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Article

An Index Used to Evaluate the Applicability of Mid-long Term Runoff Prediction in a Basin Based on Mutual Information

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Abstract: Accurate and reliable mid-long runoff prediction (MLTRP) is of great importance in water resources management. However the MLTRP is not suitable in each basin and how to evaluate the applicability of MLTRP is still a question. Therefore, the total mutual information (TMI) index is developed in this study based on the predictor selection method using mutual information (MI) and partial MI (PMI). The relationship between the TMI and the predictive performance of five AI models is analyzed by applying five models in 222 forecasting scenarios in Australia. The results over 222 forecasting scenarios demonstrate that, compared with the MI, the developed TMI index can better represent the available information in the predictors, and has more significant negative correlation with the RRMSE with the correlation coefficient between -0.62 and -0.85. This means the model's predictive performance will become better along with the increase of TMI, and therefore the developed TMI index can be used to evaluate the applicability of MLTRP. When TMI is more than 0.1, the available information in the predictors can support the construction of MLTRP models. In addition, the TMI can be used to partly explain the difference of predictive performance among five models. In general, the complex models, which can better utilize the contained information, are more sensitive to the TMI, and have more significant improvement in terms of predictive performance along with the increase of TMI.

Keywords: mid-long term runoff prediction; total mutual information; applicability evaluation; artificial intelligence models; available information

1. Introduction

Driven by both the climate change and human activities, the mechanism of runoff generation and confluence is undergoing significant changes, leading to a more uncertain water resources evolution trend [1–4]. Meanwhile, some changing socio-economic factors, such as growing population and urbanization processes, will cause more and more water supply demand [5–8]. Under this background, mid-long term runoff prediction (MLTRP), which can support valuable information on future runoff, is of great importance in water resources management and comprehensive utilization, and received more and more attention in the research and practice fields [9–12].

In order to obtain good predictive performance, many models have been developed and applied in MLTRP, and support the comprehensive management of water resources [9–16]. These models can

be broadly divided into two groups: 1) physical-based models; and 2) data-based models [12,17–20]. In general, the physical-based models require large amount of data for model construction and validation, such as rainfall data, characteristics data of basins, geographic data and climate data, and therefore these models cannot obtain good predictive performance in data-sparse basins [18,21,22]. On the other hand, along with the development of computer science and data science, there are more and more hydrological data and climate data, and the data-based models are more and more popular in many fields including the MLTRP [23–26]. In addition, due to the lack of reliable and accurate meteorological forecasts with same forecast horizon, the application of physical-based models are limited, and therefore the data-based models are widely used to generate mid-long term runoff predictions by establishing teleconnection relationship between future runoff and climate factors, such as sea surface temperature anomalies (SSTA), atmospheric circulation factors [13,17,27–29].

Aiming to improve the predictive skills of the data-driven mid-long term runoff predictions, many studies have been done in the three aspects: 1) the model improvement, 2) the post-processing of model outputs and 3) the selection of predictors. Among these studies, most studies focus on the improvement of models and many artificial intelligent (AI) models, including the support vector regression (SVR), artificial neural networks (ANN), gated recurrent unit neural network (GRU) and so on, have been proposed in place of the simple linear models and obtain better predictive performance [18,30–33]. In addition, many hybrid models based on the connection of different models have been applied and perform better than base models [17,25,34]. However, the same model may have different predictive performance in different basins, and a single AI model often generate deterministic predictions and cannot reflect the uncertainties of future runoff, and therefore the post-processing methods are needed to improve the predictive accuracy and reliability [16,35]. For example, the model fusion methods are used to combine the forecasting results to improve model reliability [35–37]. And some studies focus on generating probabilistic predictions to reflect the forecasting uncertainties better [16,38]. For example, Liang et al. (2018) makes probabilistic predictions by applying hydrological uncertainty processor to post-process the deterministic predictions obtained by the SVR model [16].

