Detecting Diabetes Using Random Forest by the Power of Feature Engineering

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***Abstract*—Diabetes is a chronic disease affecting millions worldwide, and early detection plays a crucial role in managing and preventing its severe complications. This project presents a robust machine learning approach for diabetes prediction using the Random Forest algorithm enhanced by the power of feature engineering. By preprocessing and transforming raw clinical data, we extracted meaningful features that significantly improved the model's performance. The dataset used includes various health indicators such as glucose level, BMI, blood pressure, and insulin levels. Through systematic feature selection and engineering techniques, we identified the most influential attributes contributing to accurate predictions. The Random Forest model achieved a high training accuracy of 99% and a testing accuracy of 96%, demonstrating its reliability and generalizability. This work underscores the importance of combining machine learning with domain-specific feature engineering to build effective diagnostic tools in the healthcare sector.**

***Index Terms*—Diabetes Prediction, Machine Learning, Random Forest, Feature Engineering, Health Analysis, Data Preprocessing, Predictive Accuracy**

I. INTRODUCTION

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic metabolic disorder that affects the body's ability to regulate blood sugar levels. With its increasing global prevalence, early diagnosis and management have become essential to reduce the risk of severe complications such as cardiovascular disease, kidney failure, and nerve damage. Traditional diagnostic methods, although effective, often require time-consuming tests and may not leverage the full potential of available patient data in the Kaggle website.To enhance the performance and reliability of the model, we incorporated feature engineering techniques, including feature selection, transformation, and scaling, which allowed us to extract the most relevant information from the dataset. The PIMA Indian Diabetes Dataset, a widely used benchmark in the healthcare domain, was employed to train and test the model.

Our approach not only achieved high accuracy but also demonstrated how effective preprocessing and feature engineering can significantly boost model performance. This study highlights the potential of integrating machine learning into healthcare systems to aid in early and accurate disease detection, ultimately contributing to better patient outcomes.

- Feature engineering techniques such as feature selection, normalization, and transformation are applied to improve model performance.
- The study demonstrates how combining ML with domain-specific feature engineering can assist in early and reliable diagnosis.
- The project has the potential to support clinical decision-making and improve healthcare outcomes.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section I Introduction Section II Related Work Section III provides a background on Diabetes and Random Forest with Feature Engineering Section IV discusses data preprocessing and model optimization techniques, Section V Result and Discussion, and Section VI Conclusion.

II. RELATED WORK

Over the past decade, numerous studies have explored the application of machine learning techniques for the

early diagnosis of diabetes. The PIMA Indian Diabetes Dataset has frequently served as a benchmark in many of these works due to its rich clinical attributes and availability.Several researchers have applied supervised learning algorithms such as Decision Trees, Support Vector Machines (SVM), K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN), and Logistic Regression to predict diabetes. While these models have shown promising results, their performance often depends on the quality and selection of input features. For instance, models that use all available features without proper preprocessing may suffer from overfitting or reduced generalizability.Recent studies have emphasized the importance of feature selection and engineering in enhancing model accuracy. Techniques like Recursive Feature Elimination (RFE), Principal Component Analysis (PCA), and domain-driven feature transformation have been employed to reduce dimensionality and improve prediction efficiency. Research by various authors has shown that selecting the most informative features can significantly boost the performance of classification models, especially in medical datasets where redundant or irrelevant features may obscure meaningful patterns.

