

# Machine Learning Approach to Characteristic Fluctuation of Bulk FinFETs Induced by Random Interface Traps

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## Abstract

Interface traps are of particular concern for highly scaled-down semiconductor devices. They cause trapping and de-trapping of charge carriers and have an adverse effect on device characteristics and variability. Therefore, in this work, the influence of randomly generated interface traps (RITs) on device characteristics of 16-nm-gate high- $\kappa$ /metal gate bulk fin field-effect transistors (FinFETs) is investigated for experimentally validated simulated data. A machine learning (ML) model is proposed here to imitate the device simulation results. The impact of variation of these multi-point defects is analyzed by generating RITs at the interface of gate-oxide and silicon channel of the explored bulk FinFETs. The statistical fluctuations induced by RITs are analyzed by predicting the variations in threshold voltage ( $V_{TH}$ ), subthreshold slope ( $SS$ ), drain-induced barrier lowering ( $DIBL$ ), off-state current ( $I_{OFF}$ ), and transconductance ( $g_m$ ) using the proposed ML model with high accuracy and small error, in much less computational cost. This work shows the possibility of accelerating the random defects analysis using the technique of machine learning.

## Keywords

Bulk FinFET, characteristic fluctuation, interface trap, machine learning, random forest regressor.

## 1. Introduction

In the semiconductor fabrication industry, the ever-increasing demand for higher density, better performance, and low power consumption led the semiconductor planar devices to continuous scaling [1], [2]. However, non-stop scaling of planar device technology encountered hard challenges that leads to objectionable effects such as short channel effects (SCE), increased leakage current, and fluctuation of characteristics of these devices [3]. Control of SCE is central since it allows lower operating voltages and shorter channel lengths. The planar devices don't scale efficiently beyond 30-nm lengths, so the FinFETs emerged as their substitute. The FinFET devices because of their unique three-dimensional (3-D) gate structure overcome these issues up to a great extent [4]. FinFET blocks SCE and has lower switching times as well as higher current density than a planar transistor and makes further scaling of transistor possible. But the continuous shrinking of FinFET devices makes them vulnerable to random fluctuations such as work function fluctuations (WKF), line edge roughness (LER), random dopant fluctuations (RDF), and interface traps. In past, these

fluctuations are studied in detail. For example, WKF-induced variability in GAA FETs has been reported [5]. Similarly, in [6] the impact of different types of LER has been analyzed for 14-nm-gate high- $\kappa$ /metal gate (HKMG) trapezoidal bulk FinFET. The effect of RDF on variability of threshold voltage of InGaAs nMOSFETs has been reported in [7]. Impact of RITs at the interface of SiO<sub>2</sub>/Si on the electrical characteristic of the 16-nm HKMG bulk FinFET devices is investigated [8].

Recently, ML has been gaining popularity in the semiconductor fabrication industry [9]–[11]. The idea, however, is not new [12]. There is always a motivation for using ML in semiconductor manufacturing. The application of ML has also explored the effects of random fluctuations in FinFET transistors. An artificial neural network is developed to investigate the effect of LER-induced random variation on the input/output transfer characteristics of 5-nm FinFETs [13]. Similarly, the authors in [14] have analyzed the impact of WKF on gate-all-around silicon nanosheet MOSFET using three different deep learning algorithms.

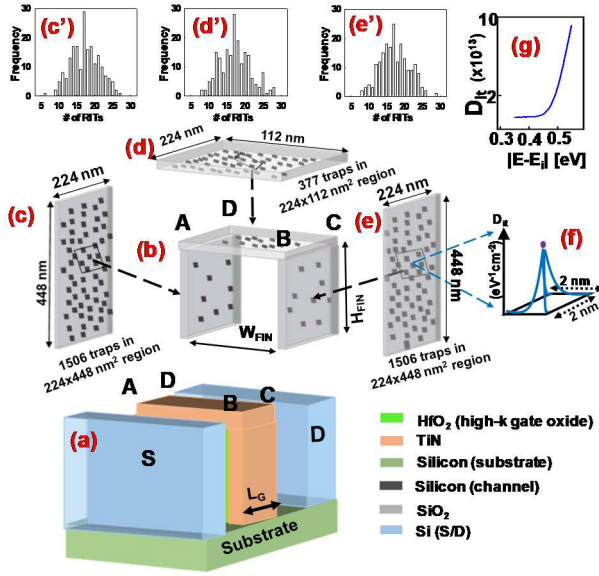
In this work, the impact of RITs on device characteristics of 16-nm-gate HKMG bulk FinFETs is examined. The 3-D interface traps are generated randomly at the gate-oxide/silicon channel interface of FinFETs. These traps affect the drain current due to the capture and emission of charge carriers in the channel [15]. A regression-based ML model is proposed here which predicts the RITs induced key characteristics fluctuations. The rest of the paper is outlined as follows: Section 2 presents the bulk FinFET device structure, simulation methodology, and generation of RITs. Section 3 demonstrates the machine learning modeling. In Section 4, results obtained from the proposed ML model are reported and at last, Section 5 concludes this study.