In terms of the selection of predictors, many previous studies focus on the auto-correlation in the runoff time series and many auto-regressive models, such as autoregressive moving average model and its variant models, have been used and have good performance [21,39,40]. However, when only the auto-correlated factors are used, the predictive performance is determined by the statistical characteristics of the runoff time series [27]. And many studies demonstrated that the number and selection process of predictors will influence the predictive performance significantly [21,41,42]. Therefore, considering the teleconnection between the hydrological factors and climate factors (SSTA, atmospheric circulation factors), many studies select climate factors as predictors and obtain more accurate predictions with longer forecast lead time [43–45]. In order to select more suitable predictors from numerous climate factors, many selection methods have been used, such as correlation analysis, sensitivity analysis, least absolute shrinkage and selection operator, mutual information and principal component analysis [10,16,37,44,46,47]. Among these methods, the mutual information (MI), which can reflect nonlinear relationship between variables, has been widely used in many fields [48–50].

Based on the studies on selecting predictors, improving models, and post-processing, the mid-long term runoff predictive performance have been significantly improved. But there are some questions needing to be investigated. Firstly, in some forecasting scenarios, the forecasting results obtained by data-based models may be worse than results obtained by averaging the runoff time series, and the difference of predictive performance among different basins may be larger than that among different models [31,33,51]. But how to explain the difference among different basins and evaluate if a basin is suitable for making mid-long term runoff predictions? Secondly, many indexes, e.g., the mutual information, are used in the predictor selection process to evaluate the nonlinear correlation between the predictors and predictand (i.e., the runoff), which is closely related with the predictive performance [27]. But the relationship between the predictive performance and the indexes, which are used in predictor selection process, is not further discussed. Therefore, the

objectives of this study are (1) to find an index which can reflect the relationship between all predictors and runoff; (2) to evaluate the relationship between the index and the predictive performance; and (3) to identify if the index can be used in assessing the applicability of MLTRP in a specific forecasting scenario.

The remaining sections of this paper are organized as follows. The data, case studies and methods are introduced in section 2. The results will be demonstrated in section 3 and discussed in section 4. Finally, the main conclusions will be summarized in section 5.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The Predictor Selection and Total Mutual Information

2.1.1. The Predictor Selection Method

The predictor selection is a process applied to recognize most valuable predictors from numerous candidate predictors to reduce the model complexity and improve model accuracy [49,52]. Among many predictor selection methods, the MI can reflect the nonlinear relationship and is used in this study. The selection method based on MI is briefly described as follows, and the details can be found in other studies [48,53,54].

For the predictand Y and candidate predictors X , the MI is defined as follow:

$$I(X; Y) = \int \int p(x, y) \log \frac{p(x, y)}{p(x)p(y)} dx dy \quad (1)$$

where $p(x)$ and $p(y)$ represents the marginal probability density functions (pdfs) of X and Y , and $p(x, y)$ is the joint pdf. In the application, the MI can be obtained by a numerical approximation as follows:

$$I(X; Y) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \log \frac{f(x_i, y_i)}{f(x_i)f(y_i)} \quad (2)$$

where f denotes the estimated density based on a sample of n observations of (x, y) , and can be estimate by the kernel density estimation (KDE):

$$\hat{f}(x) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n K_h(x - x_i) \quad (3)$$

where $\hat{f}(x)$ denotes the estimate of the pdf at x ; x_i denote the i th observation of X ; and K_h is some kernel function and a common choice is the Gaussian kernel.

The MI can be used to evaluate the correlation between predictand and predictors, but it cannot identify the internal relation among the predictors and may cause the redundant information in the predictors [54]. Therefore, the partial mutual information (PMI), which quantifies the nonlinear dependence of Y on candidate predictors Z that is not accounted for by the selected predictors X , is introduced. The PMI is calculated by first filtering both Y and Z via regression on X to obtain residuals u and v respectively:

$$u = Y - \hat{m}_Y(X) \quad (4)$$

$$v = Z - \hat{m}_Z(X) \quad (5)$$

where the $\hat{m}_Y(X)$ and $\hat{m}_Z(X)$ represents the estimators for the regression of Y and Z on X . Based on the KDE, the $\hat{m}_Y(X)$ can be written as:

$$\hat{m}_Y(X) = E[y|X = x] = \frac{1}{n} \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n y_i K_h(x - x_i)}{\sum_{i=1}^n K_h(x - x_i)} \quad (6)$$

Then, the PMI can be calculated by:

$$I'(Z; Y|X) = I(v; u) \quad (7)$$

Based on the previous equations, the process of the predictor selection method based on the MI and PMI, named PMIS, is showed in Figure 1. The thr_n and thr_{PMI} are sated thresholds.

