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A Systematic Framework for Water Quality Classification Using Deep Neural Networks

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ABSTRACT: Efficient water quality monitoring is critical for environmental sustainability and public health, but traditional laboratory testing methods suffer from scalability and timeliness limitations. This study proposes a novel AI-driven framework to address these challenges by systematically designing and screening machine learning models suitable for water quality classification. The framework integrates three phases of data preprocessing, model training, and performance validation to optimize the effectiveness of model deployment in different monitoring scenarios. The study employs four architectures, Random Forest, XGBoost, Deep Neural Network (DNN) and Transformer, which are evaluated on three heterogeneous datasets by accuracy, recall and F1 score. The experimental results show that the deep neural network achieves optimal performance (maximum accuracy of 0.968, recall of 0.786, and F1 score of 0.846) on the two datasets by virtue of its hierarchical structure and automated feature extraction capability. This study reveals the adaptability of DNN to the complex spatio-temporal patterns of water quality data, providing a reliable solution for real-time monitoring.

KEY WORDS: Water quality classification, Deep Neural Network, Model selection, Data preprocessing, Artificial intelligence framework.

I. INTRODUCTION

Effective water quality monitoring is essential for environmental protection and public health safeguards. Traditional methods rely heavily on labor-intensive laboratory analyses with limited scalability and lagging response times, often struggling to cope with the dynamically changing nature of water quality issues. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionized the field, significantly improving the efficiency and accuracy of water quality assessments by introducing automated real-time classification capabilities.

The development of AI in the field of water quality classification has gone through different stages of evolution: it started in the 1990s with basic machine learning techniques such as artificial neural networks and support vector machines [1][5], and by the end of the 2010s it had evolved to complex deep learning architectures such as convolutional neural networks and recurrent neural networks [6]-[9]. These technological advances have enabled the modeling of complex spatio-temporal data, thereby improving prediction performance in various aquatic environments. Despite these technological breakthroughs, the proliferation of AI models and the diversity of water quality monitoring scenarios pose a significant challenge - selecting the most applicable model for a specific detection task remains an ad hoc decision-making process that lacks a systematic basis.

This paper presents an innovative framework that aims to fill this gap by facilitating the design and selection of customized AI models. The framework integrates key considerations such as data availability, computational resources, and performance goals to provide a structured methodology for model selection. By establishing a systematic pathway, this research works to optimize the deployment of AI-driven solutions and enhance their adaptability and effectiveness in different water quality monitoring scenarios.

The primary contributions of this study as follows:

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- **A Systematic Framework:** We propose a novel three-stage AI-driven framework that integrates data preprocessing, model training, and performance validation, aiming to systematize the model selection process for water quality classification to address the problem of ad-hoc nature of existing approaches.
- **Comprehensive Model Benchmarking:** Through rigorous evaluation of four AI architectures (Random Forest, XGBoost, Deep Neural Networks, Transformer) on heterogeneous datasets, we demonstrate the superior performance of Deep Neural Networks (DNNs) in capturing complex spatio-temporal patterns, achieving state-of-the-art accuracy (0.968) and F1 scores (0.846).
- **Optimized DNN Design:** we propose a customized deep neural network architecture with hierarchical feature extraction, dropout regularization, and adaptive optimization specifically for unbalanced and high-dimensional water quality data.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: section II reviews the development of AI techniques in the field of water quality classification, covering early machine learning approaches, deep learning advances, and hybrid methods. Section III details the proposed framework, including data preprocessing, model training and validation schemes. Section IV demonstrates the experimental results and comparative analysis across datasets. Section V explores the model selection criteria and the architectural design for optimizing deep neural networks. Finally, Section VI summarizes the research and looks at future research directions, aiming to improve the interpretability and deployability of real monitoring systems.

II. RELATED WORKS

The application of artificial intelligence in the field of water quality classification has undergone a remarkable evolution, progressively evolving from basic machine learning techniques to sophisticated deep learning systems and innovative hybrid methods. This section provides a systematic overview of key methodologies and their application practices in the field, organized by chronology of technology development and subject categories.

