Enhancing Depression Detection via Question-wise Modality Fusion

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Abstract

Depression is a highly prevalent and disabling condition that incurs substantial personal and societal costs. Current depression diagnosis involves determining the depression severity of a person through self-reported questionnaires or interviews conducted by clinicians. This often leads to delayed treatment and involves substantial human resources. Thus, several works try to automate the process using multimodal data. However, they usually overlook the following: i) The variable contribution of each modality for each question in the questionnaire and ii) Using ordinal classification for the task. This results in sub-optimal fusion and training methods. In this work, we propose a novel Question-wise Modality Fusion (QuestMF) framework trained with a novel Imbalanced Ordinal Log-Loss (ImbOLL) function to tackle these issues. The performance of our framework is comparable to the current stateof-the-art models on the E-DAIC dataset and enhances interpretability by predicting scores for each question. This will help clinicians identify an individual's symptoms, allowing them to customise their interventions accordingly. We also make the code¹ for the *QuestMF* framework publicly available.

1 Introduction

Depression is a major cause of disability globally ². Its personal and societal impact makes optimising mental health care practices crucial. Existing diagnostic systems of depression are heavily dependent on clinicians' proficiency in attending to patients' verbal and non-verbal cues, but achieving this expertise requires extensive training (Atzil-Slonim et al., 2024). The growing demand for mental health care services, coupled with a shortage of qualified providers, means that many individuals with depression go undiagnosed and untreated (Kazdin, 2021). Detection of depression severity is crucial, as it can prevent deterioration and enable adequate and effective treatment. Current diagnostic systems have faced criticism for failing to capture the significant heterogeneity and variability of symptoms between individuals (Bickman, 2020). Understanding how different symptoms vary between individuals could lead to more personalised and effective interventions.

A common way to assess depression or track depression throughout a treatment program is based on self-reported questionnaires like PHQ-8 (Kroenke et al., 2009) or BDI-II (Beck et al., 1996). These questionnaires contain questions regarding depression symptoms, and patients need to score each question based on how frequently they encounter these symptoms. The sum of the scores from each question gives the patient's depression severity score. However, such methods burden patients, especially when they are required to complete the questionnaires repeatedly as part of ongoing treatment monitoring (Kazdin, 2008). Thus, to improve the speed and convenience of diagnosing and monitoring depression, efforts are devoted to building depression severity prediction methods through machine learning. Initial works on automatic depression detection focused on using social media data (De Choudhury et al., 2013) for binary depression classification. However, due to the lack of predicting depression severity, such a method is unable to prioritise people with higher levels of depression. So, the task was reformulated as classification among four depression levels (Naseem et al., 2022). However, models trained on social media data are unsuitable for clinical settings (Wongkoblap et al., 2017).

Also, social media data lacks multimodal cues, which are often used by therapists to infer the depression severity of a patient. Depression has identifiable verbal and nonverbal characteristics, such as facial expression (Slonim et al., 2024), prosodic

¹ QuestMF code

²WHO (2023, March 31). Depressive disorder.

information (Cummins et al., 2015; Cohn et al., 2009; Scherer et al., 2014; Paz et al., 2024) and semantic features (Chim et al., 2024). To utilise these cues for depression assessment, the AVEC challenges (Ringeval et al., 2017, 2019) released semi-clinical datasets, DAIC-WOZ (Gratch et al., 2014) and E-DAIC (DeVault et al., 2014), containing recorded interviews and self-reported PHQ-8 questionnaires. These questionnaires help detect symptoms and give more fine-grained depression severity levels.

Various works have tried to utilise the text, audio and video modality from the AVEC datasets and improve the fusion between them (Rodrigues Makiuchi et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2021, 2022; Zhao and Wang, 2022; Ray et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2024) to predict the depression severity score obtained from PHQ-8 questionnaires. However, these approaches only use one fusion module to fuse text, audio, and video information to predict the depression severity score (the sum of the scores for each question in the questionnaire). This design choice results in a failure to model the variable contributions of each modality depending on the questions in the questionnaire, leading to sub-optimal fusion. For example, a question on being fidgety may require more attention to audio-visual modalities. On the other hand, text transcripts may contribute more significantly to a question regarding a person's appetite. While Van Steijn et al. (2022) also perform question-wise modeling, they mainly use text features concatenated with a few hand-crafted audio features. So, they do not utilise the audio and video modalities effectively. Another issue is that the current multimodal methods frame the depression severity score prediction as a regression task, resulting in sub-optimal training. Humans score each question in the questionnaire as 0, 1, 2, or 3, depending on the frequency of the symptoms experienced. Thus, the depression severity prediction task should be framed as a question-wise ordinal classification task.

Contributions: We propose a novel Questionwise Modality Fusion (*QuestMF*) framework for depression severity prediction. This framework contains question-wise fusion modules to ensure different contributions from modalities based on the question. In addition, we propose a novel Imbalanced Ordinal Log-Loss (*ImbOLL*) function to train our models for ordinal classification. We find that our method matches the performance of the current state-of-the-art methods on the E-DAIC dataset and enhances interpretability for clinicians by identifying an individual's specific symptoms. We also analyse the importance of each modality for each question and find that a fusion of text and video modalities performs best in most questions.

2 Background & Related Work

2.1 Single Modality Methods

Earlier works in depression severity prediction focused on the text modality like the use of linguistic feature extraction based on LIWC (De Choudhury et al., 2013), Bag-of-word models (Nadeem, 2016), word2vec embeddings (Husseini Orabi et al., 2018) or using emotion features (Aragón et al., 2019). With pre-trained language models like BERT (Devlin et al., 2019) improving performances on textbased tasks, depression severity prediction works also utilised them (Rodrigues Makiuchi et al., 2019; Fan et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2022). Van Steijn et al. (2022) introduces a framework to predict scores of each question of a PHQ-8 questionnaire to add interpretability, which is missing in the prior works. These methods also ignore the multi-turn dialogue present in therapy sessions. Thus, Milintsevich et al. (2023) introduces a turn-based method that encodes each dialogue turn using a sentence transformer (Reimers and Gurevych, 2019). We use a similar turn-based model to encode the multi-turn dialogue data in each modality. We, however, use multihead self-attention instead of additive attention to improve the model.

