

A Comparative Study of Machine Learning and Deep Learning in Network Anomaly-Based Intrusion Detection Systems

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Abstract—This paper presents a comparative study of Machine learning and Deep learning models used in anomaly-based network intrusion detection systems. The paper has presented an overview of the previous work done in the field of ML and DL IDS, then an overview of the used datasets in reviewed literature was presented. Moreover, ML and DL models were tested on the KDD-99 dataset, and performance results were presented, compared, and discussed. Finally, areas of future research of critical importance are proposed by the authors.

Index Terms—intrusion detection, machine learning, deep learning, comparative

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, dependence on network-attached devices has continuously grown. With such dependence, the importance of securing network-attached devices has grown in importance thus, network security has been an ever-evolving field. Among other interests, research in network security heavily aims to find methods to prevent malicious attacks to be executed on networks. Such attacks can cause disastrous outcomes organizations, industrial entities, governments, and individual privacy. Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS) are systems that aim to detect such malicious attacks, and are often coupled with Intrusion Prevention Systems (IPS) to prevent such attacks to bypass the implemented security measures and affect the inter-connected devices within networks. Therefore, Intrusion Detection Systems subjects of high demand and development interest. Intrusion Detection Systems are mainly divided into two main categories Network-based Intrusion Detection Systems (NIDS) and Host-based Intrusion detection Systems (HIDS), where NIDS are attached directly to the network's infrastructure fabric at critical network gateways, on the other hand HIDS are installed on individual hosts that are connected to the network. Within both IDS types, IDSs can detect malicious attacks using two main detection methods: Signature-based Detection (aka misuse detection) and

Anomaly-based Detection [1] [2]. Signature-based detection works by detecting a specific signature which resembles a specific action set, while Anomaly-based detection works by differentiating between what is considered a normal packet or an abnormal one [1] [3]. Therefore, Signature-based detection is very useful in extremely stable environments which are not prone to change in potential attack methods, while Anomaly-based detection is a much more suitable method of detection of novel malicious attacks [1]. Therefore this paper will focus on using Anomaly-based detection as it suits real-world scenarios, where malicious attack signatures, are continuously changing. Securing the network against any potential attacks that might compromise the victim infrastructure is important. However to achieve that, conventional techniques becomes very weak when it comes to sophisticated attacks such as zero day attacks. This has led the research community to work on anomaly network detection. To prevent malicious use or accidental damage to the network's private data, its users, or their devices. Many proposed works have shed the light on using Machine learning techniques in network anomaly detection in order to distinguish between malicious and benign packets and use such techniques in the context of detection of malicious packets in real time streaming networks [4]. Machine learning is a field in which computers are trained to predict the state of newly fed data based on adequate amounts of previously digested data given by humans as a verified fact. Computers can execute such operations using many different ML models, with each model usually having its advantages and can excel in different use-cases [4]. In the context of IDS, this paper reviews and compares many previous literature which use many different ML models aiming to find the most suitable model and methodology that can be used for effective Anomaly-based IDS.

This paper aims to present a comparative study of the reviewed existing literature in the field of machine learning

and deep learning anomaly-based intrusion detection systems. Moreover, this paper tests a selected set of machine learning and deep learning models and illustrates a performance comparison between the utilized models.

II. DATASETS

This section introduces different types of datasets which were used in other previous works and in this work. However, to the best of our knowledge and our research we found only these datasets which showed some drawbacks during our experiments due to the age of creation. Such drawbacks are further discussed by Divekar et al. [5], Sung et al. [6], and Janarthanan and Zargari [7].