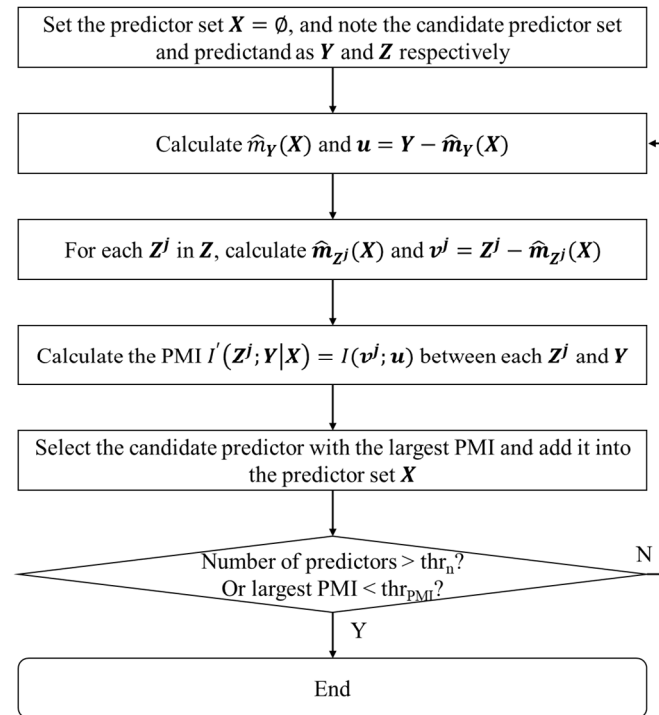


Figure 1. The process of PMIS method.

2.1.2. Total Mutual Information

The PMIS can be proposed to select suitable predictors from numerous candidate variables, but the PMI cannot reflect the relation between the whole predictor set and the predictand, and the MI cannot reflect the internal relationship among the predictor set. Therefore, the total mutual information (TMI) is developed based on the PMIS method to reflect the relation between the whole predictor set and the predictand. The TMI can be calculated by the following equation:

$$\text{TMI} = \sum_{i=1}^m w_i \text{PMI}_i \quad (8)$$

where m is the number of selected predictors; i is the order of selecting the predictor; w_i and PMI_i are the weight and PMI value of the i th selected predictor.

The w_i can be determined by calculating the information gain after introducing the specific predictor. Considering the residual shown in equation (4) can represent the uncertainty in the predictand to some degree, the difference between standard deviation of the residual is used to represent the information gain. Then the w_i can be calculated as follows:

$$w_i = \text{std}(Y - \hat{m}_Y(X^{i-1})) - \text{std}(Y - \hat{m}_Y(X^i)) \quad (8)$$

where X^i represent the predictor set after introducing the i th predictor; std denote the standard deviation.

2.2. Case Study and Data Preparing

In order to analyze the relationship between TMI and the predictive performance of MLTRP, the predictions are generated in 37 hydrologic reference stations in Australia. The 37 hydrologic reference stations are selected from 221 stations with the best data quality and available data length. All stations are located in catchments with minimal anthropogenic interruptions. The 37 stations and corresponding catchments are shown in Figure 2.