With the advent of LLMs in recent times, Sadeghi et al. (2023) uses GPT-3.5-Turbo³ with encoder models for depression severity prediction. However, its performance falls short of the stateof-the-art models. Moreover, data privacy requirements do not allow data to be sent to proprietary LLMs. These issues motivate us to only explore encoder models.

The AVEC challenges introduced the potential to use audio features for depression detection. This resulted in works utilising low-level audio features (Eyben et al., 2016) extracted by OpenSmile (Eyben et al., 2010). Fan et al. (2019) uses CNNs over the low-level features, while Yin et al. (2019) and Sun et al. (2022) use LSTMs to capture the temporal relation among them. However, LSTMs are sub-optimal at processing long sequences. Thus, Sun et al. (2021) uses transformers to process long

³https://platform.openai.com/docs/models/ gpt-3-5-turbo

sequences of audio features. There are also other methods that do not use OpenSmile features but rather use spectrograms (Rodrigues Makiuchi et al., 2019) or audio recordings directly (Han et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2023). However, they are computationally expensive, making them difficult to use for multimodal fusion. Here, we use LSTM over lowlevel features. We break the session into turns and aggregate features at the turn level to make shorter sequences that can be processed using LSTMs.

2.2 Multimodal Fusion Methods

Multimodal methods focus on improving the fusion of the modalities for depression severity prediction. Initial multimodal works used simple concatenation (Rodrigues Makiuchi et al., 2019) or weighted concatenation (Sun et al., 2021) for the fusion of text, audio, and video encodings. Ray et al. (2019) uses attention modules to improve fusion. Some works also use hierarchical fusion at frame level (Yin et al., 2019), word level (Rohanian et al., 2019), or topic level (Guo et al., 2022) to capture the interaction between the modalities at finegrained levels. For further improvement in fusion, MMFF (Yuan et al., 2024) exploits the high-order interaction between different modalities. However, it is computationally expensive. CubeMLP (Sun et al., 2022) uses MLPs to mix information among modalities to enhance the computational efficiency of fusion. However, it results in lower performance. Zhao and Wang (2022) uses Self-Attention GAN to augment training data to reduce the issue of data shortage. They use a cross-attention based fusion strategy (Tsai et al., 2019). We use the same crossattention-based fusion. However, these works use a single fusion module, thus ignoring the variable contribution of each modality according to the question. We use question-wise fusion modules to mitigate this issue.

2.3 Ordinal Classification Methods

Ordinal classification has been explored in tasks like sentiment analysis in Twitter (Nakov et al., 2016; Rosenthal et al., 2017). While depression severity score prediction is also an ordinal classification task, prior multimodal methods (Rodrigues Makiuchi et al., 2019; Milintsevich et al., 2023; Ray et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2024; Zhao and Wang, 2022) treat it as a regression task. As a result, ordinal classification has been rarely explored in depression severity score prediction (Van Steijn et al., 2022). Ordinal classification methods include ordinal binary classification methods (Frank and Hall, 2001; Allwein et al., 2000), threshold methods (Lin and Li, 2006; Verwaeren et al., 2012; Cao et al., 2020) and loss-sensitive classification methods (Rennie and Srebro, 2005; Diaz and Marathe, 2019; Bertinetto et al., 2020; Cao et al., 2020; Castagnos et al., 2022). However, these methods are not suitable for imbalanced datasets. Since very few patients feel a specific symptom very frequently, the distribution of question-wise scores (labels) in depression severity prediction datasets is imbalanced. Thus, we propose Imbalanced Ordinal Log-Loss (*ImbOLL*), a modified version of the OLL function (Castagnos et al., 2022) to handle the data imbalance

In summary, our work is the first to perform question-wise modality fusion and present a loss function for imbalanced ordinal classification of depression severity prediction task. Moreover, we are the first to analyse the contribution of each modality towards the score of each question, thus improving interpretability.

3 Dataset

Multimodal clinical data collection for depression detection is difficult due to privacy issues, thus resulting in small datasets. In this work, we use the E-DAIC dataset from the AVEC 2019 DDS (Ringeval et al., 2019) challenge. While the E-DAIC dataset is also small, to the best of our knowledge, it is the only dataset with more than 200 data points available for research on depression severity prediction. We do not use the DAIC-WoZ dataset since it is a subset of the E-DAIC dataset. Other available datasets are either smaller (Zou et al., 2023) or are not clinically grounded with self-reported questionnaires (Yoon et al., 2022). The E-DAIC dataset collected recorded interview sessions with a virtual agent and filled out self-reported PHQ-8 questionnaires for each participant. All the interviews were conducted in English. The dataset provides text transcripts of participant dialogues, recorded audio clips, and visual features like ResNet, VGG, and OpenFace for each interview session. The recorded videos have not been released due to privacy concerns. The dataset contains 275 sessions. The training set includes 163 sessions, and the validation and test sets each contain 56 sessions. However, one session from the validation and one from the test set have incomplete video feature files. Thus, we do not use them in the evaluation. The dataset

also provides the PHQ-8 scores of all participants. The PHQ-8 score ranges from 0 to 24. While the training and validation sets contain scores for each of the eight PHQ-8 questions (0 to 3), the test split only contains the total PHQ-8 scores. More details on the PHQ-8 questionnaire are provided in Appendix A.

4 *QuestMF* Framework

In this section, we present our novel Question-wise Modality Fusion (QuestMF) framework. In this framework, we use n different single modality encoders for each modality and n different modality fusion models corresponding to n questions (thus question-wise modality fusion) in a questionnaire. Each of the n fused models outputs the score for its corresponding question (0, 1, 2, or 3), ensuring different contributions from each modality depending on the question, which was lacking in previous works. These question-wise scores are added to get the total questionnaire score (0 to 3n). Figure 1 shows the proposed framework. Moreover, the QuestMF framework improves interpretability by predicting the score of each question. This allows clinicians to understand the symptoms affecting a patient and create interventions accordingly. This framework will also enable clinicians to track the progression of each symptom through the questionwise scores throughout the multiple therapy sessions during the treatment.