## 2. Device structure and simulations

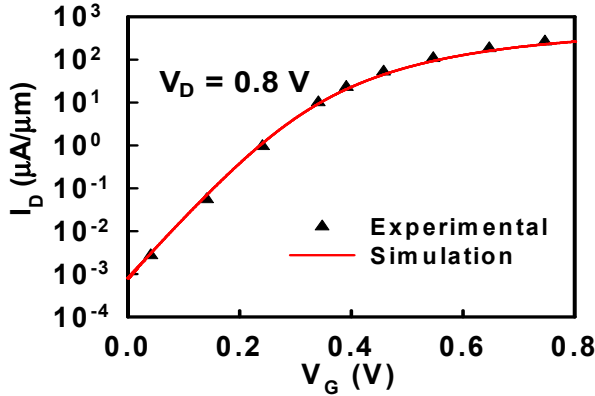
A 3-D schematic of the bulk FinFET structure used in this study is shown in Fig. 1(a). The detailed structural information of the device is as follows: the channel length ( $L_G$ ) 16-nm, the fin height ( $H_{FIN}$ ) 32-nm, the fin width ( $W_{FIN}$ ) 8-nm, the aspect ratio 4, and the effective oxide thickness ( $EOT$ ) is 0.95 nm and calculated by the expression:

$$EOT = t_{SiO_2} + t_{HfO_2} \times \frac{\epsilon_{SiO_2}}{\epsilon_{HfO_2}} \quad (1)$$

where  $t_{SiO_2}$  and  $t_{HfO_2}$  are thicknesses of SiO<sub>2</sub> gate oxide and high- $\kappa$ /metal gate. Similarly,  $\epsilon_{SiO_2}$  and  $\epsilon_{HfO_2}$  are the dielectric constants for SiO<sub>2</sub> gate oxide and HfO<sub>2</sub>. In addition to this, the

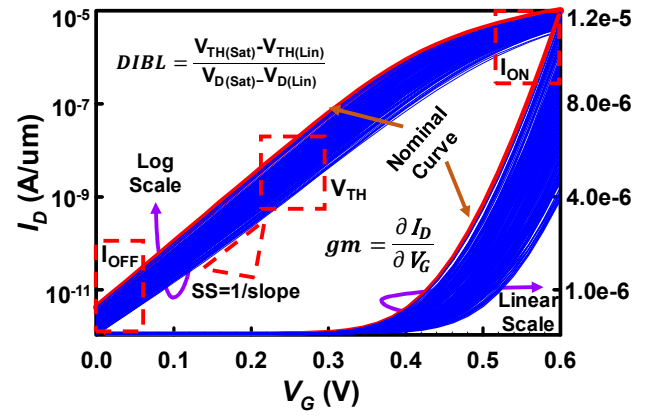


**Figure 1:** (a) A 3-D schematic of the explored Si bulk FinFET with the high-k-metal-gate. (b) RITs generated on the interface of gate oxide/channel. (c)-(e) show three different sides with RITs. The concentration of each RIT is approximately  $1.5 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ eV}^{-1}$  for all planes, and is driven by the Poisson distribution. (c')-(e') show the Poisson distribution of the statistically generated RITs for each plane. (g) The density of each trap ( $D_{it}$ ) on the plane is assigned according to distribution of trap's energy.