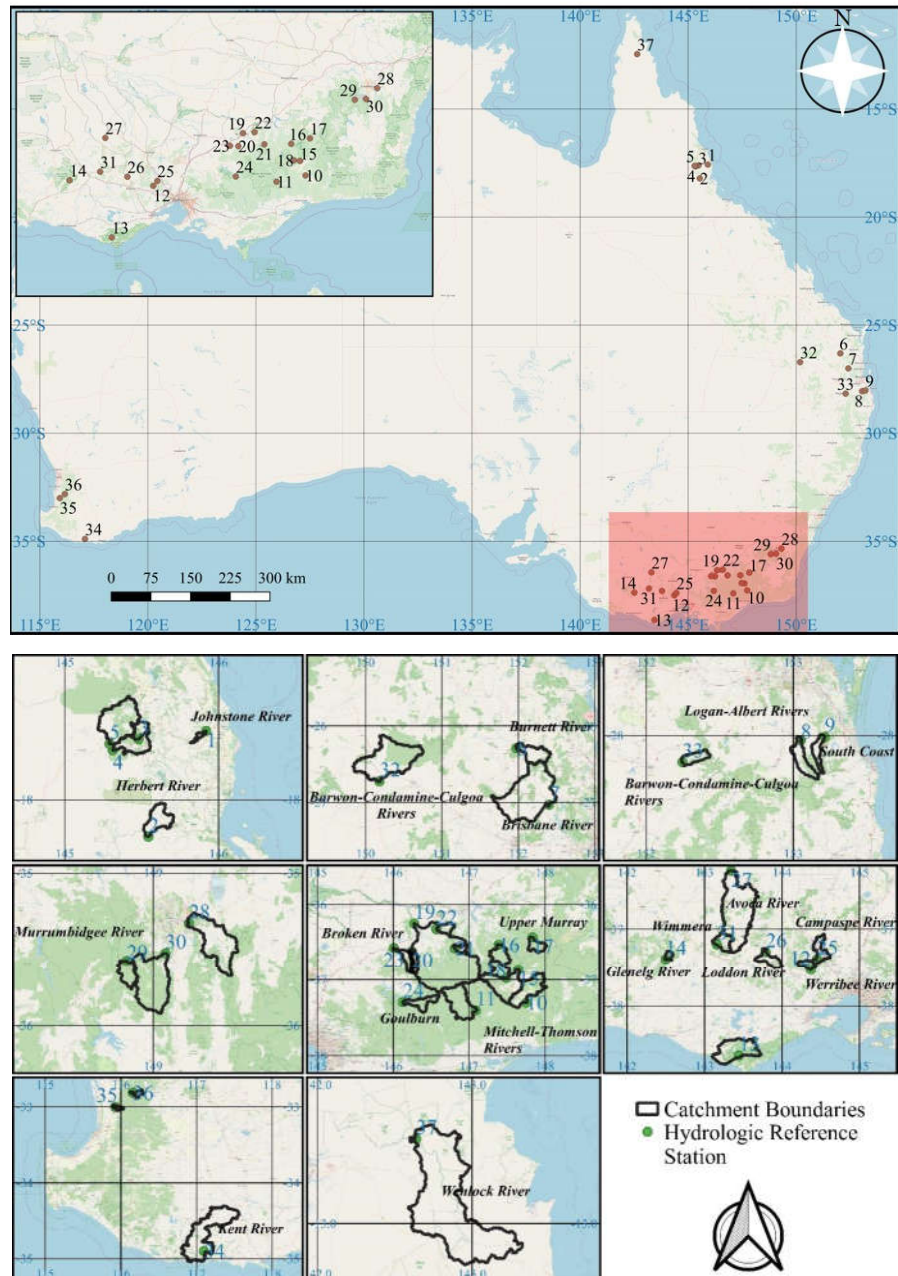


Figure 2. Locations of the catchments and hydrologic reference stations.

The monthly runoff data of the 37 selected stations can be obtained from the website of Bureau of Meteorology, Australia (<http://www.bom.gov.au/water/hrs/>). The available runoff records all end in December 2014 and the start months of different stations are between January 1951 and July 1982. In order to process the skewness in runoff data, the runoff data are preprocessed by a widely used log-sinh data transformation method [51,55,56]. And it should be noted that the following results are demonstrated and discussed based on the transformed data in order to compare the model's predictive performance among different basins.

