

On the Optimisation of Machine Learning Models for Predicting the Photosynthetically Available Radiation in the Water Column

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ABSTRACT

Photosynthetically Available Radiation (PAR) is a crucial parameter in oceanography. This study explores the optimization of machine learning models to predict PAR in the water column using selected wavelengths of downwelling irradiance. By leveraging Genetic Algorithms (GA), optimal wavelength combinations were identified for two machine learning models: Linear Regression (LR) and Regression Trees (RT). The models were trained on data from the HE533 expedition and validated using datasets from multiple ship expeditions across different geolocations. Experimental results indicate that the LR model, with an optimal wavelength combination of $E_d(469)$, $E_d(501)$, and $E_d(600)$, achieved the highest prediction accuracy ($R^2 = 0.9992$, MAE = 5.78). The RT model, using $E_d(433)$, $E_d(586)$, and $E_d(687)$, performed slightly worse ($R^2 = 0.9954$, MAE = 16.37). While both models generalised well to unseen datasets, significant prediction errors were observed for small PAR values at lower water depths.

INTRODUCTION

Photosynthetically Available Radiation (PAR) is an important parameter in modern oceanography. PAR is defined as the integrated radiation between 400-700 nm. One potential application is modelling vegetation growth, because the radiation in this wavelength is a requirement for the photosynthesis process (Holinde and Zielinski, 2016; Wang et al., 2013).

Modelling vegetation growth in the water column is crucial for understanding ecosystem dynamics (Krause-Jensen and Duarte, 2016), predicting climate change impacts (Dutkiewicz et al., 2019), managing water resources (Glibert, 2020) or modelling the oxygen

production (Field et al., 1998). Therefore, providing reliable PAR values for different water bodies is an important task.



Figure 1 – Freefall profiler

As proven in previous work, the PAR values can be reconstructed using only discrete wavelengths from the underwater light field and, if necessary, additional environmental parameters (Stahl et al., 2022; Kumm et al., 2022; Tholen et al., 2024). Predicting PAR has been explored in the context of autonomous Argo Float devices (Sloyan et al., 2018) in (Stahl et al., 2022) using multiple linear regression and regression trees. Kumm et al. (2022) showed that these results can be improved by using artificial neural networks-based models and further improved by incorporating additional environmental parameters, i.e. pressure. Tholen et al. (2024) used data from Freefall Profilers (Figure 1) to

improve the prediction accuracy of PAR by incorporating incoming surface irradiance (E_s) (Wollschläger et al., 2020d). Most recently Pitarch et al. (2025) investigated the accurate estimation of PAR based on the different radiance wavelength available on different Argo Float configurations. The long term goal of this series of research is to make the PAR sensor, mounted on the Argo Floats obsolete, to allow the replacement with another sensor (Stahl et al., 2022). However, even if the models show a good performance on the data gathered by Argo Floats (Kumm et al., 2022; Stahl et al., 2022). However, most recent research has shown a unsatisfactory accuracy of the models relaying on the three wavelengths $E_d(400)$, $E_d(412)$, $E_d(490)$ for the Freefall Profiler dataset, which covers more geolocations and is therefore more complex (Tholen et al., 2024).

In Figure 2 two spectral profiles for a water depth of 01 m and 195 m are shown. It can be observed that the radiation profile depends on the water depth. Furthermore, one can observe that the wavelength measured by the Argo Floats might best reflect the characteristics of the full spectra. Therefore, in this paper Genetic Algorithm (GA) (Holland, 1975) will be used to optimise the selection of suitable wavelength for PAR predictions on Argo Floats.

DATASETS

In this research, data from different ship expeditions are used. The different models are trained on data from the HE533 Expedition (Voß et al., 2020e). As shown in Figure 3, this expedition was undertaken near the northern coast of Norway. The HE533 dataset contains originally 9858 tuples of which 37.77 % had to be discarded because of missing values.

To validate the generalisability of the models developed, data from ten other cruises was used in the validation

process (Friedrichs et al., 2020; Mascarenhas et al., 2020; Voß et al., 2020f, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d; Wollschläger et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). As shown in Figure 3 these cruises cover different geolocations all over the world. The combined dataset for validation contains 64,060 tuples. However, only 10,954 tuples can be used due to missing values. All datasets used in this research are publicly available on the data portal Pangea¹.