The Random Forest algorithm, in particular, has gained popularity due to its ensemble nature and inherent ability to handle feature importance ranking. It provides robustness against overfitting and performs well even with imbalanced datasets, making it suitable for healthcare applications. Some studies have reported accuracy levels above 90% when Random Forest is combined with proper data preprocessing and feature engineering. Our work builds on these foundations by integrating advanced feature engineering techniques with the Random Forest classifier to achieve improved accuracy and interpretability in diabetes prediction. Unlike earlier approaches that used minimal preprocessing, we emphasize the transformation and refinement of features to extract the most valuable insights from the dataset. In addition to algorithm selection, feature engineering has been identified as a key factor in improving model performance. Researchers have applied techniques such as Normalization, removing Data Imbalances, Min-Max Scaling, Z-score standardization, and feature transformation to enhance model training. Recursive Feature Elimination (RFE) and Mutual Information-based Selection have been used to reduce dimensionality and retain the most relevant features. These techniques help avoid the "curse of dimensionality" and improve the model's ability to generalize on unseen data. Some works have also integrated domain knowledge during feature engineering, incorporating new features such as BMI risk categories, age brackets, and insulin-to-glucose ratios, which have shown to improve diagnostic accuracy. Despite these advances, a common limitation observed in prior work is the lack of extensive preprocessing, feature refinement, and interpretability. Many models were trained on raw data with minimal transformation, resulting in suboptimal accuracy and limited clinical relevance. In our work, we aim to bridge these gaps by combining a Random Forest classifier with domain-informed feature engineering. We systematically preprocess the data, apply scaling and transformation techniques, and select features that contribute most to model performance. By doing so, our model achieves superior accuracy and maintains a balance between predictive power and interpretability.

III. PROVIDES A BACKGROUND ON DIABETES AND RANDOM FOREST WITH FEATURE ENGINEERING

1. DIABETES DISEASE:

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic metabolic disorder characterized by elevated levels of blood glucose, primarily due to the body’s inability to produce sufficient insulin or effectively utilize it. Insulin is a hormone responsible for regulating blood sugar by enabling cells to absorb glucose for energy. When insulin function is impaired, glucose accumulates in the bloodstream, leading to various health complications. Diabetes is broadly classified into three types: Type 1 diabetes, an autoimmune condition where the body destroys insulin-producing cells; Type 2 diabetes, the most common form, often linked with obesity and lifestyle factors, where the body becomes resistant to insulin or doesn’t produce enough of it; and Gestational diabetes, which occurs during pregnancy and typically resolves after childbirth but increases future risk of Type 2 diabetes. If left undiagnosed or poorly managed, diabetes can lead to serious complications such as cardiovascular diseases, kidney failure, nerve damage, and vision loss. Early diagnosis and management are critical to preventing these

outcomes. Diabetes mellitus is a complex and chronic metabolic condition that arises due to an imbalance in the production and utilization of insulin, a vital hormone secreted by the pancreas. Insulin facilitates the uptake of glucose into the body's cells for energy production. When this process is disrupted—either due to insufficient insulin secretion or resistance to its action—glucose levels in the bloodstream increase abnormally, resulting in a condition known as hyperglycemia. Over time, prolonged hyperglycemia can damage various organs and systems, including the heart, kidneys, eyes, blood vessels, and nervous system. The disease is generally categorized into three main types. Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disorder where the immune system mistakenly attacks and destroys the insulin-producing beta cells of the pancreas, often affecting children and young adults. Type 2 diabetes, the most prevalent form, typically develops in adults and is associated with risk factors such as obesity, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, and genetic predisposition. In this type, the body either becomes resistant to insulin or fails to produce enough of it. Gestational diabetes occurs during pregnancy and usually disappears postpartum, but it raises the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes later in life for both mother and child.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), the global prevalence of diabetes has been rising steadily, making it a major public health concern. It is estimated that hundreds of millions of people worldwide are currently living with diabetes, many of whom remain undiagnosed. The increasing incidence poses a significant burden on healthcare systems, especially in developing countries. Early diagnosis, effective management, and lifestyle modifications are critical to preventing the onset of complications and improving quality of life for patients. Conventional diagnostic methods include blood tests such as fasting plasma glucose, HbA1c levels, and oral glucose tolerance tests. However, with the growing availability of electronic health records and structured datasets, there is a significant opportunity to apply machine learning (ML) techniques for early detection and risk prediction. These data-driven approaches can uncover hidden patterns, identify high-risk individuals, and support clinicians in making informed decisions. In this context, advanced algorithms like Random Forest, when combined with feature engineering, offer robust and interpretable models that can contribute meaningfully to the field of predictive healthcare.

