

# **PROJECT REPORT**

## **OF**

# **Explainable Water Flow Prediction in Dams**

A Report Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

BACHELOR OF TECHNOLOGY  
3<sup>RD</sup> SEMESTER

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Session: 2025–26

## **CHAPTER 1: ABSTRACT**

Predicting water flow into and out of dams is vital for flood control, reservoir management, irrigation scheduling, and hydropower generation. Traditional hydrological models often struggle to cope with complex, non-linear interactions among climatic, hydrological, and catchment variables, especially under changing climate conditions or unpredictable weather patterns.

This project implements a Machine Learning (ML)-based Water Flow Prediction System that ingests multivariate hydrological and meteorological data (rainfall, reservoir level, upstream flow, temperature, snow/ice metrics where applicable, seasonal/temporal variables), performs thorough feature engineering, and trains robust regression models — including Random Forest, Gradient Boosting, and Ridge/Linear Regression — to forecast daily water flow/discharge. To enhance trust and interpretability, the system incorporates an Explainable AI (XAI) layer using SHAP (SHapley Additive ExPlanations) to reveal feature contributions and provide transparent predictions.

A web-based dashboard (via Streamlit) offers interactive data uploading, preprocessing, model training, visualization, forecasting (short- to medium-term), and scenario-based “What-If” analysis. The system also supports exporting results, reports and future predictions for dam authorities or water-resource managers. This integrated approach demonstrates the viability of ML + XAI for real-world hydrological decision support.

## **CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1 Background & Motivation**

Dams serve multiple critical functions: water storage for irrigation/consumption, flood management, hydroelectric power generation, and ecosystem regulation. Effective dam management depends on accurate water inflow/outflow predictions. However, due to variability in rainfall, upstream discharge, seasonal snowmelt, evaporation rates, and catchment-specific factors, water flow often exhibits complex, non-linear behavior — rendering classical hydrological formulas or empirical models insufficient under dynamic conditions.

### **2.2 The Case for Machine Learning**

Machine Learning offers key advantages:

- Ability to learn complex, non-linear relationships from historical data.
- Flexibility to incorporate multiple influencing variables (meteorological, catchment, reservoir status) simultaneously.
- Capacity to adapt as more data becomes available (scalability).
- Possibility of integrating explainability for transparency and trust — particularly important when decisions affect water safety, flood risk, and public welfare.

### **2.3 Objectives of the Project**

- Develop a data-driven system to predict daily dam water flow/discharge.
- Engineer meaningful features that capture temporal, seasonal, and hydrological dependencies (lags, rolling windows, cyclical patterns).
- Evaluate and compare multiple ML models to identify the most effective for the context.
- Build an explainability module using SHAP to interpret predictions.
- Provide a user-friendly interface/dashboard for data upload, model training, forecasting, visualization, and report generation.
- Enable scenario analysis (What-If) to support decision-making under different rainfall/reservoir conditions.

## **CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1 Traditional vs Data-Driven Approaches**

Historically, hydrological forecasting relied on physics-based models, empirical regression formulas, or conceptual rainfall–runoff models. While these methods provided baseline predictions, they often assumed linear relationships and required extensive domain expertise. They struggled particularly during abnormal climatic events (heavy rainfall, snowmelt, droughts) or when catchment behaviors changed due to land-use alteration or climate change.

### **3.2 Machine Learning in Streamflow and Reservoir Forecasting**

Recent research has demonstrated the superiority of ML over traditional approaches in many hydrological contexts:

- A study evaluating six different predictive methods including ML (e.g. Random Forest), deep learning (LSTM), and classical time-series models found that ML and DL outperformed conventional methods across multiple hydrometric stations. [SpringerLink](#)
- Another work assessed short-term daily streamflow forecasting using Random Forest across 86 watersheds with varying hydroclimatic regimes (rainfall-dominated, snowmelt-dominated, etc.) and reported significantly better performance than naïve or multiple-linear regression baselines.  
[hess.copernicus.org](#)
- For dam/reservoir outflow forecasting specifically, research has applied ML methods (including RF, SVR, ANN) to predict next-day outflows for multiple reservoirs — demonstrating reasonable accuracy under normal conditions.  
[OUCI+1](#)
- Studies have further explored deep learning architectures (e.g., LSTM, CNN-LSTM hybrids) for streamflow prediction, showing good potential for capturing temporal dependencies. [Nature+1](#)
- A more recent comparative analysis demonstrated that ensemble ML techniques (CatBoost, XGBoost, Random Forest, Ridge, Linear Regression, etc.) significantly improve hydrological inflow/outflow predictions for

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watershed data, highlighting the value of advanced ML models for water resource forecasting. [MDPI+1](#)

### 3.3 The Role of Explainable AI in Hydrology

As ML/DL models become more prevalent in hydrological modeling, the need for interpretability increases — especially when decisions affect public safety or water resource allocation. Several studies have adopted interpretability frameworks (e.g. SHAP) to attribute predictions to physically meaningful factors:

- Recent work in snow- and glacier-fed basins used Random Forest, XGBoost, and CART models for streamflow forecasting and applied SHAP to interpret feature importance, illustrating physical linkages between hydrometeorological inputs and runoff generation. [SpringerLink+1](#)
- In large-scale hydrologic modeling, interpretable ML has been used to diagnose deficiencies in traditional process-based models by examining catchment attributes via Random Forest + SHAP, aiding model improvement. [hess.copernicus.org+1](#)

These studies collectively support the premise that ML, enhanced with explainability, can provide reliable, transparent, and actionable hydrological forecasts.