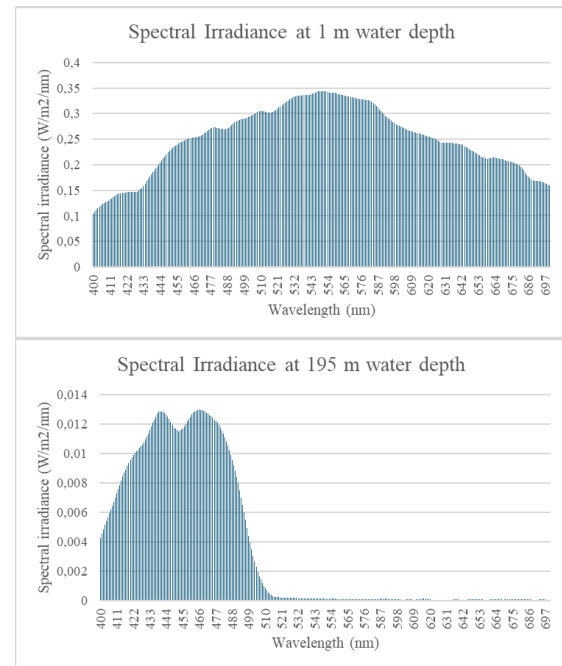


Figure 2 Example Spectral Irradiance for 1m and 195 water depth

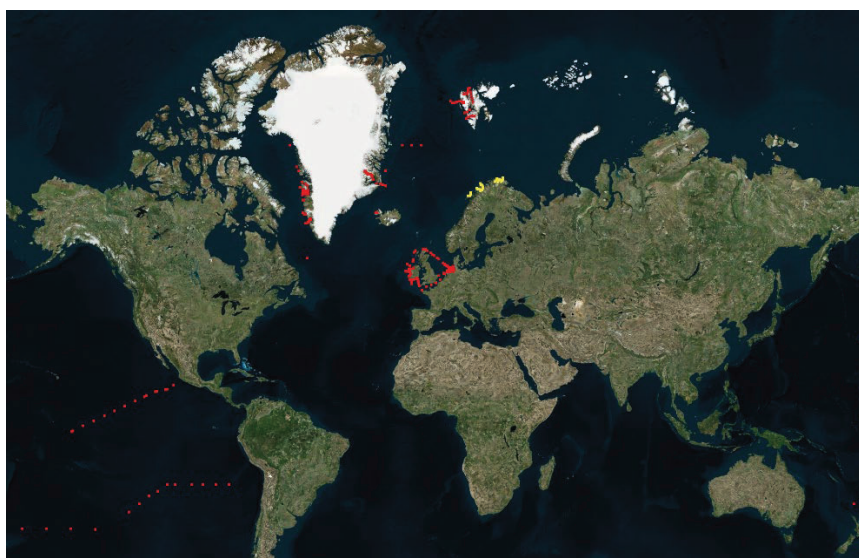


Figure 3 Locations of stations from cruise HE 533 (yellow) used for training and all other cruises (red) used for validation

¹ www.pangea.de

MODELLING

For modelling purposes, data from the HE533 dataset was used after pre-processing, i.e. normalisation and removal of data records with missing values. Random sampling without replacement was applied, to split this data into a training set (70 %) and a test set (30 %). The training set was used to find optimal wavelength for PAR prediction for two different AI based models, i.e. a Linear Regression model (LR), and a Regression Tree model (RT) utilising GA.

The test set was then used to validate the models generated in terms of accuracy. The outcome of this validation serves as a baseline to investigate the generalisability of the different models to measurements in other geolocations.

The models generated on HE533 were then applied on the other datasets available and evaluated in terms of accuracy. This accuracy was then compared with the baseline accuracy calculated from the HE533 test data. The modelling approach described is visualised in Figure 4.

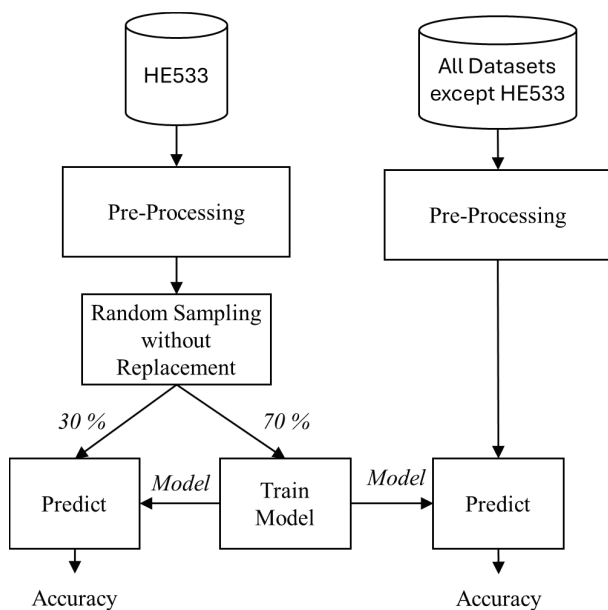


Figure 4: Modelling approach used

EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

All experiments were conducted using the KNIME workbench (Berthold et al., 2009). For training the RT the procedure described by Breiman et al. (1984) is applied with a couple of simplification, for instance no pruning, not necessarily binary trees. LR model uses standard multiple linear regression (Freedman, 2009).