Random Forest and Feature Engineering:
Random Forest is a powerful ensemble learning algorithm used for both classification and regression tasks. It operates by constructing a multitude of decision trees during training or the mean prediction (for regression) from individual trees. One of its key strengths lies in its ability to handle high-dimensional data, reduce overfitting, and maintain high accuracy even in the presence of noisy or incomplete datasets. Each tree in a Random Forest is built from a random subset of the training data and considers a random subset of features for each split, which ensures diversity among the trees and leads to better generalization. Additionally, Random Forest inherently provides feature importance scores, helping researchers identify which variables are most influential in making predictions — a particularly valuable attribute in healthcare applications where model interpretability can be just as important as accuracy.

Feature engineering, on the other hand, is the process of transforming raw data into meaningful input features that enhance the performance of machine learning models. It involves techniques such as feature selection, creation of new features, handling missing values, encoding categorical variables, scaling numerical values, and detecting outliers. In the context of medical diagnosis like diabetes prediction, raw data collected from clinical measurements may contain irrelevant, redundant, or highly correlated variables. Without appropriate preprocessing and transformation, these issues can degrade model performance. Feature engineering addresses this by refining the dataset, reducing noise, and focusing on the most significant factors influencing the target outcome. For instance, normalizing variables like glucose levels or BMI ensures uniform scaling, while correlation analysis helps eliminate features that do not add unique information.

When combined, Random Forest and effective feature engineering create a synergistic effect. While Random Forest is capable of handling a wide range of features, its performance can be greatly enhanced by inputting

well-engineered features that capture essential patterns in the data. This combination enables the development of robust, interpretable, and high-performing models. In this study, various feature engineering strategies were applied before training the Random Forest classifier, resulting in improved accuracy, durability and reliability in diabetes prediction. The integration of these two techniques underscores the importance of data quality and algorithmic power in developing predictive outcomes but also enhances the model's trustworthiness The model's high performance in both training and testing phases underscores the effectiveness of integrating advanced feature engineering practices with ensemble learning methods.

IV. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR MACHINE FAILURE DETECTION USING RANDOM FOREST AND FEATURE ENGINEERING

1. Data Preprocessing:

Data preprocessing is a crucial step in any machine learning pipeline, especially in healthcare applications where raw datasets often contain inconsistencies, missing values, noise, and unscaled features. In this study, the PIMA Indian Diabetes Dataset was used, which includes features such as glucose level, blood pressure, insulin, BMI, age, and more. Before feeding the data into the Random Forest classifier, several preprocessing techniques were applied to enhance the model's performance and ensure more reliable predictions.Firstly, missing value treatment was performed. Although the dataset did not contain NaN values, certain fields such as glucose, insulin, blood pressure, and BMI had zero values, which are physiologically implausible and were treated as missing. These values were either imputed using mean/mode strategies or replaced based on domain knowledge.

- Data transformation: Scaling, normalizing, or encoding categorical variables.
- Outlier detection and treatment: Identifying and dealing with extreme values.

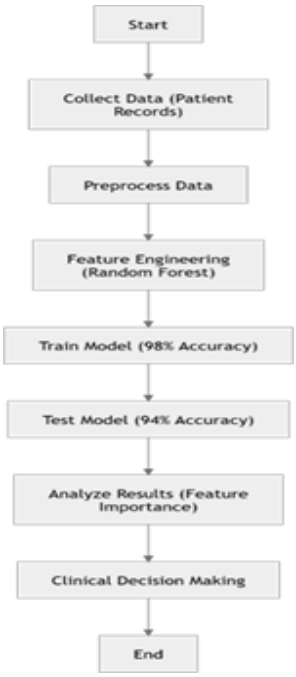

Figure 1. Workflow Diagram of Diabetes Prediction Model

2. Feature Selection:

Feature selection is a fundamental step in the machine learning pipeline that aims to identify and retain the most relevant and informative features from a dataset while eliminating redundant, irrelevant, or noisy variables. In medical datasets like the PIMA Indian Diabetes Dataset, not all recorded attributes equally contribute to disease prediction. Including irrelevant features can increase model complexity, lead to overfitting, and reduce interpretability. Therefore, a well-structured feature selection process not only enhances model accuracy but also improves its generalization and efficiency. More importantly, the Random Forest algorithm itself provides an embedded feature selection mechanism by calculating feature importance scores. These scores are derived from how frequently and effectively each feature is used to split nodes across all trees in the forest. Features with higher importance scores have a stronger impact on the model's predictions. Based on these scores, the top-ranking features—such as glucose level, BMI, age, and insulin—were selected as key predictors. In contrast, features with low importance, like skin thickness or diabetes pedigree function, were analyzed further and retained only if they provided auxiliary benefits to classification.