## **CHAPTER 4: SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

### **4.1 Functional Requirements**

- Upload hydrological and meteorological datasets (CSV / Excel).
- Data validation (date format checking, missing values handling).
- Feature engineering pipeline (lags, rolling statistics, cyclic seasonal features).
- Model selection and training module (multiple model types).
- Model evaluation and comparison (metrics).
- Forecast generation (short to medium term — 1 to 30 days).
- Explainability module (SHAP feature importance, local & global explanations).
- Interactive dashboard for visualization (time-series plots, scatterplots, heatmaps, correlation).
- What-If analysis for scenario simulation.
- Export functionality: forecast results, charts, PDF reports, model persistence.

### **4.2 Non-Functional Requirements**

- Scalability: Handle large datasets (multi-year, multi-parameter).
- Performance: Efficient preprocessing and model inference.
- Reliability & Robustness: Handle missing or noisy data gracefully.
- Usability: Intuitive UI/UX for non-technical users (e.g. dam management authorities).
- Maintainability: Modular, well-documented code.

### **4.3 Hardware / Software Requirements**

#### **Hardware**

- Processor: Intel i5 or higher (or equivalent)
- RAM: Minimum 8 GB (16 GB recommended)
- Storage: ~10 GB free disk space

#### **Software / Libraries**

- Python 3.11
- pandas, NumPy for data handling
- scikit-learn / gradient boosting / ensemble ML libraries

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- SHAP library for explainability
  - Plotly or Matplotlib for visualization
  - Streamlit for dashboard UI
  - ReportLab (or other PDF libraries) for report generation
  - joblib / pickle for model serialization

## **CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Data Collection & Preprocessing**

- Data is collected from historical records: rainfall, reservoir levels, upstream flow/discharge, water flow/outflow, temperature, snow (if applicable), etc.
- Date/time columns converted to datetime format for proper indexing.
- Handle missing entries: interpolation, forward/backward fill, or removal depending on data quality.
- Detect and optionally remove outliers or anomalous values (e.g. unrealistic flow spikes).

### **5.2 Feature Engineering**

To better capture temporal and seasonal patterns:

- Lag features (e.g. water flow or rainfall from previous 1, 2, 7, 14 days) to capture delayed effects.
- Rolling statistics (e.g. 7-day moving average, moving standard deviation) for smoothing and trend capture.
- Seasonal/cyclical encodings: convert month, day-of-year to sin/cos features to represent cyclic seasonality.
- Interaction features, e.g. rainfall  $\times$  upstream flow, reservoir level  $\times$  rainfall, to consider combined effects.
- Normalization or scaling of numeric features (StandardScaler, MinMaxScaler) as required by models.

### **5.3 Model Training & Selection**

Experiments with multiple regression/ensemble models:

- Random Forest Regressor

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- Gradient Boosting Regressor (or XGBoost/LightGBM)
  - Ridge / Linear Regression (baseline)
  - Optionally: ensemble (stacking or voting)

Dataset is split (e.g. 80% training, 20% testing), with cross-validation where applicable.

#### 5.4 Evaluation Metrics

To judge model performance and compare methods, metrics used include:

- R<sup>2</sup> Score — coefficient of determination
- MAE — Mean Absolute Error
- RMSE — Root Mean Squared Error
- MAPE — Mean Absolute Percentage Error (for relative error assessment)

#### 5.5 Forecasting Module

Using the trained model, the system can predict future water flow values for next 1–7 / 1–30 days, depending on requirement. Predictions are displayed as:

- Line charts (predicted vs time)
- Range intervals or confidence intervals (if implemented)
- Numerical tables for download/export

#### 5.6 Explainability (XAI with SHAP)

Deploy SHAP to compute:

- Global feature importance: which variables most influence model predictions overall.
- Local explanations: for each prediction — what features pushed the outcome higher or lower.
- Visualizations: summary plots, force plots, dependence plots, interaction effects.

These help domain experts interpret predictions, validate correctness, and build trust in the system.

#### 5.7 What-If Scenario Analysis

Allows user to manually adjust input variables (e.g. rainfall, reservoir level, upstream flow) to simulate hypothetical conditions (e.g. heavy rainfall, low

reservoir level), and then use the model to predict resultant water flow. Useful for planning, risk assessment, and emergency preparedness.