A. KDD-99 & NSL-KDD Datasets

KDD-99 dataset has been released on 1999 and is based on a 7 week period of packet capture exports made by DARPA's IDS evaluation program in 1998. The KDD-99 dataset is composed of nearly 4.9 million records of network packets, some of which are normal packets and others which are malicious attack packets. Each packet is listed based on 41 features and a target which identifies whether the packet is a normal/attack packet. The dataset targets 5 different attack classes, which break down to 22 different attack subclasses [4]. The dataset is available as a complete version containing 4.9 million records or a 10% version as a less resource intensive alternative. The KDD-99 dataset, despite having some inherent problems such as uneven data, outdated attacks, redundant data, and high skewedness as discussed in [5], is still the most widely used dataset for ML IDS training and performance evaluation [8].

The NSL-KDD is an iteration over the KDD-99 dataset. The NSL-KDD dataset utilizes the same feature and target set, however, it aims to remove the inherent problems within the KDD-99 dataset. Some of which are the removal of redundant and duplicate records in order to avoid bias due to frequently occurring records, providing less records while maintaining relevance to improve performance on less resourceful training and testing environments, and selection of records within each difficulty level is based on an inversely-proportional relationship to the percentage of records in the KDD-99 dataset. [2]

B. UNSW-NB15

The UNSW-NB15 dataset has been developed by Cyber Range Lab of the Australian Centre for Cyber Security (ACCS). The dataset has been extracted and derived from 100GBs of raw pcap data using the IXIA PerfectStorm tool, and recognizes nine attack types being: Fuzzers, Analysis, Backdoors, DoS, Exploits, Generic, Reconnaissance, Shellcode and Worms. The dataset labels each vector based on 49 features with the target label. The UNSW-NB15 dataset is considered by some to be a proper advocate as an alternative for the popular KDD-99 dataset [5]. However, the UNSW-NB15 has shortcomings; for example, the dataset contains several features that are redundant and also affect the utilized models' accuracy [6] [7]. To add due to the dataset being

relatively new [7], not much work has been done utilizing the dataset, therefore using the dataset as a benchmark for the tested models might lead to misleading results.

III. RELATED WORK

The related work of ML and DL in anomaly-based IDS will be reviewed and illustrated in the chronological order of ML and DL pipelines as seen in the reviewed literature, which is in the following order: Data collection, Pre-processing, and Classification [9]. Figure 1 illustrates a ML and DL IDS pipeline structure commonly used in reviewed literature discussed in this section.

A. Data Collection

Despite some inherent problems in the KDD-99 dataset, it is considered the default bench marking standard in ML and DL IDS performance evaluation [10]. It has been found that most of the reviewed literature utilizes the KDD-99 dataset in the data collection phase such as in [8] [11] [12] [3]. A closely-popular choice is the NSL-KDD dataset, which has been utilized in [2] [13] [14]. Moreover, other datasets has been used such as the ISCX dataset in [15] and UNSW-NB15 dataset as used in [5] [10]

B. Pre-processing

In the previous reviewed literature, it has been found that the pre-processing pipeline mainly consists of two stages: numericalization of categorical features, and standardization of highly variant data. To elaborate, the KDD-99 dataset has three categorical features: protocol_type, service and flag [4], all of which need to be labeled as numerical representations of such categorical features [2] [8]. In the reviewed literature, it has been observed consistent popularity of usage of One-Hot Encoders and Label Encoders in the numericalization of the categorical features in the used datasets such as in: [16] [3]. However, other methods of encoding has been used such as the proposition of a novel Non-Symmetric Deep Auto-Encoder (NDAE) in [8]. Moreover, in the next stage of pre-processing, standardization of highly variant data aims to scale data into numerically similar range around the mean of the distribution, and scaling by the standard deviation value. Standardization of highly variant features is a common practice among reviewed literature as observed in [5] [17], the authors of this paper believe that the need of standardization originates from the flexible nature of network usage spikes, which reflects onto packet features being highly variant.

C. Classification

This section illustrates the usage of different classification methods in the reviewed related literature.

Mainly, the utilization of ML classifiers and DL classifiers has been observed. Moreover, such observations will inspire this paper to further test a select set of highly-performing classifiers to be further tested and compared on a local testing environment [18].