The other data used in this study include the rainfall and 130 climate factors. The grid rainfall data with 0.05 ° resolution are obtained through Australian Water Availability Project (<http://www.auscover.org.au/purl/australian-gridded-climate-data>) and processed to monthly area rainfall. The 130 climate factors data are obtained from the website of National Climate Center, China Meteorological Administration (<http://cmdp.ncc-cma.net/en/>). The climate data are normalized by:

$$\hat{F}_{year,month} = \frac{F_{year,month} - \bar{F}_{month}}{S_{month}} \quad (8)$$

where F is the original data, \hat{F} is the transformed data, $year$ and $month$ represent time, \bar{F} is mean value and S is standard deviation.

2.3. Forecasting Models and Model Development Process

2.3.1. Forecasting Models

Five AI models are used to generate mid-long term runoff predictions in this study. The five models are multilayer perceptron (MLP) model, block-based MLP (MB) model, Bayesian SVR (BSVR) model, coupled model of BSVR and ARD kernel (BSVRARD), and long short-term memory (LSTM) model. Because these five models have been widely used in many fields, the details of these five models are not introduced in this study and can be found in other previous studies [24,49,57–60]. The features of these five models are briefly summarized in Table 1. In general, the MLP, BSVR and BSVRARD more focus on the point information and the inputs of these models are simple point structure [49]. The MB and LSTM more focus on the time series information and the inputs of these two models are time series structure [49].

Table 1. Brief introduction of five models applied in this study.

Model	Introduction
MLP	Commonly used three layers neural networks.
MB	Based on the MLP, a block data structure is used to incorporate the time series information. The details of this method can be found in [49]
BSVR	A model in which the Bayesian inference framework is used to optimize the parameters of SVR. The details can be found in [57–59].
BSVRARD	A model integrated the BSVR and ARD kernel. The details can be found in [57–59].
LSTM	Commonly used deep learning neural network which is suitable for time series forecasting. The details of LSTM can be found in [60].

2.3.2. Model Development Process

The commonly used model development process introduced in [49,50] is proposed and modified in this study. Firstly, the PMIS method is used to select predictors and organized to meet the input format requirement of the five models. Meanwhile, the TMI and MI are calculated along with the PMIS process. Secondly, the leave-one-year-out cross validation is applied in this study to generate predictions in whole dataset of each station. Thirdly, the five models are constructed and validated.

The validation metrics include: 1) root mean square error (RMSE) and 2) relative root mean square error (RRMSE). The two metrics can be calculated according to the following equations.

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (\hat{Y}_i - Y_i)^2} \quad \in [0, +\infty)$$
(9)

$$RRMSE = \frac{RMSE}{\sigma_Y} \quad \in [0, +\infty)$$
(10)

where \hat{Y}_i and Y_i are the predicted and observed value respectively, N is the number of validation data, σ_Y is the standard error.

Because the σ_Y can represent the predictive performance of a model using the average value as predictions (named average model), the RRMSE, which is the ratio of the RMSE of a specific model to σ_Y , can represent the forecasting model’s applicability to some degree. A RRMSE value larger than 1 means that the model’s predictive performance is worse than the average model and cannot generate valuable predictions.

2.4. Experiment Setup

In order to examine the ability of TMI in evaluating the applicability of MLTRP, two experiments are implemented in this study and summarized in Table 2. The main difference of the two experiments is the candidate predictor set. In experiment 1 (E1), the candidate predictions include

130 climate factors and transformed runoff in the previous 12 months. In experiment 2 (E2), the candidate predictors include those in the E1 and area rainfall in the previous 12 months and future *FLT* (forecast lead time) months. Based on the candidate predictors, five AI models are used to predict runoff of the 37 stations in the future 1-6 months (37*6=222 forecasting scenarios), and the RMSE and RRMSE are used to evaluate the predictive performance. Meanwhile, the MI and TMI are calculated. Finally, the relationships of RMSE-TMI, RRMSE-TMI and RRMSE-MI are analyzed. In addition, the TMI and predictive performance are further compared between the two experiments.