Early Machine Learning Approaches. The initial phase of AI-driven water quality classification relied heavily on machine learning techniques to interpret physicochemical data and derive meaningful insights. Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs) were among the earliest methods adopted, proving effective in predicting essential water quality parameters such as pH and dissolved oxygen levels [1]. Building on this foundation, Support Vector Machines (SVMs) were utilized to tackle specific challenges, such as detecting groundwater contamination, particularly in datasets with uneven distributions [2]. The incorporation of fuzzy logic and expert systems introduced a valuable layer of interpretability, enabling the assessment of complex ecological processes like eutrophication through rule-based frameworks [3]. Ensemble methods, such as random forests, further advanced the field by improving predictive robustness, especially in coastal water quality monitoring scenarios with incomplete datasets [4]. Additionally, semi-supervised learning frameworks emerged as a practical solution to mitigate the dependency on extensive labeled datasets, making them particularly useful in resource-limited settings [5]. However, these early approaches often struggled with high-dimensional data, temporal variability, and limited adaptability across diverse water bodies.

Advancements in Deep Learning. The advent of deep learning (DL) marked a transformative shift in water quality classification, offering enhanced capabilities for automated feature extraction and the modeling of intricate spatiotemporal patterns. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) became a pivotal technology, excelling in tasks such as algal bloom detection through the analysis of hyperspectral imagery [6]. Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks extended the temporal modeling capacity, enabling accurate predictions of time-dependent parameters like chemical oxygen demand (COD) in riverine environments [7]. The introduction of Vision Transformers (ViTs) broadened the scope of deep learning applications, proving adept at identifying microplastic pollutants in marine ecosystems [8]. Graph Neural Networks (GNNs) offered a novel approach to modeling pollutant dispersion within watersheds by leveraging spatial relationships among monitoring sites [9]. Meanwhile, edge computing facilitated real-time water quality assessments, such as turbidity monitoring in smart water systems, using optimized lightweight CNNs. Despite these advancements, deep learning methods faced limitations, including their opaque decision-making processes, substantial computational demands, and reliance on large, well-annotated datasets.

Exploration of Hybrid Methods. To overcome the shortcomings of standalone deep learning models, recent efforts have shifted toward hybrid architectures that integrate domain-specific knowledge with data-driven AI, aiming to balance

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predictive power with interpretability. Physics-Informed Neural Networks (PINNs) have emerged as a groundbreaking approach, embedding physical principles—such as hydrodynamic equations—into neural network frameworks to enhance the physical plausibility of pollutant dispersion predictions [10]. Satellite remote sensing data fusion has enabled large-scale water quality monitoring by combining multi-spectral satellite imagery with machine learning techniques, offering a global perspective on aquatic health [11]. Explainable AI systems have also gained prominence, providing transparent insights into key contaminants in urban wastewater and aligning AI outputs with regulatory standards [12]. Furthermore, federated learning architectures have been explored to address privacy concerns while enabling collaborative model training across multiple institutions [13]. To overcome the limitations of purely data-driven approaches, such as data scarcity and physical inconsistency, research has begun to integrate physical laws or prior knowledge from hydrology, environmental chemistry, and other related domains into machine learning models. The work by Willard et al. [14] is representative, demonstrating how incorporating physical constraints can improve the generalization ability and robustness of water quality prediction models, especially when data is limited. This approach helps models generate results that are more consistent with real-world physical processes. These hybrid methods not only improve accuracy but also enhance trust and usability among stakeholders by making AI decisions more comprehensible.

III. METHODOLOGY

The proposed framework for water quality classification, as illustrated in Fig. 1, follows a systematic three-stage workflow: data preprocessing, model training, and performance validation, designed to guide the selection of optimal AI models for diverse monitoring scenarios.