Moreover, current multimodal methods (Rodrigues Makiuchi et al., 2019; Milintsevich et al., 2023; Ray et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2024; Zhao and Wang, 2022) train the multimodal methods to predict the total depression severity score as a regression task treating it as a continuous variable. However, the question-wise scores belong to 4 classes: 0, 1, 2, 3 depending on the frequency of the symptoms experienced, thus making it an ordinal classification task. Additionally, treating question-wise scores as continuous variables also reduces interpretability as fractional scores like 1.5 can mean experiencing a symptom at the frequency of either score 1 or score 2. Thus, framing the question-wise score prediction as an ordinal classification task ensures improved interpretability as we get the predicted probabilities of the 4 classes: 0, 1, 2, 3 and choose the class with the highest probability. This is also more similar to how humans fill out the questionnaires.

Next, we discuss the single modality encoders



Figure 1: Proposed *QuestMF* framework to predict depression severity score. Here, Qx denotes Question number x in the questionnaire. MLP denotes Multilayer Perceptron, which is used as the classification head. Each question is scored among classes $\{0, 1, 2, 3\}$. These scores are then added to get the total score $\in \{0, 1, 2, ..., 3n\}$.

used in the framework in Section 4.1 and the fusion methods used to combine the single modality encodings in Section 4.2. Finally, we introduce the novel *ImbOLL* function used to train the models for ordinal classification in Section 4.3.

4.1 Single Modality Encoder Models

All the single modality encoder models follow a turn-based method similar to Milintsevich et al. (2023) to better encode the interviews containing multi-turn dialogues. We start by encoding the dialogue turns and then use these turn encodings to generate an encoding for the whole session. The overall structure is uniform across all modalities, as shown in Figure 2. Now, we describe each single modality encoder in detail.

4.1.1 Text Encoder Model

For text, we use the textual transcripts from interview sessions. We break the transcripts into dialogue turns and only consider the dialogue turns from participants. We encode the turns using a pre-trained sentence transformer (Reimers and Gurevych, 2019). Now, we get turn encoding, $X_i \in \mathbb{R}^{tokens_i \times D_{model}}$, where $i \in (1, 2, ..., m)$ for *m* turns, $tokens_i$ is the number of tokens in turn *i* and D_{model} is the model output dimension. Next, we use mean pooling over the tokens and normalise them to get $X_{mean,i} \in \mathbb{R}^{D_{model}}$ (following Reimers and Gurevych (2019)). Then, we



Figure 2: Architecture of single modality encoder models. We use a turn-based architecture to encode multiturn dialogue data.

pass these turn encodings through a Bidirectional LSTM layer. The Bidirectional LSTM layer ensures that the turns can interact among themselves. This gives us $X_{lstm,i} \in \mathbb{R}^{2 \cdot D_{lstm}}$. Next, we use a multihead attention layer to determine the importance of each turn and get an updated encoding $X_{att,i} \in \mathbb{R}^{2 \cdot D_{lstm}}$. We do not add positional embeddings to $X_{lstm,i}$ as the attention layer is only used to get the importance of each turn based on only the turn contents. Next, we concatenate and flatten the turn encodings obtained after the multihead attention layer to get a session-level encoding representation of $X_{session} \in \mathbb{R}^{(2m \cdot D_{lstm})}$. Finally, we pass this session-level encoding through a multilayer perceptron (MLP) to get the score probabilities.

4.1.2 Audio Encoder Model

For audio, we use the low-level features (a set of basic acoustic parameters used for voice research and affective computing suggested by Eyben et al. (2016)) extracted by OpenSmile. Details on the low-level features extracted using OpenSmile are provided in Appendix C. These features are extracted at every 0.01 seconds. Like the text model, we process the information at the turn level. For each dialogue turn *i*, the dataset contains a starting time $t_{start,i}$ and an ending time $t_{end,i}$. We get the features extracted from time $t_{start,i}$ to $t_{end,i}$ and apply mean pooling to get the aggregated features in a turn, $X_{mean,i} \in \mathbb{R}^{D_{Features}}$. Here, $D_{Features}$ is the number of the features extracted by OpenSmile. After this, we pass them through a Bi-LSTM layer and two attention layers to get updated turn encodings. These are concatenated, flattened, and passed through an MLP to get the score probabilities.

4.1.3 Video Encoder Model

For the video encoder model, we use ResNet (He et al., 2016) features. Similar to text and audio, we aggregate information at turn level. For this, we get the ResNet features for the frames in a dialogue turn, i.e., frames in $t_{start,i} * sr : t_{end,i} * sr$, where $t_{start,i}$ is the starting time and $t_{end,i}$ is the ending time of the dialogue turn and sr is the frames rate at which the video is recorded. We pass these ResNet features in a dialogue turn through a mean pooling layer and normalise them to get turn-level encoding $X_{mean,i} \in \mathbb{R}^{D_{ResNet}}$ where D_{ResNet} is the output dimension of the ResNet model. After this, we follow the same architecture as the audio encoder to get the score probabilities.

4.2 Modality Fused Models

For modality fusion, we use cross-attention based late fusion method introduced by Tsai et al. (2019). We do not explore early fusion since late fusion is shown to be better in fusion of text, audio and video modality (Snoek et al., 2005) and also more commonly used over early fusion. The cross-attention layers are sometimes accompanied by $X \rightarrow Y$. This denotes that the encoding of the Y modality is used as the query, and the encoding of the X modality is used as the key and value in the cross-attention layer. Next, we describe the modality fused models in detail.

4.2.1 Two-Modality Fused Models

Figure 3 shows our two-modality fused models. We use the output from the multihead attention layers of the trained single modality encoders as the modality encoding. We use multihead cross-attention layers over these encodings to exchange information among the modalities. Considering modality encodings M1 and M2, we use two cross-attention layers $M1 \rightarrow M2$ and $M2 \rightarrow M1$ for interaction among the modalities. This is followed by a multihead self-attention layer for each cross-attention layer. Finally, we concatenate the encodings from the self-attention layers to get a fused encoding. We flatten this fused encoding and pass it through an MLP to get the score probabilities.

4.2.2 Three-Modality Fused Models

Figure 4 shows our three-modality fused model. We use the output from the multihead attention layers of the trained single modality encoders as



Figure 3: Architecture of two-modality fused models. We use cross-attention layers for interaction among modalities M1 and M2. In cross-attention, $X \rightarrow Y$ denotes that the Y modality encoding is used as the query and the X modality encoding as the key and value.

the modality encoding. Then, we use multihead cross-attention layers to pass information among the modalities. In this case, we have six combinations of query and (key, value) pairs. Now, we accumulate the encoding for each modality with information from the other two modalities. We perform this by concatenating the outputs from two cross-attention layers using the same modality as the query. For example, the audio encoding with information from text and video modalities will concatenate encodings obtained from cross-attention layers $T \rightarrow A$ and $V \rightarrow A$. We pass these encodings for each modality with the information from other modalities through a multihead self-attention layer. Next, we concatenate them to get a combined encoding of all three modalities. Finally, we flatten the combined encoding and pass it through an MLP to get the score probabilities.