**Figure 2:** An illustration of validation of device simulated data (solid red line) with experimentally measured data (black triangle dots) through proper calibration.

channel doping concentration is  $5 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$  and the source/drain doping concentration of device is  $1 \times 10^{20} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ . Table I lists all the structural and simulation parameters used for the bulk FinFET device. The RITs are generated arbitrarily at the  $HfO_2/SiO_2$  and Si channel interface using the statistical generation simulator [Fig. 1. (b)], to study their impact on the electrical characteristics of the bulk FinFETs. The simulation flow of RITs is as follows: A total of 1506 traps are generated in two large areas of  $224 \times 448 \text{ nm}^2$  2-D planes for side gates of bulk FinFET, as depicted in Figs. 1(c) and (e). Similarly, in Fig. 1(d), 377 traps are generated in  $224 \times 112 \text{ nm}^2$  area for the top fin. Each 3-D trap is of dimension 2-nm (width), 2-nm



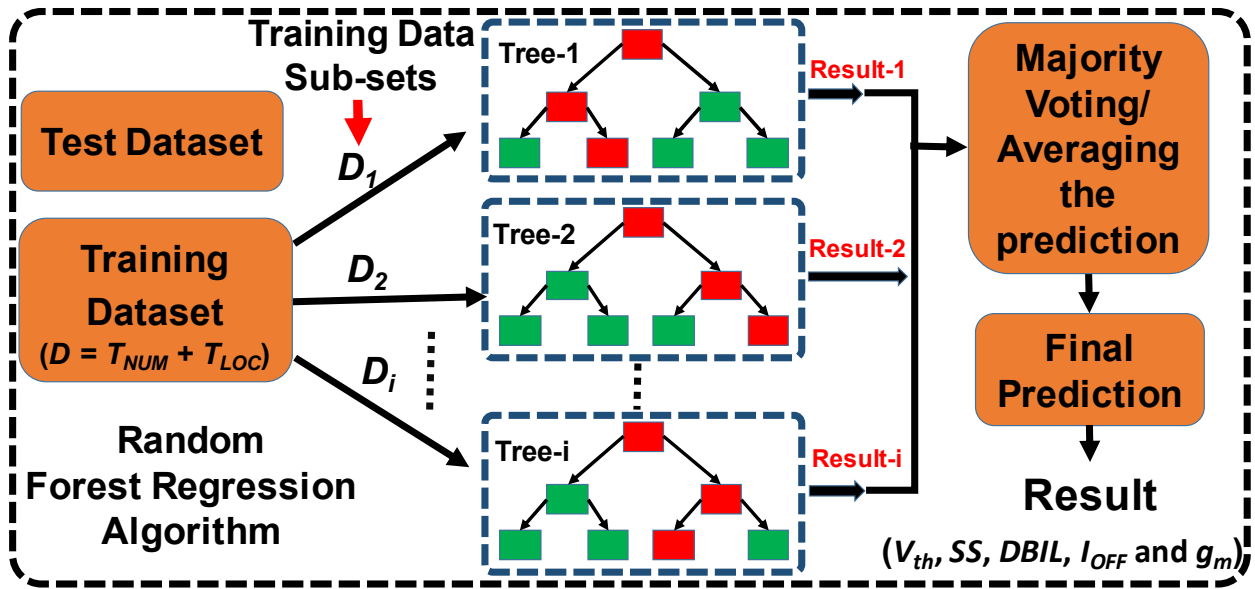
**Figure 3:** The  $I_D$ - $V_G$  characteristics of the 4500 simulated FinFET devices. The red curve shows the nominal case (i.e., the FinFET without traps) and the blue curves show the FinFET devices with traps, in logarithmic and linear scales.

**Table I:** List of bulk FinFET device parameters, regions, and their specified values used in the 3-D device simulation.