A) Data Pre-processing

The raw input data undergoes critical preprocessing to ensure compatibility with downstream AI models. This stage comprises two core operations:

- Data Cleaning: Missing Value Handling: Sparse or incomplete entries (e.g., sensor failures) are addressed through median imputation for numerical features and mode substitution for categorical labels.
- Normalization: Numerical features (e.g., turbidity, dissolved oxygen) are scaled to a [0,1] range using min-max normalization, ensuring uniform contribution across heterogeneous parameters.

This stage aligns with the "Data Preparation" module in Fig. 1, ensuring robustness against noise and measurement variability.

B) Model Training

The preprocessed data is fed into four distinct AI model architectures, selected for their complementary strengths in water quality classification:

- Random Forest (RF): A tree-based ensemble method prioritized for interpretability and robustness to small datasets.
- XGBoost: A gradient-boosted framework optimized for handling imbalanced class distributions.
- Deep Neural Network (DNN): A multilayer perceptron architecture with automated feature extraction capabilities, tailored for high-dimensional data.
- Transformer (XFMR): A self-attention-based model designed to capture temporal dependencies in time-series water quality data.

As depicted in the "Model Training" phase of Fig. 1, all models are trained on identical preprocessed datasets to ensure fair comparison.

C) Performance Validation and Model Selection

The trained models are evaluated on a held-out test set to quantify their generalization performance. Key metrics include:

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Vol. 12, Issue 5, May 2025

- Accuracy (Acc): Overall classification correctness.
- Recall (Rec): Sensitivity to minority classes (e.g., contamination events).
- F1-Score: Harmonic mean of precision and recall, critical for imbalanced tasks.

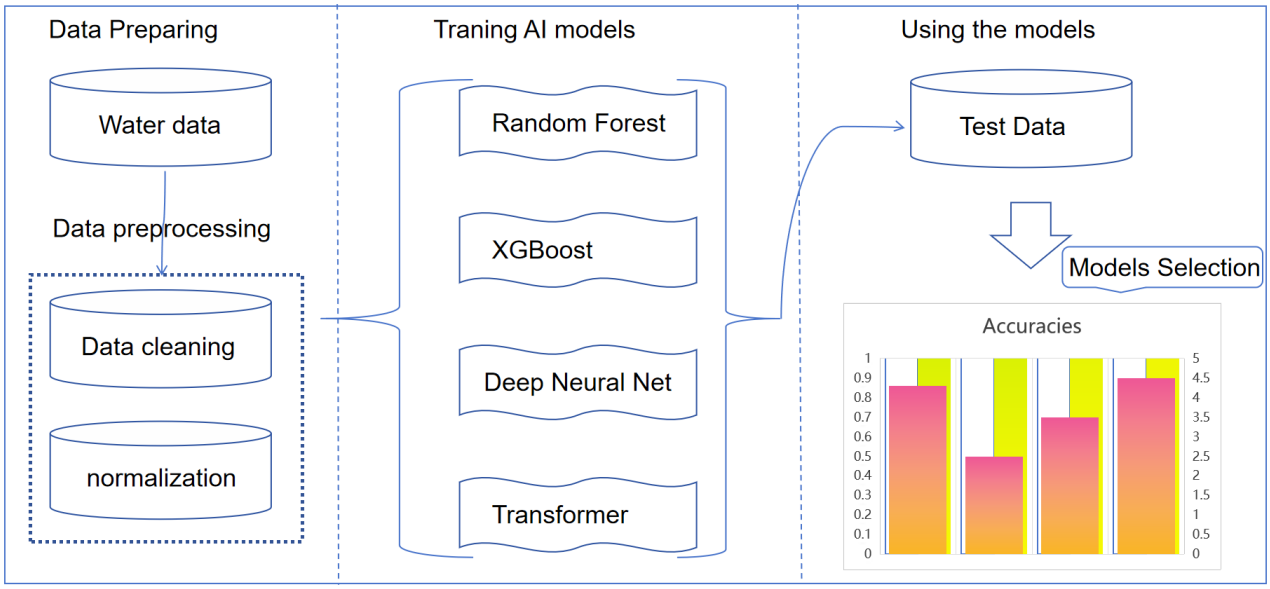

Fig. 1 Artificial Intelligence Modeling Framework for Water Quality Discrimination