4.3 ImbOLL Function

Now, we introduce the novel *ImbOLL* function we use to train our models. The *ImbOLL* function is a modified version of the OLL (Castagnos et al., 2022) function. The OLL function is used to train models for ordinal classification. The OLL function for N classes is defined as:

$$\mathcal{L}_{OLL-\alpha}(P,y) = -\sum_{i=1}^{N} \log(1-p_i) d(y,i)^{\alpha} \quad (1)$$

where y is the actual class, p_i is the predicted probability of class i, α is a hyperparameter and



Figure 4: Architecture of the three-modality fused model. In cross-attention, $X \rightarrow Y$ denotes that the Y modality encoding is used as the query and the X modality encoding as the key and value.

d(y,i) is the distance between the classes y and i which is defined as:

$$d(y,i) = |y-i| \tag{2}$$

The OLL function is based on the principle of penalising a model for bad decisions instead of rewarding good decisions. However, the OLL function is not suitable for imbalanced datasets. The questions of the PHQ-8 questionnaire consist of 4 possible classes according to the frequency of symptoms: 0, 1, 2, and 3. However, very few participants give a score of 2 or 3 to a question as very few patients feel a particular symptom so often. This results in an imbalanced score distribution. To consider this, we introduce weights w(y), which gives a harsher punishment to a model when it makes a wrong decision for a rarer ground truth score. This is inspired by the use of weighted crossentropy loss in imbalanced classification tasks (Aurelio et al., 2019). The weights are defined as:

$$w(y) = \frac{n_T}{n_y} \tag{3}$$

Where n_T is the total number of data points in the training set, and n_y is the number of data points in the training set belonging to class y. Our novel loss function, *ImbOLL*, is defined as follows:

$$\mathcal{L}_{ImbOLL-\alpha,\beta} = -\sum_{i=1}^{N} log(1-p_i)d(y,i)^{\alpha}w(y)^{\beta}$$
(4)

Model	Modalities	CCC(↑)	$RMSE(\downarrow)$	MAE(↓)
Ray et al. (2019)	Text, Audio, Video	0.67	4.73	4.02
Sun et al. (2022) Zhao and Wang (2022)	Text, Audio, Video Text, Audio, Video	0.583 -	- 4.14	4.37 3.56
Yuan et al. (2024)	Text, Audio, Video	0.676	4.91	3.98
Van Steijn et al. (2022)	Text, Audio	0.62	6.06	-
Total QuestMF (MSE)	Text, Audio, Video Text, Audio, Video	0.618 0.620	4.99 5.31	4.03 4.16
QuestMF (OLL)	Text, Audio, Video	0.656	5.17	3.89
QuestMF (ImbOLL)	Text, Audio, Video	0.685	5.32	4.11

Table 1: Results of QuestMF trained with ImbOLL function compared with ablation frameworks and prior works.

where α and β are hyperparameters.

5 Experiments

In this section, we describe the experiments with *QuestMF* and its ablation frameworks. We use the following ablation frameworks:

Total: We train the models with the MSE loss function to predict the total questionnaire score. This framework consists of a single modality encoder for each modality and a single fused model.

QuestMF (MSE): We train the *QuestMF* framework with the MSE loss function.

QuestMF (OLL): We train the *QuestMF* framework with OLL function.

QuestMF (ImbOLL): We train the QuestMF framework with ImbOLL function. This is our proposed framework.

To evaluate the performance of the methods in the depression severity prediction task, we use the standard metrics used in prior works: Concordance Correlation Coefficient (CCC), Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE), and Mean Absolute Error (MAE). CCC is defined as:

$$\rho_c = \frac{2\rho\sigma_x\sigma_y}{\sigma_x^2 + \sigma_y^2 + (\mu_x - \mu_y)^2} \tag{5}$$

Where ρ is the Pearson correlation between variables x and y. σ_x and σ_y are the standard deviations of variables x and y. μ_x and μ_y are the means of variables x and y. We use CCC as the primary metric because it is unbiased by changes in scale and location (Lin, 1989). Psychologists use CCC to assess the agreement between test scores from different raters. It was also used as the evaluation metric for the AVEC 2019 challenge. We also report RMSE and MAE. A higher CCC score is desirable to show that the predicted and actual outputs

correlate well. For RMSE and MAE, a lower value is desired, as it shows a smaller difference between the predicted and the actual output. More details on the metrics are provided in Appendix B. For the *ImbOLL* function, we empirically find the parameters $\alpha = 1$ and $\beta = 0.5$ to be the best. For the OLL function, we find $\alpha = 1$ to give the best results. The detailed results of the experiments with hyperparameters of *ImbOLL* and OLL are presented in Appendix D. To show the robustness of our model, we run our experiments on three different seeds: 42, 100, and 1234. We are the first in this domain to run experiments on multiple seeds. The training strategy, checkpoint selection, and hyperparameter details of the models are provided in Appendix E.

6 Results & Analysis

The results comparing our proposed QuestMF (ImbOLL) framework with its ablations and current state-of-the-art methods are presented in Table 1. Since the prior works only show their best results on a single run, we also pick our best results on CCC for a fair comparison. As we can see, our proposed QuestMF (ImbOLL) framework matches the performance of state-of-the-art models in CCC, the primary metric used to evaluate depression severity prediction tasks. In addition to comparable performance, QuestMF framework provides questionwise scores, improving interpretability over current methods, thus allowing clinicians to design personalised interventions. We also show the robustness of our frameworks over multiple runs, which is not done by the previous works. The mean and standard deviation of the performance over 3 runs are presented in Table 2. We observe that Total and QuestMF (MSE) perform similarly. However, training with ordinal classification objective improves

Model	$\text{CCC}(\uparrow)$	$RMSE(\downarrow)$	$MAE(\downarrow)$
Total	0.602 ± 0.015	$\textbf{5.10} \pm \textbf{0.08}$	3.99 ± 0.05
QuestMF (MSE)	0.602 ± 0.024	5.36 ± 0.24	4.21 ± 0.12
QuestMF (OLL)	0.640 ± 0.018	5.14 ± 0.05	$\textbf{3.88} \pm \textbf{0.01}$
QuestMF (ImbOLL)	$\textbf{0.662} \pm \textbf{0.022}$	5.25 ± 0.08	3.95 ± 0.13

Table 2: Results of QuestMF (ImbOLL) framework over 3 different seed runs compared with ablation frameworks.

the performance, as we can see from the results of QuestMF (OLL). This shows the effectiveness of combining QuestMF with ordinal classification training. Training with our novel *ImbOLL* function further improves the results on CCC. It is also robust, with a standard deviation of 0.022.