During the experiments, GA is used to find an optimal subset of wavelengths to model the PAR value. Due to the limitations of the Argo Float platforms, a maximum number of three wavelengths is chosen during the optimization. The optimization was done utilizing the KNIME *Feature Selection Node* applying Genetic Algorithm as feature selection strategy. The population

size was set to 20, while the maximum number of iterations was set to 10. The optimal parametrisation of the GA is not discussed in this research.

RESULTS

For the LR the highest accuracy was achieved by the combination of $E_d(469)$, $E_d(501)$, and $E_d(600)$, achieving an R^2 value of 0.9992. For this configuration, the accuracy on the validation dataset was 0.9982. A scatter plot showing the relation between predictions based on the LR-model and the true PAR values is given in Figure 5. It can be observed that the model tends to underestimate the PAR values, especially for higher values.

Scatter Plot Linear Regression on all Datasets

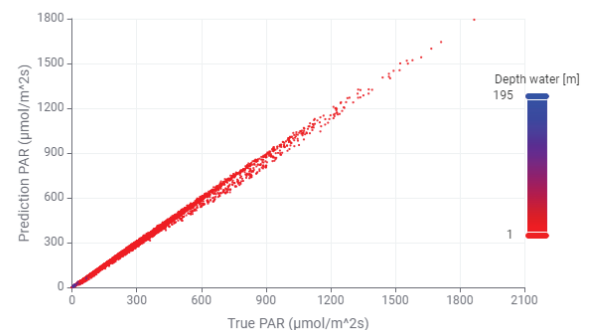


Figure 5 Scatter Plot for Linear Regression Predictions of PAR for the validation Datasets

For RT the highest accuracy was achieved by the combination of $E_d(433)$, $E_d(586)$, and $E_d(687)$, achieving an R^2 value of 0.9954. For this configuration, the accuracy on the validation dataset was 0.9603. Figure 6 shows the relation between PAR predictions and true PAR values utilising the RT model as scatter plot. It can be observed that the model performance decreases for higher PAR values.

Scatter Plot Regression Tree on all Datasets

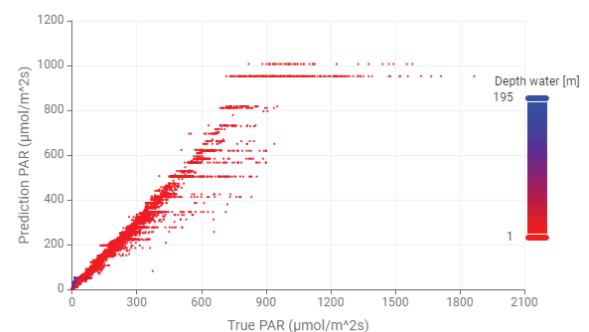


Figure 6 Scatter Plot for Regression Tree Predictions of PAR for the validation dataset

Statistical results of both best found ML models are given in Table 1. The mean absolute error (MAE) of the

LR is approximately three times smaller than the MAE of the RT model.

Table 1 Statistical values for both ML models on the validation set

Statistical Value	LR	RT
R^2	0.9969	0.9564
Mean Absolute Error	5.780	16.37
Mean Squared Error	141.8	1979
Mean Absolute Percentage Error	0.1160	0.2208

DISCUSSION

Models trained in this research, i.e. based on the optimised subset of wavelength, clearly outperform the models trained in Tholen et al. (2024). The best performing LR model found in previous work achieved an R^2 of 0.884, trained on $E_d(400)$, $E_d(412)$, $E_d(490)$. The best performing RT model achieved an R^2 of 0.822 on six wavelengths, incorporating three wavelengths of the surface radiation.

In Figure 6, depicting the results of the regression tree, it can be seen that groups the plotted data points are aligned horizontally. This is because a regression tree partitions the feature space into distinct regions based on decision rules. This is also known as local discretisation (Bramer, 2020). Within each region, the model assigns a constant predicted value to that region. If predicted values (i.e. the predicted PAR values), are plotted on the vertical axis against an independent variable on the horizontal axis (i.e. the true PAR values), all data points within the same leaf node will have the same predicted value. This results in horizontally aligned points because multiple input values share the same output value.

Wollschläger et al (2020d) introduced a trimodal approach to model the underwater light field, splitting the spectral information into three different bands. Within the optimisation GA automated chooses one wavelength from each of the bands for the LR model, while for the RT-model two wavelengths from the third band are chosen. For the RT model, two wavelength from the third band are chosen, while none of the wavelength from the second band is chosen. The trimodal approach was motivated by the absorption characteristics of the dominant substances affecting the underwater light field (Wollschläger et al., 2020d). Thus, the wavelength chosen for the RT might not be optimal for generalising PAR predictions.