Previous work has utilized classifiers such as Support Vector Machines (SVM) [19] [20], K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) [21],

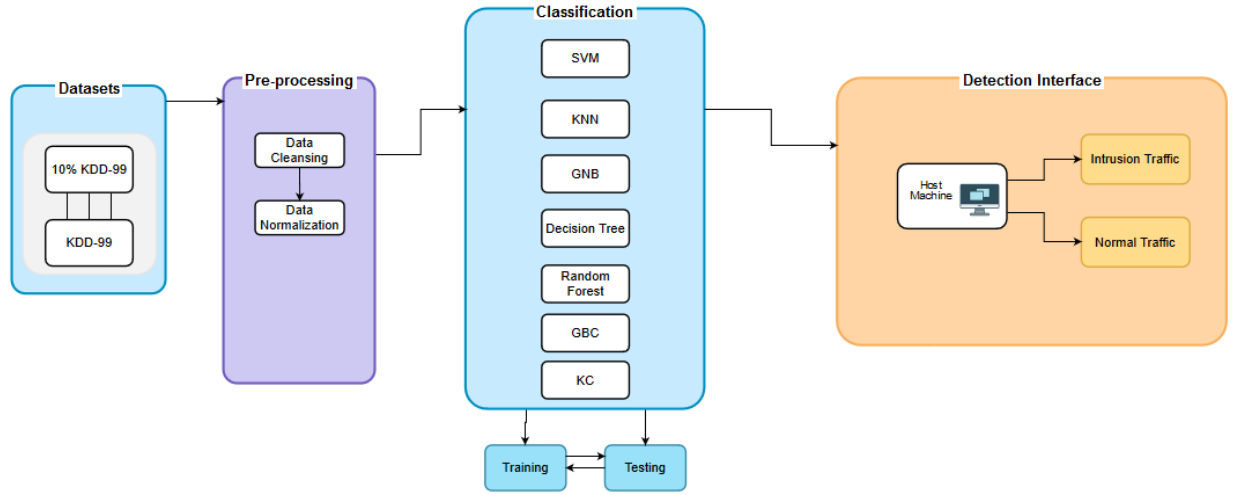


Fig. 1. ML and DL IDS pipeline structure commonly used in literature

Decision Trees (DT) [20] [22], Ensemble Classifiers [23] [4] [24] [5], Naive Bayes (NB) [25] [5] [4], and Deep Neural Networks (DNN) [26] [27] [10].

IV. EXPERIMENT

A review of the common promising ML and DL models from the previously reviewed literature will be recreated, analyzed, and discussed in detailed. Moreover, the most suitable select set of models will be indicated.

The experiment was done on a local testing bench with the following specifications: AMD Ryzen 3600 6 Core, 12 Thread CPU, 16GB 3200Mhz CL16 Memory, AMD Radeon RX 570 8GB GPU, Crucial MX300 256GB Sata SSD, Windows 10 Pro (v.1909), Anaconda3(1.9.12) w/ JupyterLab(1.1.4).

A. Data Collection

As illustrated by Shone et al. [8], the popularity of the KDD-99 makes it considered by some to be the de facto standard of IDS ML and DL testing datasets. Therefore the authors of this paper decided to test the use of the select ML and DL models on the commonly-used KDD-99 dataset in practice which can reflect the findings relative to a common benchmark.

The KDD-99 dataset is publicly available on University of California Irvine Knowledge Discovery in Databases Archive. A comparison of both the 10% and full corrected versions of the dataset will be denoted, therefore, both dataset versions will be attained in the data collection stage. Both versions of the KDD-99 datasets will be utilized, as it was illustrated in I the larger version of the dataset scales up the frequency of the common classes while keeping unchanged frequencies on the least 2 common classes. Therefore, it is of critical importance to test how various models perform in an environment which resembles high skewness in common class occurrence frequency.

