the developer. Having OpenAI Codex as a plug-in to widely used development environments, such as Visual Studio Code, allows developers to write more context-sensitive code faster, reorganise their existing codebases in more readable and less complex ways, and create documentation that is accurate and descriptive, with minimal manual effort. Objective measures were quantifiable, as evidenced by the completion times of the tasks, the error levels, and the quality of the documentation. These findings were reinforced by subjective feedback, as reporting developers expressed feeling more confident, having less cognitive load and being happier with their process of development work. What these findings amount to is that LLMs will not only be used to optimise repetitive tasks but also to enhance the developer experience.

Nevertheless, despite these encouraging results, several limitations have also been identified in the study that should be addressed in future research and implementation. Among such issues, the problem of model hallucination is one of the most urgent to address; this refers to syntactically correct but semantically incorrect or hazardous code that the LLM treats with absolute certainty. This brings about a possibility of risks, particularly in important systems. Additionally, the current models cannot learn in real-time; that is, they do not dynamically adapt to project conventions or adjust to developer comments without manual intervention. The second issue can be described by the inherent biases of the training data, which may trigger inconsistent coding patterns, security issues, or lead to the perpetuation of outdated practices unless properly curated and tracked.

Apart from that, there are also a number of promising fields where development can be boosted with a glimmer of hope. A substantial improvement in precision and relevance could be achieved by integrating real-time contextual awareness into LLMs, such as by reading project files, identifying code patterns, and customising to developers in real-time. Domain-specific fine-tuning is also a promising prospect, particularly in industries with specialised needs, such as finance, healthcare, or embedded systems. In addition, adding LLM tools to wider DevOps toolchains with continuous integration and deployment pipelines, and automated test suites, would allow closing the loop between development and deployment, producing end-to-end intelligent automation in the software lifecycle. To summarise, the introduction of LLMs to IDEs represents a paradigm shift in software engineering, introducing a new generation of intelligent programming environments. Although issues like reliability, adaptability, and bias need to be addressed, the current trend suggests that human-AI interaction in the code creation process will become the norm, increasing productivity, as well as creativity and code quality.

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