Table 2. Experiment Setup.

Experiment	Candidate Predictors	Predictand	Validation Metrics	Evaluation Indexes	Analysis
Experiment 1 (E1)	130 climate factors and transformed runoff in the previous 12 months.	Runoff of the 37 stations in the future 1-6 months. In total 37*6=222 forecasting scenarios.	RMSE, RRMSE.	MI and TMI.	The relationships of RMSE-TMI, RRMSE-TMI, and RRMSE-MI.
Experiment 2 (E2)	The candidate predictors in E1 and rainfall in the previous 12 months and future <i>FLT</i> (forecast laed time) months.	Runoff of the 37 stations in the future 1-6 months. In total 37*6=222 forecasting scenarios.	RMSE, RRMSE.	MI and TMI.	The relationships of RMSE-TMI, RRMSE-TMI, and RRMSE-MI.

3. Results

The results of the five forecasting models without and with rainfall in candidate predictors (i.e., E1 and E2) are presented in terms of the RMSE and RRMSE in section 3.1 and section 3.2 respectively.

3.1. The Predictive Performance of Five Models without Rainfall in Predictors

The cross-validated predictive performance of the five AI models (i.e., MLP, LSTM, MB, BSVR and BSVRARD) are examined using the root mean square error (RMSE) and relative root mean square error (RRMSE) obtained over the validation data, as shown in Figure 2. In the figure, the x-axis and y-axis represent the FLT and station ID, and the color represents the RMSE and RRMSE values. The difference of predictive performance results from the difference among basins, FLTs and models. It can be seen from the Figure 2 that the difference of predictive performance caused by the difference of basins is most significant. In addition, the basins with smaller RMSE values and the basins with smaller RRMSE values are different due to the characteristics of the transformed runoff time series. In terms of the influence of the FLT, it can be seen that the all model will obtain best predictive performance, which will become worse along with the increase of FLT. In general, it is obvious that the difference of predictive performance caused by the difference of forecasting scenarios (different basins and different FLTs) is more significant than that caused by the models.

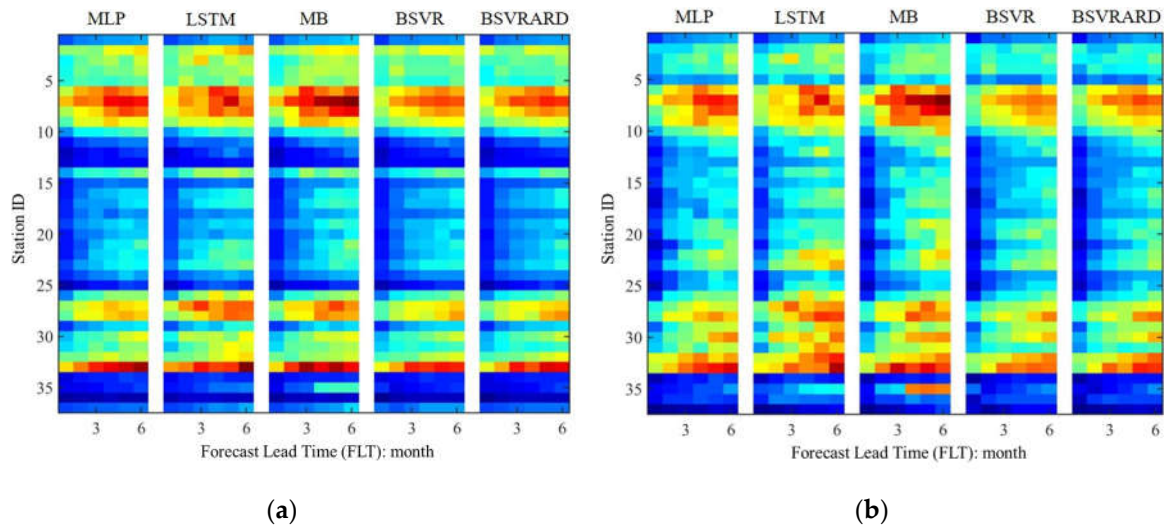


Figure 2. The RMSE and RRMSE values over the validation data for predicting in the future 1-6 months in the 37 stations without observed rainfall as predictors (E1). (a) RMSE; (b) RRMSE.