B. Pre-processing

1) *Data cleansing*: Data cleansing is performed on the dataset, as the presence of non-cleansed data can cause undesirable effects on the final models' results. First, the authors of this paper verified the inexistence of null values within both dataset versions, and no nulls were found in both corrected KDD-99 dataset versions. To add, due to the high variance in the dataset features, standardization of highly variant data was performed on both datasets to improve classifier performance during the classification stage.

2) *Analysis and Visualization*: General analytics of the dataset is performed for visualization and further understanding of the dataset construction.

TABLE I
ATTACK CLASSES AND FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE IN 10% AND FULL DATASET

	10% KDD-99 Dataset	Full KDD-99 Dataset
Dos	391458	3883370
Normal	97278	972781
Probe	4107	41102
R2L	1126	1126
U2R	52	52

Table (I) illustrates each attack class and the frequency of its occurrence in both dataset versions is observed. This outcome is of critical importance as the high variation in class frequency can cause high detection difficulty in less common classes.

3) *Feature selection*: 2 illustrates a correlation heatmap of the dataset's features is display, which shall be used to identify extremely-correlated features which can be dropped. Since the authors have utilized the corrected version of the dataset, no extremely correlated features have been identified. However, the heatmap still is useful for further analysis of the dataset as it identifies features which are highly-uncorrelated and can affect the model's accuracy positively.

Moreover, there were 2 features which had less than 2 occurrences of unique values, which were the 'is_host_login' and 'num_outbound_cmds', therefore such features were considered redundant features and have been dropped to further decrease unnecessary performance overhead on the models.

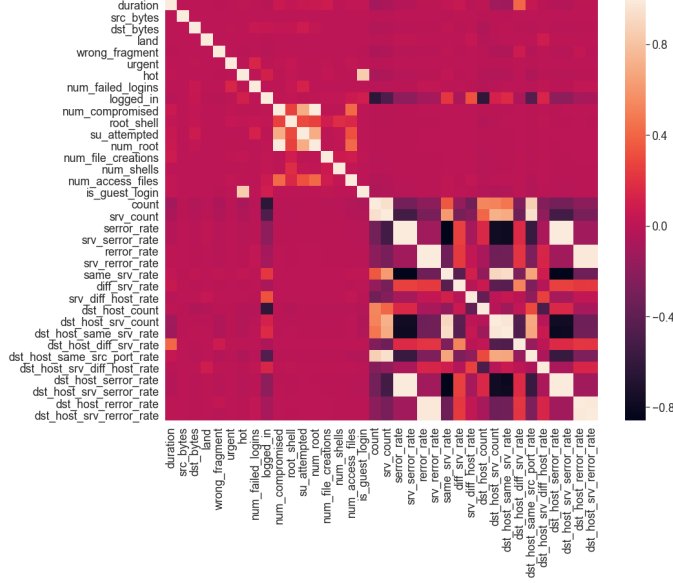


Fig. 2. 10% KDD-99 features correlation heatmap

4) *Label encoding*: In the label encoding stage, three categorical features 'protocol_type', 'flag', and 'service' were found and scikit-learn Label Encoding was utilized to encode those features' values into numerical representations.

5) *Scaling and Splitting Dataset*: Scaling has been done using the Min Max Scaler and splitting of the data is done using the scikit-learn python library. The dataset was split into training and testing datasets of a test-to-train ratio of 0.2.

C. Classification

A select choice of models which showed promising results in reviewed literature will be tested. The authors will utilize scikit-learn library to perform the models previewed within subsections (1-7), and the Keras classifier library will be utilized in subsection (8). Moreover, scores and metrics of all models will be illustrated on the basis of precision, recall, f1-score, and support metrics. A detailed descriptions of the metrics is presented below:

Precision:

The average precision (AP) scores are computed as a value between 0 and 1, with 0 referring to a model with 0% accuracy and 1 being a model achieving 100% accuracy. AP is defined as:

$$Precision = \frac{TP}{TP + FP} \quad (1)$$

where TP is the number of positive items flagged as positive by the model and FP is the number of negative items flagged

