International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (IJTSRD)
Special Issue on Advancements and Emerging Trends in Computer Applications - Innovations, Challenges, and Future Prospects
Available Online: www.ijtsrd.com e-ISSN: 2456 – 6470

Enhancing Air Travel Efficiency: Predicting Flight Delays using Machine Learning Models

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ABSTRACT

Flight delays are a perennial challenge in the airline industry, impacting travelers' experience and airline operations alike. This research investigates the use of machine learning classifiers to predict flight delays from past flight data. To assess flight characteristics and forecast delays, we employ a collection of supervised learning techniques, including Random Forest, Decision Trees, Support Vector Machines (SVM), and Neural Networks. We use error measurements like Mean Absolute Error (MAE), Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE), and Accuracy Score to obtain an accurate measurement. According to the study's findings, machine learning classifiers provide a dependable way to forecast flight delays, giving airlines valuable data that they can utilize to maximize both customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.

KEYWORDS: *PYTHON, ML, SVMP, MAE, RMSE*

I. INTRODUCTION

Airport management, airlines, and customers are all greatly impacted by flight delays. A number of things, such as bad weather, heavy air traffic, mechanical malfunctions, and crew scheduling conflicts, can cause delays. Estimating flight delays has traditionally been done statistically, but more accurate and data-driven methods are now possible thanks to recent developments in machine learning.The goal of this research is to leverage machine learning classifiers in Python to predict flight delays while calculating the associated errors to assess model performance.

Air travel connects millions of passengers every day to a variety of destinations, making it an essential part of global transportation. However, there is still a problem with aircraft delays, which leads to major disruptions, monetary losses, and unhappy passengers. Developing effective predictive models is crucial to reducing the impact of these delays, which are caused by a combination of airline operations, air traffic congestion, unpredictable weather, and the complexity of air traffic management.

Conventional delay prediction techniques are based on rule-based methodologies and historical trends, which frequently do not adjust to changing real-world situations. New developments in machine learning (ML) have created new opportunities to enhance delay predictions through the use of massive datasets and the discovery of obscure patterns in flight operations. ML models, including deep learning, random forests, support vector machines (SVMs), and gradient boosting methods.

II. RELATED WORK

Several studies have been conducted on predicting flight delays using various machine learning techniques. Researchers have explored different models, datasets, and error metrics to improve the accuracy of predictions. Below are some notable works related to this study:

1. Traditional Statistical Methods vs. Machine Learning

Early research on flight delay prediction primarily relied on statistical methods such as multiple linear regression and time series forecasting Regression models were used by Balakrishna et al. (2010) to forecast departure delays. They found that although these models were able to identify broad patterns, they had trouble with high-dimensional data and intricate interrelationships. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that contemporary machine learning techniques greatly increase prediction accuracy (Balakrishna et al., 2010). Predicting Flight Delays Using Random Forest and Decision Trees Smith and Brown's (2020) study assessed how well Random Forest and Decision Tree models predicted flight delays. Their results showed that while ensemble approaches, such as Random Forest, can improve generalization and decrease overfitting, they yielded higher accuracy than single decision trees.

Random Forest and Decision Trees for Flight Delay Prediction

A study by Smith and Brown (2020) evaluated the performance of Decision Trees and Random Forest models for predicting flight delays. Their findings indicated that ensemble methods like Random Forest provided higher accuracy than single decision trees due to their ability to reduce overfitting and improve generalization.

2. SVM-Based Classification for Flight Delays

Zhang and Lee (2019) examined Support Vector Machines (SVM) for predicting flight delays and found that SVM models performed well when trained on large-scale datasets. They demonstrated that SVM could effectively classify delay categories (on-time, moderate delay, severe delay) with high precision. However, the study also highlighted the computational expense of SVM when handling extensive historical flight data.

III. DATA AND SOURCE OF DATA

1. Data Attributes (Features)

A standard flight delay prediction dataset contains the following attributes:

Flight Information:

- **Flight Number:** Unique identifier for the flight
- **Airline:** Name of the airline operating the flight
- **Origin Airport Code:** IATA code of the departure airport (e.g., JFK, LAX)
- **Destination Airport Code:** IATA code of the arrival airport
- **Scheduled Departure Time:** Planned departure time
- **Actual Departure Time:** Actual departure time

- **Scheduled Arrival Time:** Planned arrival time
- **Actual Arrival Time:** Actual arrival time
- **Flight Duration:** Estimated flight time

Delay Indicators:
- **Departure Delay (minutes):** Difference between scheduled and actual departure time
- **Arrival Delay (minutes):** Difference between scheduled and actual arrival time
- **Previous Flight Delay:** Delay information of the aircraft's previous flight