3.2. The Predictive Performance of Five Models with Rainfall in Predictors

The cross-validated predictive performance of the five AI models are examined using the RMSE and RRMSE obtained over the validation data with rainfall as predictors, as shown in Figure 3. It can be seen that RMSE values of the 222 forecasting scenarios (37 stations * 6 FLT) is within 0.4-2.3 and significantly decrease compared with those obtained in experiment 1 (E1, without rainfall as predictors) shown in Figure 2. And the RRMSE values decrease from 0.35-1.25 (Figure 2) to 0.2-0.85 (Figure 3). In addition, the difference of predictive performance among different basins is still significant. In terms of the influence of FLT on predictive performance, different models show different features, which can be seen from Figure 4. In E2, where the observed rainfall is included in predictors, the predictive performance becomes worse significantly for the MLP, BSVR and BSVRARD models (i.e., point models) along with the increase of FLT. But the predictive performance of the time series models (i.e., MB and LSTM) are steadier among different FLT. In E1, the predictive performance of all models shows similar trend with the increase of FLT. Though the LSTM and MB models perform worse in E1, the two models have better performance after the incorporation of rainfall (E2). In addition, the advantages of the time series models (MB and LSTM) compared with the point models (MLP, BSVR and BSVRARD) are more obvious along with the increase of FLT.

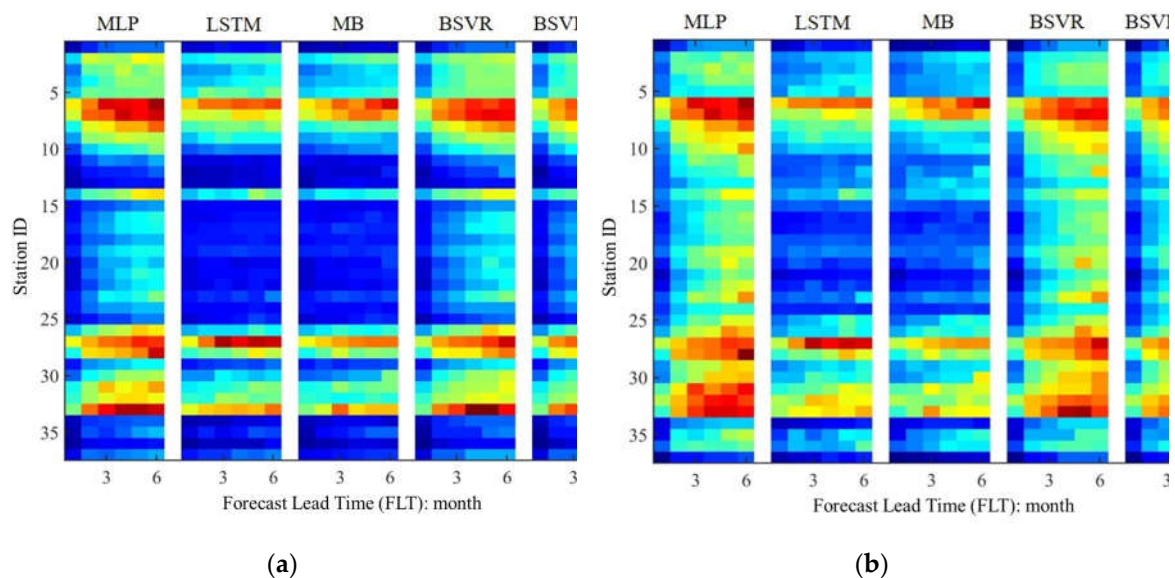


Figure 3. The RMSE and RRMSE values over the validation data for predicting in the future 1-6 months in the 37 stations with observed rainfall as predictors (E2). (a) RMSE; (b) RRMSE.