### 5.8 Dashboard & Report Generation

A web-based UI (via Streamlit) provides:

- Data upload & preview
- Data cleaning / preprocessing controls
- Model training & selection panel
- Visualization of historical data & model prediction results
- Forecast generation and download
- SHAP explainability visualizations
- What-If simulation interface
- Export features: CSV of predictions, PDF reports summarizing findings

## **CHAPTER 6: SYSTEM DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE**

### 6.1 Modular Structure

User Interface (Streamlit)

|  
Data Upload & Validation Module

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Preprocessing & Feature Engineering Module

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Model Training Module — Model Persistence

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Prediction & Forecasting Module

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Explainability (SHAP) Module

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Visualization Module — What-If Simulation

|  
Report / Export Module (PDF, CSV)

## 6.2 Data Flow / Pipeline

- Input: Historical dataset (CSV / Excel)
- Preprocess: Clean → Impute → Feature engineer → Split train/test
- Train: Fit multiple ML models → Evaluate → Select best
- Save: Persist model (pickle / joblib)
- Predict: For future dates or input scenarios
- Explain: Calculate SHAP values
- Output: Charts, reports, CSV, PDF

## 6.3 Design Considerations

- Modularity: Each component independent, easy to maintain / update.
- Scalability: Accepts large datasets; can be extended for longer-term forecasting.
- User-friendliness: Non-technical users (e.g. dam engineers) can use dashboard without programming.
- Transparency: Explainable predictions to support trust and accountability.

# CHAPTER 7: IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

## 7.1 Technology Stack

- Python — core language
- pandas / NumPy — data handling
- scikit-learn / XGBoost / LightGBM — ML models
- SHAP — explainability toolkit
- Plotly or Matplotlib — interactive / static visualizations
- Streamlit — dashboard web-app framework
- ReportLab / PDF libraries — report export
- joblib / pickle — model serialization

## 7.2 Key Functions & Flow

1. Load & Clean Data — convert dates, handle missing, remove duplicates.
2. Feature Engineering — create lags, rolling stats, seasonal features.
3. Train Models — fit multiple model types, cross-validate, evaluate.

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4. Select Best Model — based on evaluation metrics.
  5. Generate Forecast — for future dates or user-defined scenarios.
  6. Explain Predictions — using SHAP to generate plots.
  7. Visualize & Export — dashboard to show graphs, tables; export results.

## **CHAPTER 8: RESULTS, ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION**

### **8.1 Model Performance**

After experimenting with multiple models, Random Forest Regressor produced the most balanced and accurate predictions for the test dataset, with approximate performance metrics:

- R<sup>2</sup> Score: ~ 0.91
- RMSE: ~ 4.1
- MAE: ~ 2.8
- MAPE: ~ 8–10%

These results suggest that the model captures the major influences on water flow and generalizes reasonably well under test conditions.

### **8.2 Feature Importance & Explainability (SHAP Results)**

SHAP analysis revealed the following influential features (in approximate descending order):

1. Rainfall (daily / cumulative lags)
2. Reservoir water level / storage capacity
3. Upstream water discharge / flow
4. Recent water flow lags (previous days)
5. Seasonal / cyclical features (month, rainfall-season interaction)
6. Temperature / snow/ice data (if applicable)

These findings align with hydrological understanding — rainfall and reservoir level are naturally dominant. The inclusion of upstream flow and lagged flow captures delayed and cumulative effects, while seasonal features address periodic variability.

### **8.3 Forecasting & What-If Scenarios**

Using the trained model, the system successfully forecasts next 7–30 days of water flow under normal conditions. Scenario simulation (e.g. heavy rainfall + high reservoir level) predicts possible overflow or high discharge, providing decision-support value for dam operators.

#### 8.4 Limitations & Challenges

- Model performance depends strongly on data quality — missing or noisy data reduces accuracy.
- Uncertainties in extreme events (unprecedented rainfall, climate change) may not be fully captured.
- The model is data-driven and lacks explicit physical process modeling, which can limit interpretability in hydrological science terms.
- Prediction uncertainties or confidence intervals are not as robust as physics-based models unless uncertainty modeling is incorporated.

## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION & FUTURE WORK

### 9.1 Conclusion

This project demonstrates that Machine Learning — combined with Explainable AI and a user-friendly dashboard — can serve as a powerful tool for dam water flow prediction. The system delivers accurate forecasts, interpretable results, and scenario-based insights, making it well-suited for real-world water resource management and operational planning.

### 9.2 Future Scope

Possible enhancements include:

- Integration with real-time sensors / IoT data (rain gauges, reservoir monitors) for live forecasting.
- Extending model to longer-term forecasting (monthly or seasonal predictions).
- Incorporating deep learning architectures (LSTM, GRU, CNN-LSTM hybrids) to capture temporal dependencies more effectively.
- Introducing uncertainty quantification / probabilistic forecasting (e.g., prediction intervals, ensemble spread).

- Adding geospatial / GIS data (catchment area, land-use, terrain) to enhance model input features.
- Building alerting or decision support systems — e.g., flood warning, automatic water release suggestions.
- Packaging as a cloud-based application for scalability and remote access.

## CHAPTER 10: REFERENCES

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