Device parameter	Value
Channel length (nm) ( $L_G$ )	16
Channel doping ( $\text{cm}^{-3}$ )	$5 \times 10^{17}$
Fin height (nm) ( $H_{FIN}$ )	32
Fin width (nm) ( $W_{FIN}$ )	8
Aspect ratio ( $H_{FIN} / W_{FIN}$ )	4
Work function (eV)	4.52
S/D doping ( $\text{cm}^{-3}$ )	$1 \times 10^{20}$
Density of interface trap ( $\text{cm}^{-2} \text{ eV}^{-1}$ ) ( $D_{it}$ )	$1.5$ - $8.5 \times 10^{12}$
Interface trap energy (eV)	0.35-0.55
effective oxide thickness (nm) ( $EOT$ )	0.95
S/D extension doping ( $\text{cm}^{-3}$ )	$4.8 \times 10^{18}$

(length), and 0.5-nm (depth) and the density of trap is  $1.5 \times 10^{13} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ eV}^{-1}$ . The energy of each trap is varied randomly and it is distributed according to trap density. The standard deviations for the side fins are 4.0681, 4.4327 and for the top fin, it is 2.0241, as depicted in Figs. 1(c'), (e'), and (d') respectively. The top fin and side fins of bulk FinFET are partitioned into small sub-planes. The top and side fin sub-planes are of size  $16 \times 8 \text{ nm}^2$  and  $32 \times 8 \text{ nm}^2$  respectively. In this way, the 4500 devices are generated for statistical device simulations to measure the impact of RITs variabilities on DC characteristics.

Fig. 2 shows the validation of the  $I_D$ - $V_G$  characteristic of the simulated data with experimental Si data before generating the large dataset for machine learning. Fig.3 shows the  $I_D$ - $V_G$  characteristics for the nominal device (without traps) and devices with traps, in linear and logarithmic scale. In the figure, the fluctuations in  $I_D$ - $V_G$  characteristics can be clearly observed. The figures of merit (FoM) analyzed in this paper, are also marked in curves. The  $I_{OFF}$  is the current where  $V_G=0\text{V}$  and  $I_{ON}$  is the current at  $V_G=V_D+V_{TH}$ . The slope below the threshold voltage region is called sub-threshold slope ( $SS$ ). The formulas used to calculate two important FoM,  $DIBL$  and  $g_m$  are also shown in the figure.



**Figure 4:** The workflow demonstration of the random forest regression model building and its implication on data. The model operates by constructing several decision trees during training time and it utilizes the ensemble learning technique that uses averaging to improve the predictive accuracy. The training data consists of random numbers ( $T_{NUM}$ ) and random locations ( $T_{LOC}$ ) of RITs as inputs and the electrical parameters ( $V_{th}$ ,  $SS$ ,  $DBIL$ ,  $I_{OFF}$  and  $g_m$ ) of the explored device as the outputs.

**Table II:** List of hyperparameters with values utilized in the random forest regressor algorithm.

RFR Hyperparameters	Value
n_estimators	250 (No. of trees)
random state	42
min_samples_split	2
min_samples_leaf	1
max_depth	None