IV. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

This section presents the experimental evaluation conducted using the Artificial Intelligence Modeling Framework for Water Quality Discrimination to assess model performance and facilitate model selection. The datasets utilized in the experiments are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of the Datasets.

IDX	Dataset	#Samples	#Features	#Classes
1	waterQuality	8000	20	2
2	waterPotability	3277	9	2
3	groundwater	1107	13	9

To effectively evaluate the experimental outcomes of the Artificial Intelligence Modeling Framework for Water Quality Discrimination, this study employs three evaluation metrics: Accuracy, Recall, and F1-Score. The specific definitions of these metrics are provided as follows:

A) Accuracy
The proportion of correctly classified instances (both true positives and true negatives) relative to the total number of instances, expressed as:

$$\mathrm{Acc} = \frac{TP + TN}{TP + TN + FP + FN} \tag{1}$$

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Vol. 12, Issue 5, May 2025

where TP, TN, FP, and FN denote true positives, true negatives, false positives, and false negatives, respectively.

B) Recall

The ratio of correctly identified positive instances to all actual positive instances, reflecting the model's ability to detect relevant cases, defined as:

$$\text{Rec} = \frac{TP}{TP + FN} \tag{2}$$

C) F1-Score

The harmonic mean of precision and recall, providing a balanced measure of model performance, particularly in imbalanced datasets, calculated as:

$$\text{F1} = 2 \cdot \frac{\text{Precision} \cdot \text{Recall}}{\text{Precision} + \text{Recall}} \tag{3}$$

Where Precision is defined as

$$\text{Precision} = \frac{TP}{TP + FP} \tag{4}$$

These metrics collectively ensure a robust assessment of model performance across diverse water quality classification tasks.

The experimental results of the Artificial Intelligence Modeling Framework for Water Quality Discrimination, evaluated using the datasets described in Table 1 and assessed based on the three aforementioned metrics (Accuracy, Recall, and F1-Score), are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Model Evaluation and Comparison.

IDX		D1	D2	D3
RF	Acc	0.953	**0.657**	0.853
	Rec	0.667	**0.657**	0.853
	F1	0.769	0.582	0.817
XGBoost	Acc	0.961	0.654	0.864
	Rec	0.733	0.654	0.864
	F1	0.815	**0.640**	0.856
DNN	Acc	**0.968**	0.652	**0.942**
	Rec	**0.786**	0.450	**0.942**
	F1	**0.846**	0.502	**0.914**
XFMR	Acc	0.937	0.630	0.058
	Rec	0.500	0.460	0.058
	F1	0.636	0.493	0.007

The experimental results, evaluated based on the metrics of Accuracy, Recall, and F1-Score, demonstrate that the Deep Neural Network (DNN) method achieved the best performance across all three metrics on two datasets. In contrast, Random Forest (RF) obtained the highest Accuracy and Recall on the WaterPotability dataset, while XGBoost achieved the best F1-Score on the same dataset.

The DNN's superior performance on D1 (Accuracy: 0.968) and D3 (F1-score: 0.914) can be attributed to its hierarchical architecture, which captures nonlinear interactions among high-dimensional features (e.g., 20 parameters in D1). In contrast, the Transformer's failure on D3 (F1-score: 0.007) likely stems from insufficient temporal dependencies in groundwater contamination data (D3 has only 1,107 samples and static spatial features), rendering self-attention

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Vol. 12, Issue 5, May 2025

mechanisms ineffective. Meanwhile, RF and XGBoost exhibit robustness on D2 (Accuracy: 0.657 – 0.654), a smaller dataset with imbalanced classes, due to their inherent resistance to overfitting. These results highlight the importance of aligning model capabilities with dataset characteristics—DNNs excel in complex, high-dimensional scenarios, while tree-based models remain viable for resource-constrained tasks.