TABLE II
PERFORMANCE RESULTS OF UTILIZED MODELS ON BOTH 10% AND FULL VERSION OF KDD-99 DATASET

		SVM	KNN	GNB	DT	RF	LR	GBC	KC
10% KDD-99	Training Time (seconds)	66	263	0.5	1.1	7.11	12.73	353	300
	Testing Time (seconds)	6.5	226	0.38	0.01	0.39	0.02	1.2	0.5
	Training Score	0.99	0.99	0.88	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99
	Testing Score	0.99	0.99	0.88	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99
Full KDD-99	Training Time (seconds)	2472	-	5.39	15.8	119	146.9	4019	2900
	Testing Time (seconds)	202	-	3.41	0.64	4	0.21	10.1	4.3
	Training Score	0.99	-	0.88	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.987	0.99
	Testing Score	0.99	-	0.88	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99

as positive by the model.

Recall:

Recall, also known as Sensitivity or True Positive Rate (TPR), calculates the ratio of all correctly detected vectors within the data to all vectors that should be detected in an ideal case.

$$Recall = \frac{TP}{TP + FN} \quad (2)$$

where TP and FN are True Positives and False Negatives, respectively. True positives being the items that were correctly detected by the model, and false negatives being positive items that were not detected by the model.

F1-score:

F1-score is the harmonic mean of both, precision and recall, and reflects a score of the model's accuracy.

$$F1 = \frac{2 * TP}{2 * TP + FN + FP} \quad (3)$$

where R_n and P_n are the precision and recall at the nth threshold. With random predictions, the AP is the fraction of positive samples.

Support:

Support is the number of occurrences found of each class of items in the dataset.

V. EVALUATION AND RESULTS

As illustrated in III, the various models were utilized and the performance was measured based on precision, recall, f1-score, and support. Performance was tested on both the 10% and full versions of the KDD-99 datasets.

TABLE III
RESULTS OF ALL TESTED MODELS ON BOTH THE 10% AND FULL VERSION OF KDD-99 DATASET

		10% KDD				Full KDD			
		Precision	Recall	F1-score	Support	Precision	Recall	F1-score	Support
SVM	dos	1.00	1.00	1.00	78439	1.00	1.00	1.00	776980
	normal	1.00	1.00	1.00	19260	1.00	1.00	1.00	194138
	probe	1.00	0.98	0.99	872	1.00	0.98	0.99	8311
	r2l	0.93	0.91	0.92	223	0.87	0.75	0.81	247
	u2r	1.00	0.18	0.31	11	1.00	0.18	0.31	11
KNN	dos	1.00	1.00	1.00	78439	-	-	-	-
	normal	1.00	1.00	1.00	19260	-	-	-	-
	probe	1.00	0.99	0.99	872	-	-	-	-
	r2l	0.95	0.96	0.95	223	-	-	-	-
	u2r	0.83	0.45	0.59	11	-	-	-	-
GNB	dos	0.98	0.94	0.96	129106	0.98	0.95	0.96	1281483
	normal	0.97	0.64	0.77	32167	1.00	0.62	0.76	321021
	probe	0.09	0.99	0.17	1348	0.10	0.97	0.18	13594
	r2l	0.29	0.39	0.33	387	0.03	0.44	0.06	365
	u2r	0.01	0.74	0.01	19	0.00	0.90	0.00	20
DT	dos	1.00	1.00	1.00	129106	1.00	1.00	1.00	1281483
	normal	0.98	0.98	0.98	32167	0.98	1.00	0.99	321021
	probe	0.55	0.90	0.68	1348	0.99	0.64	0.78	13594
	r2l	0.00	0.00	0.00	387	0.00	0.00	0.00	365
	u2r	0.00	0.00	0.00	19	0.00	0.00	0.00	20
RF	dos	1.00	1.00	1.00	129106	1.00	1.00	1.00	1281483
	normal	1.00	1.00	1.00	32167	1.00	1.00	1.00	321021
	probe	1.00	0.99	0.99	1348	1.00	0.99	1.00	13594
	r2l	0.98	0.96	0.97	387	0.96	0.93	0.94	365
	u2r	0.93	0.68	0.79	19	1.00	0.20	0.33	20
LR	dos	1.00	1.00	1.00	129106	1.00	1.00	1.00	1281483
	normal	0.98	1.00	0.99	32167	0.99	1.00	1.00	321021
	probe	0.98	0.90	0.94	1348	0.98	0.90	0.94	13594
	r2l	0.84	0.82	0.83	387	0.14	0.02	0.03	365
	u2r	0.86	0.32	0.46	19	0.50	0.05	0.09	20
GBC	dos	1.00	1.00	1.00	129106	1.00	1.00	1.00	1281483
	normal	1.00	0.95	0.97	32167	1.00	1.00	1.00	321021
	probe	1.00	0.65	0.78	1348	1.00	0.98	0.99	13594
	r2l	0.13	0.77	0.23	387	0.70	0.66	0.68	365
	u2r	0.28	0.79	0.42	19	0.64	0.35	0.45	20
KC	dos	1.00	1.00	1.00	129106	1.00	1.00	1.00	1281483
	normal	1.00	1.00	1.00	32167	1.00	1.00	1.00	321021
	probe	0.99	0.98	0.99	1348	0.97	0.99	0.98	13594
	r2l	0.86	0.89	0.87	387	0.00	0.00	0.00	365
	u2r	0.00	0.00	0.00	19	0.00	0.00	0.00	20