### 3. Machine learning modeling

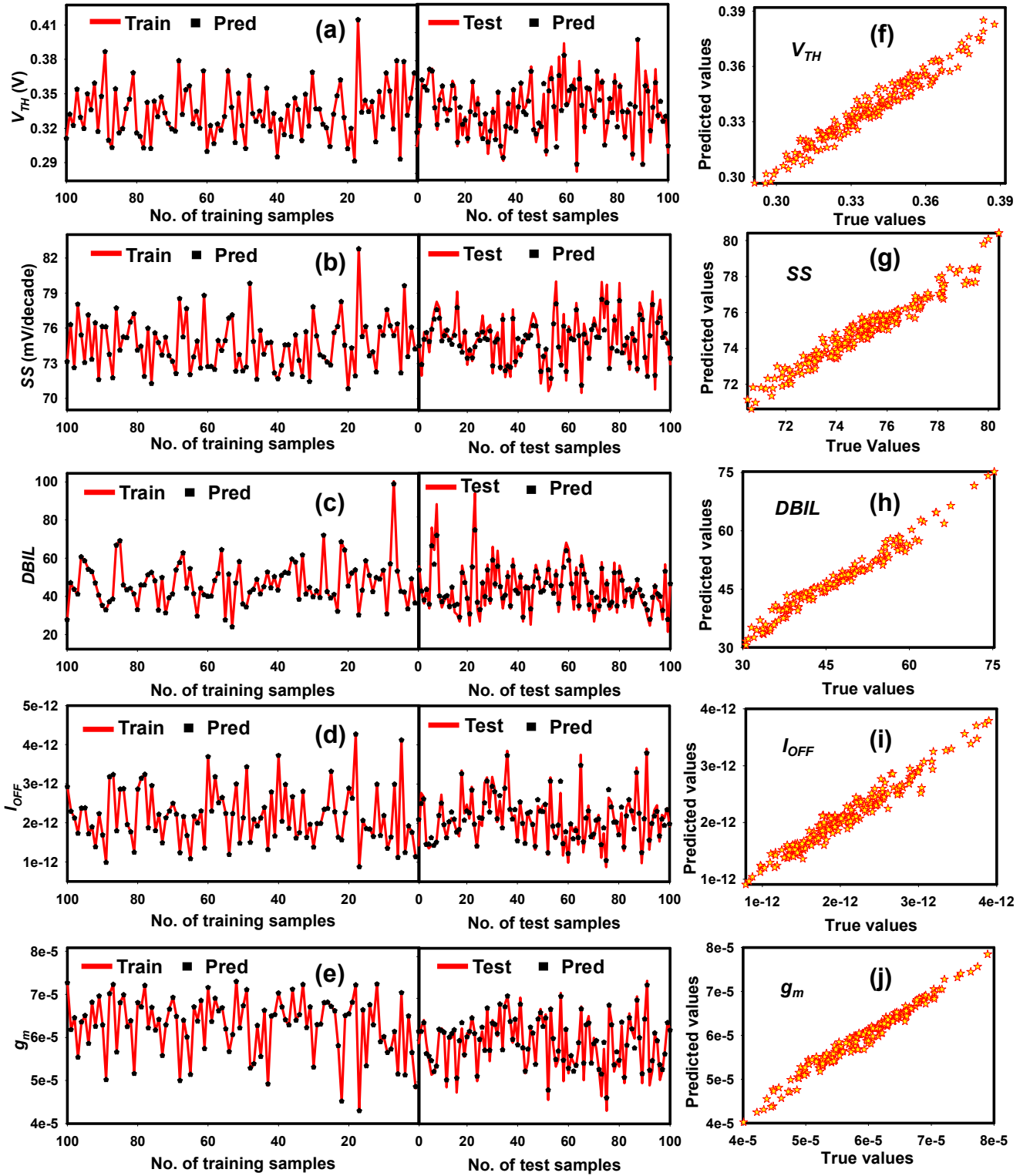
For this task, we use a regression-based supervised machine learning algorithm which is mainly used for predicting continuous values. The purpose of the ML model is to develop an automatic, fast, and reliable data-driven model that can associate the device parameters to device characteristics. The regression model, random forest regressor (RFR) [16], is used in this work from the scikit-learn library [17]. It is a flexible, reliable, and easy-to-use ML algorithm that generates great results with minimal hyperparameter tuning requirements. RFR is based on the ensemble learning method and consists of several decision trees also called “forest”. It considers the outputs of these trees individually and takes one (which gets the majority of votes) as a selected prediction as shown in Fig. 4. This prediction is the most accurate and stable output.

The RFR model is trained with the bagging method. This method combines the learning of models to increase the overall result. The simulated dataset created for this task has 4500 samples. The DC characteristics are extracted from simulated data. The dataset is split into the train (80%) and test (20%) components. The number of RITs ( $T_{NUM}$ ) and their locations ( $T_{LOC}$ ) are chosen as input features for the ML model to investigate their impact on the electrical parameters ( $V_{th}$ ,  $SS$ ,  $DBIL$ ,  $I_{OFF}$ , and  $g_m$ ). The fluctuations induced due to RITs are

Pseudo Code: Random Forest Algorithm
To generate a number of decision trees:
for i = 1 to a iterate
Randomly sample the training data S with replacement to produce $S_i$ .
Create a root node, $N_i$ containing $S_i$
Call BuildTree( $N_i$ )
end for
BuildTree( $N$ ):
if N contains instances of only one class then
return
else
Randomly select x% of possible splitting features in N.
Select features F with highest information gain to split on
Create f child nodes of N, $N_1, \dots, N_f$ , where F has f possible values ( $F_1, \dots, F_f$ ).
for i = 1 to f iterate
Set contents of $N_i$ to $S_i$ is all instances in N that match $F_i$ .
Call BuildTree( $N_i$ )
end for
end if

**Figure 5:** A list of the pseudocode is used by trained RFR algorithm to perform prediction. Each random tree predicts a different target for same test feature and then each target is calculated and considered as vote to select final output.

predicted as outputs. The training data is first normalized between the range of zero and one to increase the convergence speed and to make the model output more precise. Then, the training is done to teach the ML model from the normalized data and to enhance its predictive power for ensuring high accuracy. The hyperparameters that are selected to optimize the ML model are listed in Table II and are selected manually. The pseudocode for the RFR algorithm is explained in Fig. 5. After successful learning, the well-trained model is verified on unseen test data in order to evaluate accuracy of RFR model.