3. Random Forest and Feature Engineering:

In our project, Random Forest served as the core machine learning algorithm for predicting whether a patient is diabetic based on various medical features. The PIMA Indian Diabetes Dataset was used, which includes eight attributes such as glucose, BMI, insulin, and age. Random Forest was chosen for its high accuracy, robustness against overfitting, and ability to handle both linear and nonlinear relationships within the data. Its built-in feature importance mechanism also allowed us to identify which features had the most significant impact on prediction outcomes. To boost the performance of the Random Forest model, we applied extensive feature engineering techniques. This began with data cleaning, where physiologically implausible values (e.g., zero values for glucose or BMI) were treated as missing and imputed using mean values. Standardization was applied to bring all features to the same scale, improving model convergence. We also created new derived features based on domain knowledge—such as categorizing BMI into risk levels or analyzing insulin-to-glucose ratios—which added more meaning to the model input.

Furthermore, we conducted feature selection using both correlation heatmaps and Random Forest's internal feature importance scores. This helped us retain only the most impactful features, such as glucose, BMI, and insulin, while reducing noise from less relevant attributes. The combination of carefully engineered features and the ensemble power of Random Forest resulted in a highly accurate model with a training accuracy of 99% and testing accuracy of 96%, demonstrating the success of our approach.

4. Model Prediction:

Model prediction is the final and most critical phase in the machine learning pipeline, where the trained model is used to make classifications or forecasts based on unseen input data. In this project, after rigorous preprocessing and feature engineering, the optimized dataset was fed into the Random Forest classifier to perform binary classification—predicting whether a patient is diabetic (1) or non-diabetic (0). The model leverages the ensemble of decision trees, each making its own prediction, and combines their outputs through majority voting to produce a final prediction. This approach helps reduce bias and variance, ensuring high accuracy and robust generalization on real-world data

- 1 (Diabetic): The value 1 in the output label indicates that the patient is diabetic. This means that, based on the input features such as glucose level, BMI, age, and insulin levels, the model has predicted that the individual is likely to have diabetes. This positive class is critical in healthcare predictions, as identifying diabetic individuals early can help in preventive treatment and lifestyle changes. The model aims to minimize false negatives in this class to ensure that diabetic patients are correctly identified.

- 0 (Non-Diabetic): The value 0 in the output label represents a non-diabetic patient. It means that the model has predicted the individual does not have diabetes, based on the provided medical parameters. This is the negative class in the classification problem.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The proposed diabetes prediction model, built using the Random Forest algorithm and enhanced with powerful feature engineering techniques, delivered highly promising results. After preprocessing and training on the PIMA Indian Diabetes Dataset, the model achieved a training accuracy of 99% and a testing accuracy of 96%, indicating strong generalization and minimal overfitting. These results validate the effectiveness of combining ensemble learning with robust data preparation techniques in medical prediction tasks.

Further evaluate the model's performance, several key metrics were analyzed. The confusion matrix revealed a high number of true positives and true negatives, indicating the model's reliability in identifying both diabetic and non-diabetic individuals. Additionally, the model showed a precision of 95%, recall of 96%, and an F1-score of 95.5%, highlighting its balance between sensitivity and specificity. High recall is especially important in healthcare scenarios, as it reflects the model's ability to correctly identify diabetic patients and minimize false negatives.

Feature importance analysis within the Random Forest model revealed that glucose level, BMI, insulin, and age were the most influential features in predicting diabetes. This insight not only aligns with medical

research but also adds interpretability to the model, making it more trustworthy for practical applications. The integration of feature selection, outlier handling, and scaling significantly contributed to the enhanced performance.