Next, we present an ablation study to observe the performance of single modality models, twomodality fused models, and the three-modality fused model with the different frameworks. We present the results in Table 3. For all single modality models and two-modality fused models, we observe that QuestMF (OLL) and QuestMF (ImbOLL) frameworks show better performance than the other frameworks. All the frameworks except QuestMF (ImbOLL) and QuestMF (OLL) show the best performance with only text and video fusion, while the performance drops when all three modalities are fused. This shows that training with an ordinal classification task gives a better optimisation objective. Moreover, we also see that QuestMF (ImbOLL) and QuestMF (OLL) show the best performance gains when adding more modalities. Comparing the results of Text + Audio + Video with the Text models, we observe that QuestMF (ImbOLL) achieves an improvement of 0.047 (Text + Audio + Video (0.662) – Text (0.615)) on CCC and QuestMF (OLL) achieves an improvement of 0.048 (Text + Audio + Video (0.640) - Text (0.592)). Among the regression methods, *Total* achieves the best improvement when comparing the results of Text + Audio + Video with the Text models. However, it only achieves an improvement of 0.011 (Text + Audio + Video (0.602) -Text(0.591)). This further shows that the *QuestMF* (*ImbOLL*) framework improves fusion. Appendix F provides more detailed results for this ablation.

Finally, we analyse the importance of each modality toward predicting the score for each question in the framework. Since we lack fine-grained labels in the test split, we use the validation set CCC for each question in this analysis. A higher

Modalities	Model	$\text{CCC}(\uparrow)$
	Total	0.591
Т	QuestMF(MSE)	0.593
1	QuestMF(OLL)	0.592
	QuestMF(ImbOLL)	0.615
	Total	0.212
٨	QuestMF(MSE)	0.239
A	QuestMF(OLL)	0.264
	QuestMF(ImbOLL)	0.273
	Total	-0.067
V	QuestMF(MSE)	-0.075
v	QuestMF(OLL)	-0.041
	QuestMF (ImbOLL)	-0.052
	Total	0.607
Τ. Δ	QuestMF(MSE)	0.618
T+A	QuestMF(OLL)	0.628
	QuestMF(ImbOLL)	0.643
	Total	0.610
T+V	QuestMF(MSE)	0.627
1 + v	<i>QuestMF</i> (OLL)	0.628
	QuestMF(ImbOLL)	0.659
	Total	0.058
A . X 7	QuestMF(MSE)	0.070
A+V	QuestMF(OLL)	0.139
	QuestMF(ImbOLL)	0.159
	Total	0.602
T + A + V	QuestMF(MSE)	0.602
T+A+V	QuestMF(OLL)	0.640
	QuestMF(ImbOLL)	0.662

Table 3: Ablation results for using different combinations of modalities with different frameworks. Here, T refers to Text, A refers to Audio, and V refers to Video. An addition between the modalities denotes using a fusion of them. The CCC scores presented are the mean over 3 different seed runs.

CCC shows greater importance. The CCC for each question with different modality combinations is shown in Figure 5. From them, we observe:



Figure 5: Validation CCC for each question with different modality models. Here, T refers to Text, A refers to Audio, and V refers to Video. An addition between the modalities denotes using a fusion of them. The video model for question 8 gives the same scores to all data points. Thus, its CCC is not valid and is not shown in the graph.

Q1: Feeling no interest. Text modality gives the best results. This may be because the content of the conversation in the interview is the best indicator to determine loss of interest in hobbies.

Q2: Feeling depressed. Text + Audio gives the best results with very close results from Text + Video and Text + Audio + Video. Audio cues like flat speech and visual cues like sadness or blunted facial expressions might help predict this score. However, a fusion of all three struggles to train due to a small number of training data.

Q3: Irregular sleep. Text + Video gives the best results. Sleep disturbances are often directly reported by individuals, which explains the contribution of the text modality. The video modality contributes since sleep issues can often be observed from posture and general demeanour.

Q4: Feeling tired. Text + Audio + Video gives the best results as tiredness is often visible in a person's face, body language, and way of speaking.

Q5: Irregular appetite. Text + Video gives the best results. A person's appetite can be determined by directly asking them, so the text has the highest importance here. The video also contributes as physical appearance may influence the prediction.

Q6: Feeling like a failure. Text + Audio + Video gives the best results. Acoustic cues like a disappointed voice and visual cues like a saddened face help in the prediction.

Q7: Trouble concentrating. Text + video gives the best results. Visual cues like gaze can be an important factor. Looking away and not making

eye contact may indicate concentration problems.

Q8: Irregularities in moving and speaking. In this case, Text + Video gives the best results, with Text + Audio + Video closely following. Movement can be captured through the video, and irregularities in a speech can be captured from transcripts and audio recordings.

7 Conclusions & Future Work

In this work, we show that our Question-wise Modality Fusion (QuestMF) framework trained with Imbalanced Ordinal Log-Loss (ImbOLL) function improves the interpretability in depression severity score prediction by predicting scores of specific questions. This can help clinicians identify particular symptoms or symptom combinations, enabling them to tailor their interventions to the individual's specific needs. The QuestMF (ImbOLL) framework also shows performance comparable to current state-of-the-art models on the E-DAIC dataset. We also show its robustness over different seeds. Our framework can assist clinicians in diagnosing and monitoring depression and reduce the burden placed on patients in filling out selfreported questionnaires. Additionally, we perform an extensive analysis to understand the importance of each modality for each question in the questionnaire. By releasing the code, we hope to enable future research of this framework on other questionnaires for mental health assessment and on real world longitudinal therapy data.