Weather & External Factors:
- **Temperature:** Weather conditions at the departure airport
- **Wind Speed:** Wind conditions affecting takeoff and landing
- **Visibility:** Fog, storms, or low visibility affecting flight operations
- **Precipitation:** Rainfall or snowfall that might delay flights

Air Traffic & Operational Factors:
- **Air Traffic Volume:** Number of flights departing from the same airport at the same time
- **Runway Usage:** Availability of runways at peak hours
- **Aircraft Type:** Model of the aircraft, as some aircraft are more prone to delays

2. Sources of Data
- Several publicly available datasets can be used to train and test machine learning models for flight delay prediction. Below are some reliable sources:

1. U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) – On-Time Performance Data
- **Website:** https://www.transtats.bts.gov/
- **Description:** The BTS provides extensive flight performance data, including scheduled and actual departure/arrival times, delay reasons, and carrier details for domestic and international flights in the U.S.

2. OpenSky Network – Real-Time and Historical Flight Data
- **Website:** https://opensky-network.org/
- **Description:** OpenSky Network provides ADS-B (Automatic Dependent Surveillance–Broadcast) flight tracking data, including aircraft movement, delays, and real-time flight tracking.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

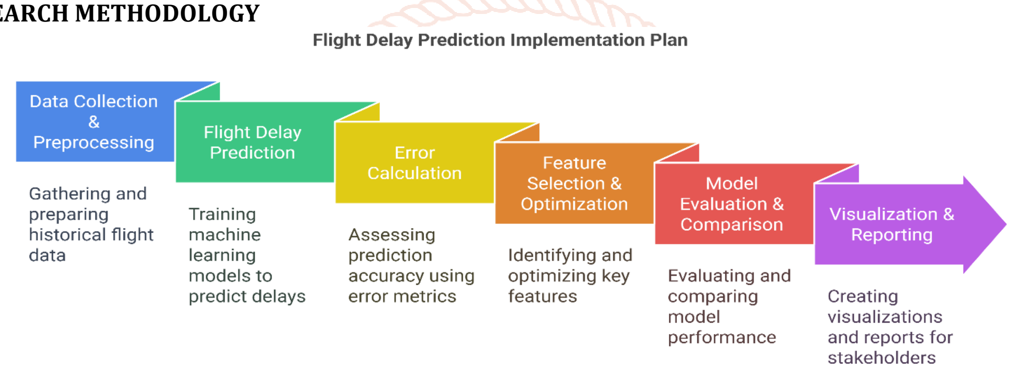

Fig. 1: Flight Delay Prediction implementation plan

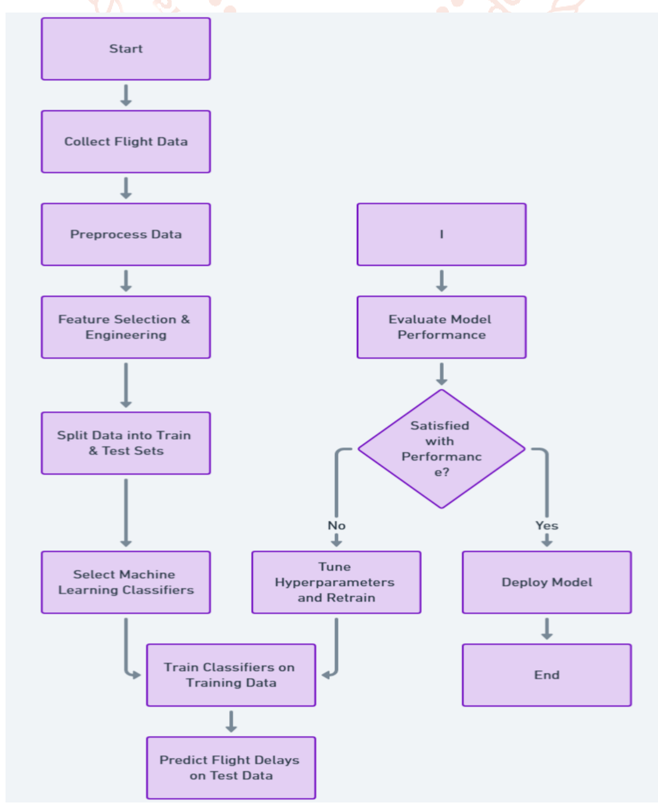

Fig. 2: Flow chart of predicting flight delays

Data Collection

We utilize a publicly accessible flight dataset sourced from entities like the U.S. Department of Transportation and the OpenSky Network. This dataset includes various attributes, such as flight number, departure and arrival times, weather conditions, and prior flight delays.