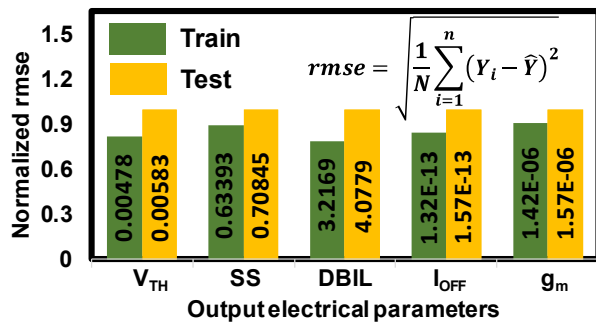


**Figure 6:** A comparison of the simulated data and the ML model predicted output values for five different key electrical parameters, i.e.,  $V_{TH}$ ,  $SS$ ,  $DBIL$ ,  $I_{OFF}$  and  $g_m$  is illustrated, (a)-(e) for training and testing datasets, respectively. The solid line represents the simulated values and the markers represent the predicted values. (f)-(j) show that the ML model predicted test outputs are in straight line between the two axis where simulated values ( $Y_i$ ) = predicted values ( $\hat{Y}$ ).

#### 4. Result and discussion

Here, the use of the ML algorithm is demonstrated to predict the variations in the electrical parameters ( $V_{TH}$ ,  $SS$ ,  $DBIL$ ,  $I_{OFF}$ , and  $g_m$ ). The  $T_{NUM}$  and  $T_{LOC}$  are given as inputs to the ML

model. After successful training, the model is evaluated for the test dataset. Root mean squared error ( $rmse$ ) is considered as the loss function in a regression problem, which is defined as the root of the average squared difference between the



**Figure 7:** The quantitative assessment using  $rmse$  values. A comparison between training and test datasets of all the electrical parameters ( $V_{th}$ ,  $SS$ ,  $DIBL$ ,  $I_{off}$  and  $g_m$ ) is shown using histograms after normalizing values by test values.

predicted values and true simulated values. In regression problems,  $rmse$  measures the deviation of the predicted values with respect to the true values given as:

$$rmse = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^n (Y_i - \hat{Y})^2}, \quad (2)$$

where  $Y_i$  and  $\hat{Y}$  are the true simulated and the predicted values, respectively. The ML model is considered well trained if the  $rmse$  value is very small which means the predicted regression values of the model are close to the real values.

The ML algorithms generally have a preconceived degree of randomness in the training process and initializing procedure. Therefore, a ML model may produce different output patterns, even if it runs with the same input data, depending on the random initial condition [18]. To improve the performance of the model so that its convergence can lead to the global minimum, a random starting point is often necessary. To ensure the known randomness of the model, a quantity, “random seed” is chosen. In our case, it is set to 35. It makes possible the reproducibility of the result. This is an initial point for a sequence, and it guarantees that the trained model will predict the same output every time if it starts from the same seed number.

There are a lot of causes that affect the accuracy of any ML model. Overfitting is one of those causes in ML that hampers the performance as well as the accuracy of the model. To counter overfitting, in the RFR ML model, there are some hyperparameters that must be selected carefully to minimize the risk of overfitting. One such hyperparameter is “ $n\_estimators$ ” which selects the number of trees in the forest. The higher number of trees gives better performance and makes the model less likely to overfit but they also make the code slower. So, it must be selected according to the processor used. To ensure that model does not overfit, we select “ $n\_estimators$ ” as 250 before taking the maximum voting or averages of predictions. This makes the predictions of the RFR model stronger and more stable.