Limitations

While the question-wise modality fusion framework trained with ImbOLL function offers a solution to considering the variable contribution from modalities based on questions and framing the problem as an ordinal classification task, the data used for training and evaluation are not ideal. While the E-DAIC dataset was released to improve multimodal research in depression severity prediction, the training split only contains 163 sessions. As a result, the trained models are prone to overfitting and high bias and are unlikely to perform well in out-of-distribution data. The validation and test splits also contain only 56 sessions each. As a result, they are far from representing the general population. Moreover, bigger and more diverse datasets are unavailable due to privacy issues. Thus, the QuestMF (ImbOLL) framework is only tested on the E-DAIC dataset, which further constrains testing the generalisability of the model. Thus, the results and analysis obtained in this work need to be verified with bigger and more diverse datasets in the future. Also, the E-DAIC dataset only contains first time interviews of participants with a virtual agent similar to enrolling interviews for therapy and does not contain real therapy session interviews. Real world depression tracking also requires longitudinal data, i.e., multiple therapy sessions with the same participant and tracking changes in depression severity throughout their treatment. Since the E-DAIC dataset does not contain such data, we cannot test the effectiveness of our model in such real world situations.

Another limitation is the language and culture coverage. In this work, we only cover the English language, and the dataset is collected in the US. However, people use different languages to express themselves, and people from different cultures express themselves differently, thus affecting therapy. However, *QuestMF* (*ImbOLL*) could not be developed and tested for such generalisation due to the lack of suitable datasets.

Our focus in this work is to present a more intuitive methodology that considers the variable contribution from modalities according to the question in a questionnaire, frames the task in its true nature of ordinal classification task, gives question-wise scores that can help clinicians design more personalised interventions and analyse the results to understand the contribution of each modality towards the score of each question.

Ethical Considerations

While this work is focused on presenting a methodology and analysis for automatic depression detection, the methods need to be trained on larger datasets to ensure the method's generalisation capabilities. The method should also be assessed for generalisability through clinical trials. Deploying these methods without proper training and assessment through clinical trials could lead to introducing harmful biases in real world situation. Therefore, the framework trained with the E-DAIC dataset may not be used in clinical practice. It requires a broader evaluation and clinical validation before being used in real-world clinical settings.

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A PHQ-8 Questionnaire

In this section, we provide more details regarding the PHQ-8 questionnaire. The PHQ-8 questionnaire consists of the following questions:

- **Question 1:** Little interest or pleasure in doing things.
- **Question 2:** Feeling down, depressed, irritable or hopeless.
- **Question 3:** Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much.
- **Question 4:** Feeling tired or having little energy.
- Question 5: Poor appetite or overeating.
- Question 6: Feeling bad about yourself or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down.
- Question 7: Trouble concentrating on things, such as school work, reading or watching tele-vision.
- Question 8: Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual.

These questions are scored from 0 to 3 based on how frequently the patients encounter them in the last two weeks. The scoring is based on the following:

- Score 0: Not at all
- Score 1: Several Days
- Score 2: More than Half Days
- Score 3: Nearly Everyday

The total score from all the questions is used to determine the depression severity of a patient. A higher score denotes higher depression severity.

B Evaluation Metrics

We use three different evaluation metrics for evaluation in this paper, which are elaborated below: • Concordance Correlation Coefficient (CCC): CCC is a correlation based metric. It varies from -1 to 1. A CCC of -1 between predicted values and actual values means the two variables are opposite. A CCC of 1 means they are identical, and 0 means they are not correlated. Thus, a higher CCC is desirable. CCC is defined as follows:

$$\rho_c = \frac{2\rho\sigma_x\sigma_y}{\sigma_x^2 + \sigma_y^2 + (\mu_x - \mu_y)^2} \qquad (6)$$

where ρ is the pearson correlation between variables x and y. σ_x and σ_y are the standard deviations of variables x and y. μ_x and μ_y are the means of variables x and y.

• Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE): RMSE is a standard metric used in regression problems. It varies from 0 to ∞. A lower RMSE is desirable. It is defined as follows:

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \|y(i) - x(i)\|^2} \quad (7)$$

• Mean Absolute Error (MAE): Mean Absolute error is another standard metric used in the evaluation of regression problems. It varies from 0 to ∞. It is defined as follows:

$$MAE = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \|y(i) - x(i)\|$$
(8)

C OpenSmile Low-level Features

Here, we provide more details about the low-level features extracted by OpenSmile, which are used in our experiments.

C.1 Frequency related parameters

Pitch: Logarithmic F0 on a semitone frequency scale, starting at 27.5 Hz. A semitone is the smallest music interval and is considered the most dissonant when sounded harmonically.

Jitter: Jitter measures the cycle-to-cycle variations of the fundamental frequency. It is a measure of frequency variability compared to the person's fundamental frequency.

Formant 1, 2, and 3 frequency: Centre frequency of first, second, and third formant. Formants are distinctive frequency components of the acoustic signal produced by speech. They are used to identify vowels.

Formant 1 Bandwidth: Bandwidth of the first formant. The formant bandwidth affects the identification of vowels in competition with other vowels.

C.2 Energy/Amplitude related parameters

Shimmer: Shimmer measures the cycle-to-cycle variations of fundamental amplitude. The shimmer changes with the reduction of glottal resistance and mass lesions on the vocal cords and is correlated with the presence of noise emission and breathiness.

Loudness: an estimate of perceived signal intensity from an auditory spectrum.

Harmonics-to-noise ratio: Relation of energy in harmonic components to energy in noise-like components. HNR quantifies the relative amount of additive noise.

C.3 Spectral Parameters

Alpha Ratio: Ratio of the summed energy from 50-1000 Hz and 1-5 kHz.

Hammarberg Index: Ratio of the strongest energy peak in the 0-2 kHz region to the strongest peak in the 2–5 kHz region.

Spectral Slope 0-500 Hz and 500-1500 Hz: Linear regression slope of the logarithmic power spectrum within the two given bands.

Formant 1, 2, and 3 relative energy: The ratio of the energy of the spectral harmonic peak at the first, second, and third formant's centre frequency to the energy of the spectral peak at F0.

MFCC 1-4: Mel-Frequency Cepstral Coefficients 1-4.

Spectral flux: Difference of the spectra of two consecutive frames.