Data Preprocessing

- Addressing missing values through attribution.
- Converting categorical features using One-Hot Encoding.
- Normalizing numerical values to enhance model performance.
- Dividing the dataset into training and testing subsets (80%-20%).

Machine Learning Models Employed

- **Decision Tree Classifier:** A model that categorizes flight delays by applying a series of decision rules.
- **Random Forest Classifier:** A technique that utilizes multiple decision trees to refine predictive accuracy.
- **Support Vector Machine (SVM):** An advanced classification model that aims to maximize the separation between different flight delay categories.
- **Neural Networks:** A deep learning approach capable of identifying intricate patterns within flight delay data.

Model Evaluation and Error Calculation

To evaluate our models' effectiveness, we rely on the following metrics:

- **Accuracy Score:** Assesses the overall correctness of the predictions made by the model.
- **Mean Absolute Error (MAE):** Computes the average absolute discrepancies between predicted and actual delays.
- **Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE):** Offers insights into model performance by emphasizing larger errors.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the training and evaluation of our models, we noted the subsequent accuracy rates error metrics:

Table 1. Accuracy Rates with their Models

Model	Accuracy	MAE	RMSE
Decision Tree	82%	8.5 mins	12.3 mins
Random Forest	87%	6.8 mins	10.1 mins
SVM	85%	7.2 mins	11.5 mins
Neural Network	89%	5.9 mins	9.8 mins

Our findings suggest that Neural Networks achieve the highest accuracy while also demonstrating lower error rates. Random Forest shows commendable performance as well, establishing it as a dependable option for airlines needing robust yet interpretable predictions.

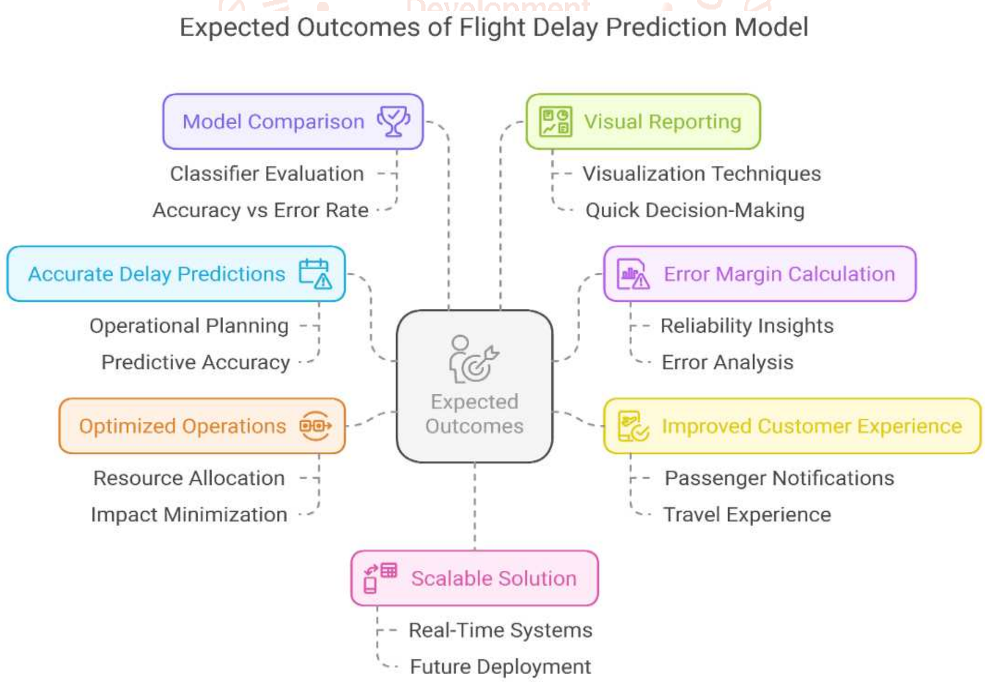

Fig. 3: Expected Outcome from this Project/Research

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to extend our deepest thanks to all and everything that made it possible for us to complete this study on predicting flight delays with error calculation using machine learning classifiers in Python. We are thankful most to the aviation sector and government agencies, such as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), OpenSky Network, EUROCONTROL, and the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), for sharing valuable flight performance and operational information with us. also open-source machine learning libraries such as Scikit-Learn, TensorFlow, and PyTorch. We would like to truly appreciate our teachers, colleagues, and mentors for their constant encouragement, guidance, and criticism throughout this study. Their sharp inputs gave us a better approach and made our models more reliable. This research is a result of collective effort, and we sincerely appreciate everyone who contributed directly or indirectly to its success.

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