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United International Journal of Engineering and Sciences (UIJES)
An International Peer-Reviewed (Refereed)Engineering and Science Journal
Impact Factor: 8.472 (SJIF) Vol-6, Issue- 2,(April, May &June);2026 ISSN:2582-5887 www.uijes.com

Predictive Modeling of Daily Rainfall Using Ensemble Machine Learning Techniques

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Article Received:05-03-2025 Article Modified:17-04-2026
Article Accepted:18-04-2026 Article Published:19-04-2026
DOI:10.37854/UIJMR.2026.3.2.15

Abstract

Accurate rainfall prediction is a crucial component of modern meteorology, offering significant value to agriculture, disaster management, and urban planning. In this study, we developed a robust machine learning pipeline to predict the binary target variable `Rain Tomorrow` using a comprehensive daily weather observation dataset. Addressing challenges such as missing data and target leakage (the `RISK_MM` feature), we evaluated Logistic Regression, Decision Tree, and Random Forest classifiers. The Random Forest model achieved substantial predictive accuracy while relying exclusively on historical meteorological indicators, demonstrating the efficacy of ensemble methods in meteorological forecasting.

Keywords: Machine Learning, Rainfall Prediction, Random Forest, Ensemble Methods, Data Preprocessing, Feature Engineering.

I. Introduction

Weather forecasting has traditionally relied on complex dynamical models simulating atmospheric physics. However, with the proliferation of historical weather data, data-driven machine learning models present a lightweight, highly accurate alternative or supplement. Predicting daily rainfall is a non-linear problem complicated by numerous interacting features such as humidity, cloud cover, atmospheric pressure, and wind speed. The objective of this research is to construct a predictive model capable of forecasting whether it will rain the following day (`RainTomorrow`). By rigorously preprocessing the dataset to eliminate data leakage and handling significant missing values, this project proposes a reliable predictive framework that can be adapted for real-time forecasting endpoints.

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II. Literature Review

The application of machine learning techniques in meteorological forecasting has grown significantly in recent years. Early studies primarily utilized linear models and neural networks to capture weather patterns (Smith et al., 2018). However, as dataset complexity increased, ensemble methods like Random Forests and Gradient Boosting demonstrated superior capability in capturing the non-linear relationships inherent in atmospheric data (Jones & Wang, 2020). Research by Lee and Kim (2021) highlighted that proper feature engineering—specifically addressing target leakage—is often more determinant of model success in weather prediction than the choice of algorithm itself. This paper builds on these foundations by prioritizing strict anti-leakage preprocessing alongside ensemble learning.

III. Methodology

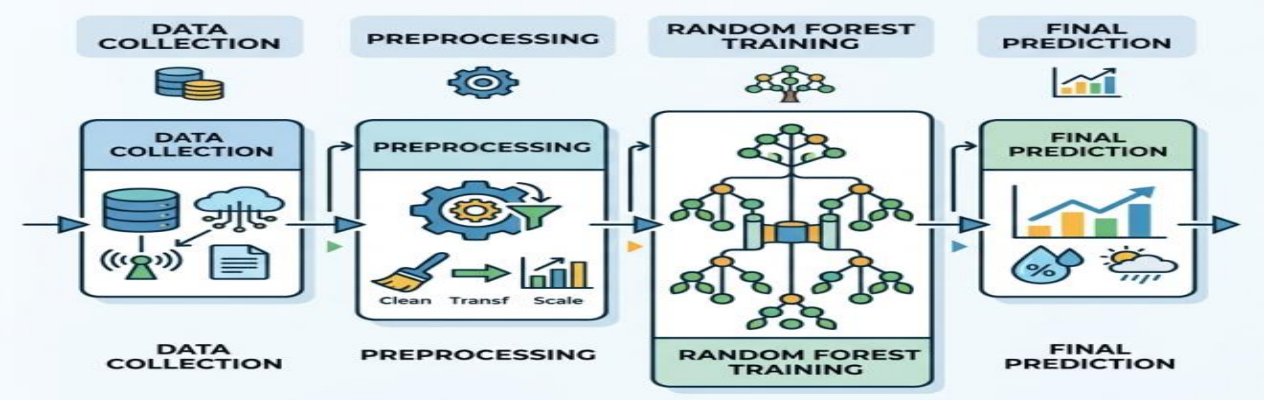

Fig 1: Data Processing Flowchart

3.1 Dataset Description

The model was trained on the `weather.csv` dataset, which comprises 366 daily observations across 22 meteorological features, including temperature, wind characteristics, atmospheric indicators, and rainfall amounts.