The depth of the RFR model also causes overfitting if it does not prune accurately. It defines the longest path from the root node to the leaf node in the forest. If this value is too large then the model will perform efficiently for the training dataset but will perform poorly over an unseen test dataset and the

model, therefore will not be able to generalize due to overfitting. So, the depth of the RFR model must be limited to a value where it can keep away from the overfitting problem. It also reduces the complexity of the ML model. For this work, the depth is set to 20.

Once the model is trained and optimized, it is used to predict the desired output. The fluctuations in  $V_{th}$ ,  $SS$ ,  $DIBL$ ,  $I_{off}$ , and  $g_m$  induced by RITs are predicted as output using the ML model according to the random number  $T_{NUM}$  and random position  $T_{LOC}$  of RITs. The results of the ML model for training and testing datasets of different parameters are shown in Figs. 6 (a)-(e). The curves are plotted between the values of the parameters in the y-axis and training and testing data samples in the X-axis. The first 100 training and testing samples results are plotted for better visualization and understanding. In the left side figures, the training simulated data (red line) and ML predicted training data (black dots) are shown. Similarly, in the right side figures, testing simulated data (red line) and ML predicted test data (black dots) are shown. From the figures, it can be seen that the prediction by the ML model is in good agreement with the simulated values. The prediction accuracy of the ML model for training data is approximately 98-99% for all the parameters. The test results by ML model, on the other hand, specially for  $V_{th}$ ,  $I_{off}$  and  $g_m$  are very accurate and the predicted values are overlapping with the simulated values. There are just a few outliers when the model is predicting the  $SS$  and  $DIBL$  parameter values but the predicted values are still close to the true simulated values.

The predictive capability of the model can be confirmed by Figs. 6 (f)-(j). The plots show that the predicted test values are in a straight line between the two axes where simulated values  $Y_i = \text{predicted values } \hat{Y}$ . It is examined that ML model outputs follow the simulated outputs. From Fig. 7, the quantitative assessment of the ML model using  $rmse$  can be evaluated. The  $rmse$  values comparison between train and test dataset of all the electrical parameters is shown using histograms after normalizing the values by test values. It can be seen that the test  $rmse$  values are close to the train values. It shows that what the model learns during training, it is able to use that learning to deduce the outputs on the test dataset. Hence, the model successfully overcomes the overfitting problem. The real  $rmse$  values are also shown in the figure.

It is also worth mentioning that, the simulation took approximately 37 days to generate 4500 samples (12 mins/sample) whereas with the same computing resources the RFR model is trained in only 240 seconds. It shows that modeling using ML is faster than simulation. In addition to this, once the training of the ML model is done, a large dataset can be derived quickly without further training process. This confirms the feasibility of using a ML model to predict the semiconductor processing results. The results also show that the ML model, after proper training and optimization, proved to be a powerful tool to obtain accurate results rapidly.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, the regression-based ML model is used successfully to imitate the results of simulated data to investigate the effects of RITs on electrical characteristics ( $V_{th}$ ,  $SS$ ,  $DIBL$ ,  $I_{off}$ , and  $g_m$ ) of 16-nm HKMG bulk FinFETs. This work bridge the gap between past physical model-based



approaches and machine learning models in analyzing the defects that occurred due to random fluctuations at the device level. Also, the ML approach is completely data-driven and device physics-free, therefore, deep knowledge of device physics is not required to apply the ML algorithm. It is shown here that, the effects of random numbers and random locations of traps on various electrical parameters ( $V_{th}$ ,  $SS$ ,  $DIBL$ ,  $I_{OFF}$ , and  $g_m$ ) variations are predicted successfully.

The model is designed easily using the ensemble technique. Once the model is trained, it is used to predict desired output without additional training of the model and large data can be obtained quickly. A total of 4500 samples are simulated and used for training and testing of the ML model. The results demonstrated that the predicted output values have strong agreement with simulated values. The error function is designed using *rmse*. The low training and test *rmse* values are achieved for  $V_{th}$ ,  $SS$ ,  $DIBL$ ,  $I_{OFF}$ , and  $g_m$  which proves that the model performs fairly well and without overfitting on data. The ML approach is very efficient and less time-consuming as compared to its simulation counterpart. With these advantages, the ML provides a great possibility to accelerate semiconductor development technology. In future work, the model can also be further utilized to analyze the effects of other fluctuations such as WKF, LER, and RDF for different semiconductor devices.

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