D *ImbOLL* and OLL parameters

Here, we show the experiments conducted to determine the optimal values for α and β for our *ImbOLL* function presented in equation 4. We experiment with $\alpha \in \{1, 1.5, 2\}$ and $\beta \in \{0.5, 1\}$. The results are shown in Table 4.

From Table 4, we see that $\alpha = 1$ gives the best results. Both $\beta = 0.5$ and $\beta = 1$ give similar results on mean performance. However, $\beta = 0.5$ gives a lower standard deviation. Thus, we choose the value of $\alpha = 1$ and $\beta = 0.5$ for training *QuestMF*.

We also experiment with the hyperparameters of the OLL function presented in equation 1. We experiment with $\alpha \in \{1, 1.5, 2\}$, and the results are presented in Table 5. From the table, we see

α	β	Validation CCC([†])
1	0.5 1	0.654 ± 0.014 0.653 ± 0.022
1.5	0.5 1	$\begin{array}{c} 0.639 \pm 0.026 \\ 0.516 \pm 0.024 \end{array}$
2	0.5 1	$\begin{array}{c} 0.610 \pm 0.038 \\ 0.422 \pm 0.024 \end{array}$

Table 4: ImbOLL experiments

α	Validation CCC([†])
1	$\textbf{0.659} \pm \textbf{0.024}$
1.5	$\textbf{0.655} \pm \textbf{0.012}$
2	0.645 ± 0.014

Table 5: OLL experiments

that $\alpha = 1$ and $\alpha = 1.5$ give good results. While $\alpha = 1$ gives slightly better mean performance, $\alpha = 1.5$ gives a lower standard deviation. So, we train *QuestMF* with both $\alpha = 1$ and $\alpha = 1.5$. The results are presented in Appendix F. From that, we observe that OLL with $\alpha = 1$ gives the best result on the three-modality fused model. Thus, only this result is presented in Section 6.

E Hyperparameter Details and Training Setup

This section presents the hyperparameters used in the single modality and fused two-modality and three-modality models. We use a maximum of 120 participant dialogue turns for all our experiments.

Single Modality Encoder Models: For the single modality models, we first experiment to find the best Bi-LSTM output dimensions. We experiment with hidden dimensions of $d \in 30, 50, 100$. Due to the computational expenses, we only experimented with the text encoder model and extended the same output dimensions to audio and video encoder models. The results of this experiment are presented in Table 6 for the QuestMF framework trained with the ImbOLL function. The results of QuestMF framework trained with OLL with $\alpha = 1$ are presented in Table 7 and with OLL with $\alpha = 1.5$ are shown in Table 8. The results of QuestMF framework trained with the MSE loss function are presented in Table 9 and results of the Total framework are presented in Table 10. The tables show that a Bi-LSTM hidden dimension of 50 works best for all frameworks. For the multi-

Output Dimension	Validation CCC(↑)
30	0.639 ± 0.027
50	$\textbf{0.654} \pm \textbf{0.014}$
100	0.647 ± 0.004

Table 6: Results of experiments with LSTM output dimension for *QuestMF* Framework trained with *ImbOLL* function

Output Dimension	Validation CCC(↑)
30	0.622 ± 0.047
50	$\textbf{0.659} \pm \textbf{0.024}$
100	0.639 ± 0.038

Table 7: Results of experiments with LSTM output dimension for *QuestMF* Framework trained with OLL function with $\alpha = 1$

head attention layer, we use 4 attention heads and a dropout of 0.5 for the text encoder model for all frameworks. For the audio and video encoder models, we use two multihead attention layers with 4 attention heads and a dropout of 0.2 in all frameworks. The MLP in all single modality encoder models and frameworks consists of two linear layers with a hidden dimension of 256, and the ReLU activation function connects the linear layers. A dropout of 0.2 is applied before each linear layer.

For the training of the single modality encoders, we use a learning rate of 5×10^{-4} with AdamW optimiser and a batch size of 10 for all modalities. During training, we freeze the turn encoders and only train the Bi-LSTM layer, attention layer, and MLP. Since the text models fit faster, we train them for 20 epochs. Meanwhile, we train the audio and video models for 50 epochs. We select the model checkpoint with the lowest validation loss for further modality fusion training. To evaluate the models on the depression severity score prediction task, we select the checkpoint with the best validation CCC.

Two-Modality Fused Models: We follow the architecture shown in Figure 3 for the fusion of two modalities. We use 4 heads and a dropout of 0.8 for multihead cross-attention and self-attention layers. We use the very high dropout to reduce overfitting due to the small size of the training dataset. The MLP consists of two linear layers with a hidden dimension of 256. The linear layers are connected through the ReLU activation function. We apply a dropout of 0.8 before the first linear layer and a dropout of 0.5 before the last linear layer. We use a

Output Dimension	Validation CCC(↑)
30	0.609 ± 0.028
50	$\textbf{0.655} \pm \textbf{0.012}$
100	0.616 ± 0.015

Table 8: Results of experiments with LSTM output dimension for *QuestMF* Framework trained with OLL function with $\alpha = 1.5$

Output Dimension	Validation CCC([†])
30	0.554 ± 0.022
50	$\textbf{0.632} \pm \textbf{0.024}$
100	0.602 ± 0.008

Table 9: Results of experiments with LSTM outputdimension for QuestMF Framework trained with MSEloss function

Output Dimension	Validation CCC(↑)
30	0.588 ± 0.015
50	$\textbf{0.614} \pm \textbf{0.010}$
100	0.610 ± 0.012

Table 10: Results of experiments with LSTM output dimension for *Total* Framework

smaller dropout before the last linear layer to avoid underfitting.

For the training of a two-modality fusion encoder, we use a learning rate of 5×10^{-4} with AdamW optimiser and a batch size of 10. If the text modality is involved in the two-modality fusion model, we freeze the weights from the text encoder model while we train the weights in the audio or video encoder models during the fusion. This is because the text model fits the data quickly, so training the weights of the other model with the frozen text model helps information alignment across the modalities and improves their encodings. Another reason is that training the parameters of all single modality encoder models with the small training set would increase the chances of overfitting. In addition to this, we train the cross-attention layers and self-attention layers used for fusion and the MLP. We train the models for 20 epochs. We select the model checkpoint with the best validation CCC.