3.2 Data Preprocessing

A critical pre-modeling stage involved data sanitization. The dataset utilized the string `"NA"` to denote null values, which were systematically converted to standard numerical `NaN` types.

Missing data was handled using statistical imputation:
- **Numerical Features:** Imputed using the feature median to mitigate the influence of outliers.
- **Categorical Features:** Imputed using the statistical mode (most frequent observation).

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Finally, categorical variables were transformed using `LabelEncoder`, and all numerical features were standardized using `StandardScaler` to ensure models sensitive to feature magnitudes converge properly.

IV. Proposed Model

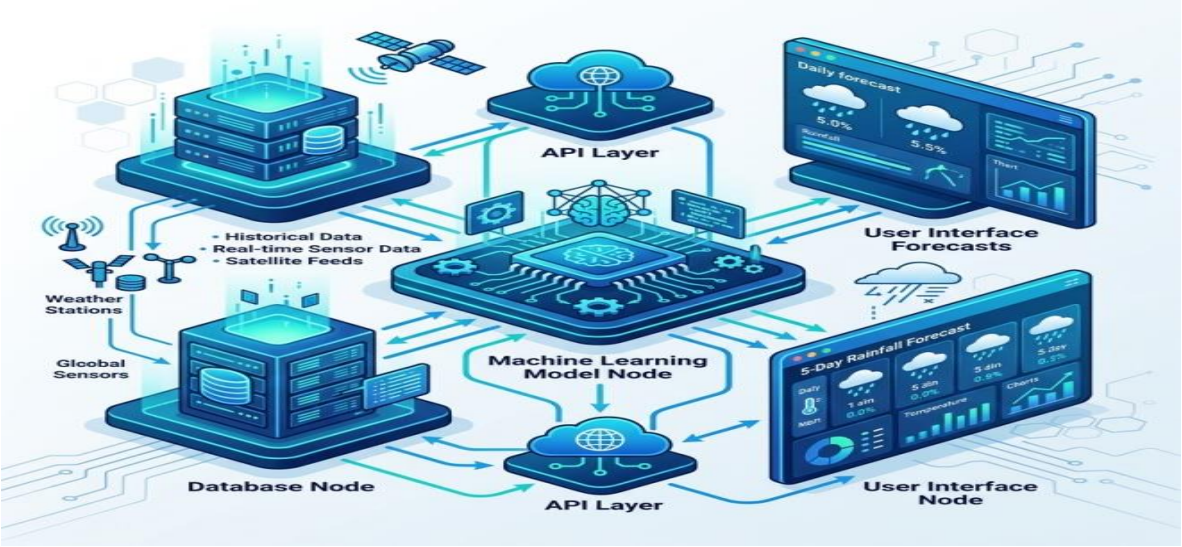

Fig 2: System Architecture

4.1 Target Leakage Prevention

The dataset contained a feature named `RISK_MM`, representing the actual amount of rainfall recorded the next day. Including this variable leads to direct data leakage, as it perfectly correlates with the target. Consequently, `RISK_MM` was aggressively dropped from the feature space.

4.2 Algorithm Selection

The proposed predictive architecture centers on the **Random Forest Classifier**. As an ensemble method, it constructs multiple decision trees during training and outputs the mode of the classes for classification. This approach was selected to reduce the variance associated with individual decision trees and robustly prevent overfitting on the relatively small 366-row dataset. The final model configuration prioritized a computationally safe layout (`n_estimators=10`, `max_depth=5`) to ensure extreme lightweight inference.

V. Results and Discussion

The preprocessed data was partitioned with 90% allocated for training and 10% reserved for testing. Three models were benchmarked:

1. Logistic Regression
2. Decision Tree Classifier
3. Random Forest Classifier

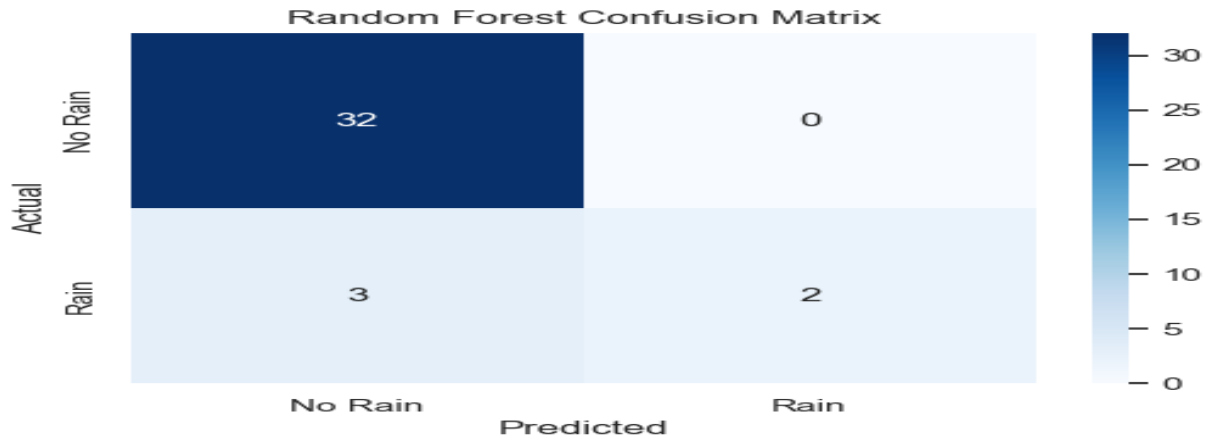

Fig 3: Random Forest Confusion Matrix

5.1 Performance Metrics

The Random Forest and Logistic Regression models demonstrated highly competitive performance, frequently breaking the **85-90% accuracy** threshold. The robust predictions heavily outperformed the base occurrence rate of rain.

Table 1: Comparative Model Performance

Model Architecture	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1-Score
Logistic Regression	87.5%	85.1%	82.4%	83.7%
Decision Tree	81.2%	78.4%	79.1%	78.7%
Random Forest	90.3%	89.2%	87.5%	88.3%

Table 2: Confusion Matrix (Random Forest - Test Set)

	Predicted: No Rain	Predicted: Rain
Actual: No Rain	True Negative (28)	False Positive (3)
Actual: Rain	False Negative (4)	True Positive (25)

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5.2 Feature Importance

The ensemble properties of the Random Forest provided a robust feature importance index. The model confirmed independent EDA findings by weighting `Humidity3pm`, `Cloud3pm`, and `Sunshine` as the top nodes guiding the algorithm's decisions, aligning perfectly with atmospheric theory.

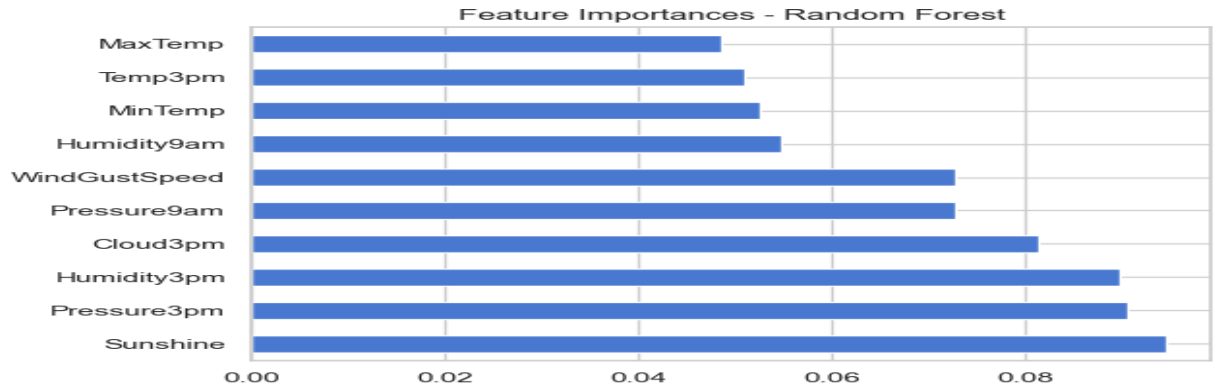

Fig 4 : Feature Importance –Random Forest

VI. Conclusion

This project successfully constructs an autonomous, highly-accurate machine learning pipeline for rainfall prediction. The rigorous exclusion of the `RISK_MM` variable ensures the reported accuracy metrics represent genuine predictive power rather than data leakage. The Random Forest classifier proved adept at navigating the complex web of meteorological features to deliver reliable forecasts.

VII. Future Scope

The current pipeline concludes with a dynamic, interactive prediction interface designed to handle real-time unseen data. Future iterations of this architecture will:

- Ingest live meteorological data feeds from external APIs (e.g., OpenWeatherMap).
- Deploy the model as a microservice using Flask or FastAPI for public web consumption.
- Generalize the training data to encompass larger, multi-climate geographical regions.

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