As summarised in Table 1, the LR model outperforms the RT-model. Therefore, further discussions will focus on the LR model. To validate the suitability of the ML model to replace the PAR sensor, the relative error of predictions compared to true values is calculated as follows:

$$E_{relative} = \frac{PAR_T - PAR_P}{PAR_T} \cdot 100 \quad (1)$$

Where PAR_T denotes the true PAR value, while PAR_P is the predicted PAR value. In Figure 7 the relative error is shown in dependence of the water depth for the LR model. One can observe measurements with high relative errors for low water depths.

Depth Profile of Relative Error for Linear Regression

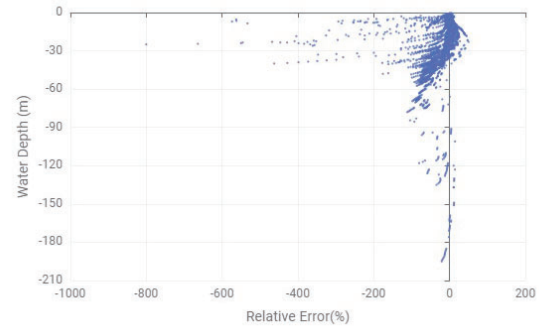


Figure 7 Depth profile of relative prediction error for the linear regression model

In Table 2 the ten highest relative error values are given together with the true PAR values and the PAR predictions. It can be observed that in all cases the true PAR value was smaller than 0.2197.

Table 2 Summary of data tuples with the highest relative error values of the validation set for linear regression

Relative Error (%)	True PAR	Prediction LR
-800.08	0.1328	1.195
-663.74	0.1591	1.215
-573.67	0.1867	1.258
-562.72	0.1917	1.270
-562.05	0.1888	1.250
-549.95	0.1903	1.237
-545.66	0.1895	1.224
-533.03	0.1974	1.250
-468.04	0.2197	1.248
-462.45	0.2175	1.223

As shown in Table 2 in all cases of high relative errors the true PAR values are small. For further investigation, Table 3 summarises statistics of the true PAR values of the subset of the validation set with higher relative errors than the given threshold, while the relative error over the true PAR values is shown in Figure 8. It can be observed that high relative errors occur for small true PAR values. If the prediction is limited to PAR values greater than one the maximum relative error is reduced to 50.04 %. Higher thresholds for the maximal relative errors result in smaller mean values for true PAR.

Relative Error over True PAR

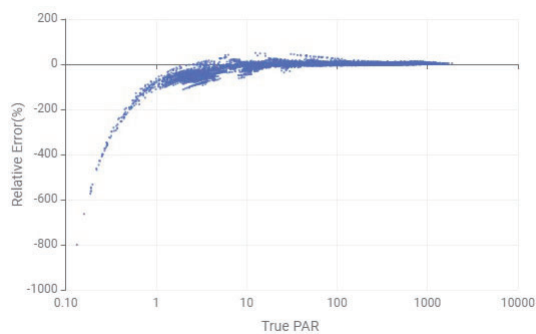


Figure 8 Relative error (%) of the linear regression model over the true PAR value

Table 3 Summary of statistics of true PAR values for tuples of the validation set with specific max. relative error values higher than the threshold

Statistics true PAR	Max. relative error (threshold)			
	10 %	50 %	100 %	200 %
Samples	1930	705	134	57
Mean	31.745	2.092	0.617	0.322
Std. dev.	110.7	1.258	0.42	0.096
Minimum	0.133	0.133	0.133	0.133
Maximum	900.44	12.538	2.353	0.508

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The paper presented a modelling approach for predicting PAR in the water column, which uses downwelling irradiance in selected wavelengths. Two different AI-based modelling approaches, i.e. linear regression and regression tree, were used. The wavelength selection was optimised utilising a Genetic Algorithm. All experiments were conducted using the KNIME workbench.

It was shown that the linear regression model outperforms the regression tree model in terms of R^2 and mean absolute error. It was also shown that the models generalise well on data recorded in other geolocations without additional modification or re-training.

However, further analysis revealed that for small true PAR values high relative prediction errors occur, especially in lower water depths. It was already shown that incorporating additional environmental parameters such as e.g. pressure or salinity enhance the accuracy of the regression (Kumm et al., 2022). Therefore, the incorporation of additional parameters can also make the regression more stable and prevent high relative errors. This will be investigated in future research. In addition, domain experts will be incorporated to decide whether the performance of the ML models is high enough to replace the PAR sensor on the Argo Floats for future missions.

In addition, methods to improve linear regression models, such as regression splines (Friedman, 1991) or

generalised additive models (Wood et al., 2015), will be investigated.

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