VI. DISCUSSION

SVM and KNN models showed promising accuracy scores in the less common classes 'r2l' and 'u2r', but both models fell behind significantly in terms of training and testing times, which rises concerns whether SVM and KNN can be deployed in real time detection considering high bandwidth and time-critical networks. Moreover, the KNN model was unable to finish training during a 24-hour period, therefore the test was aborted and KNN was considered unsuitable for real-world usage.

Furthermore, LR showed satisfactory accuracy scores, excellent training time, and outstanding training time in the 10% dataset, however, the model fell behind significantly in

the training time and accuracy of the full dataset in the less common classes; therefore, it shall further be investigated whether the model can be used in a real time detection on a non-time critical environments or whether the model can be utilized in an offline-learning ML IDS.

The GBC and KC model showed adequate accuracy scores in the common classes; however it fell behind significantly in the less common classes showed unsatisfactory training and testing time in both datasets.

Moreover, GNB and DT were able to achieve excellent training and testing time in both versions of the dataset; however, the shortcomings of both models in an IDS context is clear due to the overall low average accuracy scores achieved

in the less common attack classes.

Finally, the RF model showed outstanding accuracy in all 5 classes, while achieving satisfactory training and testing times. Despite falling behind in training time of the larger dataset, RF was able to achieve extremely satisfactory results even in both dataset versions, which was remarkable considering the significant accuracy drop other models suffered from when being tested on the full dataset. Therefore, the RF model's results were considered extremely promising and further testing of the model is highly recommended.

VII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This paper presents a comparative study of ML and DL models used in anomaly-based network intrusion detection systems. The paper has presented an overview of the previous work done in the field of ML and DL IDS, then an overview of the used datasets in reviewed literature was presented. Moreover, ML and DL models were tested on the KDD-99 dataset, and performance results were presented and compared. Various models showed specific advantages and disadvantages and no specific model was considered completely superior over other models, however, the RF model showed promising results and shall further be tested in a real-world IDS scenario.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the field of ML and DL IDS is relatively new and further research is extremely needed. Therefore this paper lays the ground for future work to be done especially in the areas of online-learning ML and DL IDS. To add, another recommended field of research is improving current datasets, as the datasets available showed inherent problems such as being dated and unrepresentative of modern network attacks. Finally, another important area of research is targeting mobile-specific network attacks, either by providing specialized mobile IDS network datasets or providing mobile-specific ML and DL IDS architectures.

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