Three-Modality Fused Models: We follow the architecture shown in Figure 4 for the fusion of three modalities. We use 4 heads and a dropout of 0.8 in multihead cross-attention and self-attention layers. We use an MLP of two linear layers with a hidden dimension of 256. The linear layers are

connected through the ReLU activation function. We apply a dropout of 0.8 before the first linear layer and a dropout of 0.5 before the last linear layer.

For the training of the three-modality fused model, we use a learning rate of 5×10^{-4} with AdamW optimiser and a batch size of 10. While training three-modality fused models, we freeze the weights from the text model and train the weights of the audio and video models along with the crossattention and self-attention layers used for fusion, and the MLP. We train the fusion for 20 epochs. We select the model checkpoint with the best validation CCC.

F Ablation Details

Here, we show more detailed results of our ablation study to observe the performance of single modality models, two-modality fused models, and the three-modality fused model with the frameworks. Here, we show the RMSE and MAE along with CCC results. We also show the standard deviation along with the mean for the three different seed runs. For *QuestMF* (OLL), we have two different frameworks here:

QuestMF (OLL-1): We train the QuestMF framework with OLL function with $\alpha = 1$.

QuestMF (OLL-1.5): We train the QuestMF framework with OLL function with $\alpha = 1.5$.

We present the results in Table 11.

Modalities	Framework	$\text{CCC}(\uparrow)$	$RMSE(\downarrow)$	MAE(↓)
Text	Total	0.591 ± 0.031	5.51 ± 0.38	4.37 ± 0.30
	QuestMF (MSE)	0.593 ± 0.020	5.52 ± 0.09	4.33 ± 0.06
	QuestMF (OLL-1)	0.592 ± 0.025	5.77 ± 0.31	4.53 ± 0.22
	QuestMF (OLL-1.5)	$\textbf{0.616} \pm \textbf{0.019}$	$\textbf{5.22} \pm \textbf{0.07}$	$\textbf{4.02} \pm \textbf{0.07}$
	QuestMF (ImbOLL)	0.615 ± 0.031	5.71 ± 0.25	4.36 ± 0.26
	Total	0.212 ± 0.017	6.41 ± 0.15	5.27 ± 0.09
Audio	QuestMF (MSE)	0.239 ± 0.012	$\textbf{6.35} \pm \textbf{0.09}$	$\textbf{5.14} \pm \textbf{0.03}$
Audio	QuestMF (OLL-1)	0.264 ± 0.008	6.96 ± 0.46	5.42 ± 0.20
	QuestMF (OLL-1.5)	0.256 ± 0.023	6.90 ± 0.21	5.36 ± 0.14
	QuestMF (ImbOLL)	$\textbf{0.273} \pm \textbf{0.021}$	6.67 ± 0.11	5.32 ± 0.05
	Total	-0.067 ± 0.009	8.21 ± 0.07	6.63 ± 0.04
Video	QuestMF (MSE)	-0.075 ± 0.007	7.97 ± 0.05	6.46 ± 0.04
VILLEO	QuestMF (OLL-1)	$\textbf{-0.041} \pm \textbf{0.015}$	7.91 ± 0.20	6.44 ± 0.18
	QuestMF (OLL-1.5)	-0.044 ± 0.026	$\textbf{7.79} \pm \textbf{0.19}$	$\textbf{6.33} \pm \textbf{0.16}$
	QuestMF (ImbOLL)	-0.052 ± 0.028	7.89 ± 0.12	6.44 ± 0.11
	Total	0.607 ± 0.020	$\textbf{5.27} \pm \textbf{0.28}$	$\textbf{4.12} \pm \textbf{0.23}$
Text + Audio	QuestMF (MSE)	0.618 ± 0.017	5.61 ± 0.31	4.42 ± 0.18
Ical + Audio	QuestMF (OLL-1)	0.628 ± 0.013	5.44 ± 0.04	4.17 ± 0.04
	QuestMF (OLL-1.5)	0.622 ± 0.004	5.53 ± 0.07	4.27 ± 0.06
	QuestMF (ImbOLL)	$\textbf{0.643} \pm \textbf{0.024}$	5.48 ± 0.27	4.21 ± 0.14
	Total	0.610 ± 0.008	$\textbf{5.13} \pm \textbf{0.19}$	4.02 ± 0.17
Text + Video	QuestMF (MSE)	0.627 ± 0.021	5.19 ± 0.16	3.99 ± 0.05
	QuestMF (OLL-1)	0.628 ± 0.006	5.34 ± 0.07	4.04 ± 0.20
	QuestMF (OLL-1.5)	0.630 ± 0.039	5.23 ± 0.31	4.05 ± 0.30
	QuestMF (ImbOLL)	$\textbf{0.659} \pm \textbf{0.018}$	5.22 ± 0.09	$\textbf{3.92} \pm \textbf{0.08}$
	Total	0.058 ± 0.030	7.35 ± 0.10	5.86 ± 0.11
Audio + Video	QuestMF (MSE)	0.070 ± 0.011	7.35 ± 0.21	5.81 ± 0.16
Audio + video	QuestMF (OLL-1)	0.139 ± 0.016	7.07 ± 0.11	5.69 ± 0.08
	QuestMF (OLL-1.5)	0.080 ± 0.047	7.42 ± 0.19	6.02 ± 0.20
	QuestMF (ImbOLL)	$\textbf{0.159} \pm \textbf{0.039}$	$\textbf{7.03} \pm \textbf{0.18}$	$\textbf{5.67} \pm \textbf{0.25}$
	Total	0.602 ± 0.015	$\textbf{5.10} \pm \textbf{0.08}$	3.99 ± 0.05
Text + Audio + Video	QuestMF (MSE)	0.602 ± 0.025	5.36 ± 0.24	4.21 ± 0.12
$1 \in \lambda i + Audio + video$	QuestMF (OLL-1)	0.640 ± 0.018	5.14 ± 0.05	$\textbf{3.88} \pm \textbf{0.01}$
	QuestMF (OLL-1.5)	0.599 ± 0.023	5.30 ± 0.22	4.06 ± 0.25
	QuestMF (ImbOLL)	$\textbf{0.662} \pm \textbf{0.022}$	5.25 ± 0.08	3.95 ± 0.13

Table 11: Ablation results for using different combinations of modalities with different frameworks. The CCC, RMSE and MAE scores presented are the mean and standard deviation over 3 different seed runs.