V. MODEL SELECTION AND ARCHIECTURE DESIGN

As demonstrated in Table 2, the Deep Neural Network (DNN) exhibits superior performance in water quality classification compared to Random Forest (RF), XGBoost, and Transformer (XFMR) across Accuracy, Recall, and F1-Score metrics. While RF and XGBoost offer advantages in interpretability and computational efficiency, the DNN's balanced combination of high performance, scalability, and adaptability establishes it as the optimal choice for dynamic water quality monitoring tasks.

A) Definition and Mathematical Formulation of DNN

A Deep Neural Network (DNN) is a hierarchical artificial neural network characterized by multiple hidden layers between input and output layers. Each layer comprises interconnected neurons that perform nonlinear transformations through weighted connections and activation functions. The hierarchical architecture enables progressive feature abstraction, allowing the model to learn high-level representations from raw data.

Mathematically, the forward propagation of a DNN with L hidden layers can be formulated as follows:

Input Layer:

$$a^{(0)} = x \tag{5}$$

where $x \in R^d$ represents the input feature vector.

Hidden Layers:
For layer $l = 1,2,\ldots,L$:

$$\begin{aligned} z^{(l)} &= W^{(l)} a^{(l-1)} + b^{(l)} \\ a^{(l)} &= \sigma(z^{(l)}) \end{aligned} \tag{6}$$

where $W^{(l)}$ and $b^{(l)}$ denote the weight matrix and bias vector for layer l, and $\sigma(\cdot)$ is a nonlinear activation function (e.g., ReLU).

Output Layer:

$$\hat{y} = \text{softmax}(W^{(L+1)} a^{(L)} + b^{(L+1)}) \tag{7}$$

where $\hat{y}$ represents the predicted class probabilities

B) Objective Function and Optimization

The training objective is to minimize the cross-entropy loss between predicted probabilities $\hat{y}$ and ground-truth labels :

$$L(\theta) = -\frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N}\sum_{k=1}^{K} y_{ik} \log(\hat{y}_{ik}) \tag{8}$$

where $\theta = \{W, b\}$ denotes model parameters, $N$is the number of samples, and K is the number of classes.

The optimization is performed via backpropagation with gradient descent:

$$\theta_{t+1} = \theta_t - \eta \nabla_\theta L(\theta_t) \tag{9}$$

where η is the learning rate.

C) Architectural Design

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Vol. 12, Issue 5, May 2025

The DNN architecture for water quality classification employs three hidden layers (512-256-128 units) with ReLU activation and dropout regularization (p = 0.2) to mitigate overfitting. The output layer uses softmax activation for multiclass discrimination. Training utilizes the Adam optimizer with a learning rate of 10^{-4} , optimized for convergence on imbalanced datasets.

This systematic architecture ensures robust feature extraction and generalization, aligning with the complex spatiotemporal patterns inherent in water quality data.

VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study presents a framework for an AI-driven water quality classification system, emphasizing the superior performance of deep neural networks (DNNs) in capturing complex spatio-temporal relationships. DNN outperforms Random Forest, XGBoost, and Transformer models in accuracy, recall, and F1 score metrics, demonstrating its ability to learn advanced features from raw data. While DNN performs well in terms of scalability and predictive power, challenges remain in terms of interpretability and computational efficiency. Future work will focus on hybrid architectures that integrate domain-specific knowledge (e.g., physically-informed neural networks) to improve model transparency and reduce training costs. Additionally, key next steps include extending the framework to incorporate federated learning into distributed data privacy and exploring lightweight DNN variants for edge computing applications. These advances aim to bridge the gap between theoretical performance and deployability in real-world water quality monitoring systems.

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