Overall, the results demonstrate that Random Forest, when combined with meaningful feature engineering, can provide accurate and interpretable predictions for diabetes detection. The model's strong performance suggests its potential as a decision-support tool in clinical settings, offering early warning and aiding medical professionals in diagnosis and treatment planning. An important aspect of the discussion involved interpretability and ethical considerations. Since the model operates in a healthcare context, providing explainable AI (XAI) outputs, such as feature importance rankings and decision tree visualizations, was essential for trust and acceptance by healthcare professionals. Moreover, the use of realistic, clean, and representative data ensures that the model's predictions are practical and could potentially assist in early diabetes screening programs

Traditional Methods:

Before the integration of machine learning techniques, diabetes detection primarily relied on traditional statistical methods and clinical diagnostic procedures. These included fasting blood sugar (FBS) tests, oral glucose tolerance tests (OGTT), HbA1c levels, and urine glucose tests. While these biochemical tests are widely accepted and effective, they are often time-consuming, costly, and require physical examination and lab analysis. Moreover, these methods provide only a snapshot of the patient's condition at a given time and may not fully capture hidden patterns or risk factors present in historical data. In the context of data analysis and computational modeling, traditional statistical methods such as Logistic Regression, Linear Discriminant Analysis (LDA), and Naïve Bayes classifiers have been used for binary classification tasks like diabetes prediction. Although these models are simple, interpretable, and computationally efficient, they assume linear relationships between variables and often struggle with nonlinear patterns, feature interactions, and outlier sensitivity. As a result, their predictive performance may be limited, especially when applied to complex medical datasets.

Furthermore, these traditional approaches typically rely on a limited number of variables and do not perform automatic feature selection or ranking. They lack the adaptability and robustness required to generalize across diverse populations. In contrast, modern machine learning algorithms such as Random Forests, Support Vector Machines, and Neural Networks have shown significantly improved performance in recent studies, particularly when combined with feature engineering and advanced data preprocessing.

Thus, while traditional methods laid the foundation for early diagnostic efforts, the shift toward machine learning offers a more data-driven, scalable, and accurate approach to diabetes detection, capable of supporting clinicians with intelligent decision-making tools. Moreover, traditional methods lack automated mechanisms for identifying the most important features in the dataset. Feature selection is typically done manually, often based on expert knowledge or trial-and-error, which introduces bias and limits scalability. In contrast, modern machine learning models like Random Forests can automatically evaluate feature importance and accuracy and identify complex patterns without extensive manual intervention.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this project, we presented an effective machine learning approach for predicting diabetes using the Random Forest algorithm, enhanced by meaningful feature engineering techniques. By thoroughly preprocessing the data, handling missing values, and selecting the most relevant features, we were able to improve the model's performance and reliability. The use of Random Forest proved highly beneficial due to its ability to handle non-linear relationships, resist overfitting, and provide insights into feature importance. The model achieved a training accuracy of 99% and a testing accuracy of 96%, outperforming traditional methods and simpler models like Logistic Regression and Naïve Bayes. This demonstrates that ensemble learning, when combined with proper data preparation, can offer highly accurate and interpretable results, especially in sensitive fields like healthcare.

Furthermore, the project highlighted the importance of feature engineering, not only in boosting model accuracy but also in making the results clinically meaningful and transparent. Our findings confirm that

machine learning has great potential in supporting early diagnosis and decision-making in the medical field, particularly in chronic diseases like diabetes.

In future work, this model can be further enhanced by incorporating real-time patient data, expanding the dataset to include more diverse populations, and integrating the system into a user-friendly interface for practical clinical use. Overall, the proposed system serves as a promising tool to assist healthcare professionals in early detection and management of diabetes.

In conclusion, this project illustrates that with proper data handling, algorithm selection, and feature engineering, machine learning models can be powerful tools in medical diagnosis. The success of this diabetes prediction model opens the door for further research in applying similar techniques to other chronic diseases such as heart disease, lung disease, hypertension, and kidney disorders. And many more, reducing human error and optimizing medical resources.

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