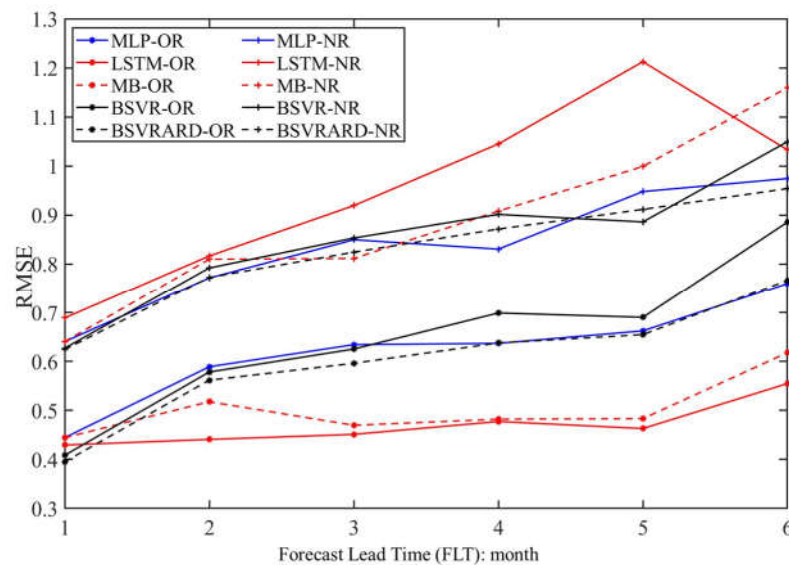


Figure 4. The RMSE values in No.37 station of different models with 6 FLT. The '-OR' means that the observed rainfall is included in the predictors and '-NR' means that the rainfall is not included.

4. Discussion

The results are discussed in this section. First, the five models are compared in terms of the predictive performance in section 4.1. Second, the relationship between the total mutual information (TMI) and the predictive performance of five models is analyzed in section 4.2. Finally, the influence of the incorporation of rainfall on the predictive performance is discussed in section 4.3.

4.1. The Comparison of Different Models

The predictive performance of the five models (i.e., MLP, LSTM, MB, BSVR and BSVRARD) in terms of the RRMSE in 222 forecasting scenarios (37 stations * 6 FLT) without rainfall in the predictors (E1) is illustrated in Figure 5(a), and that in E2 is illustrated in Figure 5(b). In Figure 5, the y-axis shows the values of the RRMSE and the x-axis shows the number of forecasting scenarios with RRMSE below specific values. It can be seen from Figure 5(a) that in the three neural network models (MLP, LSTM and MB), the MLP model perform best and the LSTM model perform worst. Though the LSTM models have better performance than the simple machine learning models in many fields, such as flood prediction and rainfall-runoff modelling, some studies also demonstrate that the effect of LSTM depends on the available data [23,49,61]. In MLTRP, the data are all monthly runoff and the limited data may be not enough to support the application of LSTM model. Furthermore, the LSTM are widely used in short term runoff prediction, where the predictand (runoff) has clear physical correlation with the predictors (rainfall and temperature). But in this study, the forecasting models are constructed based on the teleconnection between monthly runoff and climate factors in E1, where the rainfall is not included in predictors. Due to both the limited data and weak connection between predictors and predictand in the MLTRP, the most complex LSTM model performs worst and the complex MB model is worse than the MLP model. But the opposite comparison result can be obtained in E2, as shown in Figure 5(b). It is obvious that the LSTM and MB models are significantly better than the other three models (i.e., MLP, BSVR and BSVRARD). The main difference between E1 and E2 is that the rainfall is incorporated into the predictors. After the application of rainfall, there is strong physical connection between predictors and predictand. This makes the complex models, which can use the time series information, perform better. In terms of the comparison among the three point models (MLP, BSVR and BSVRARD), the BSVR and BSVRARD models are better than the

MLP model, because the uncertainty risks of the model structure and parameters are incorporated in the SVR model and the solution of SVR model is globally optimized [62].

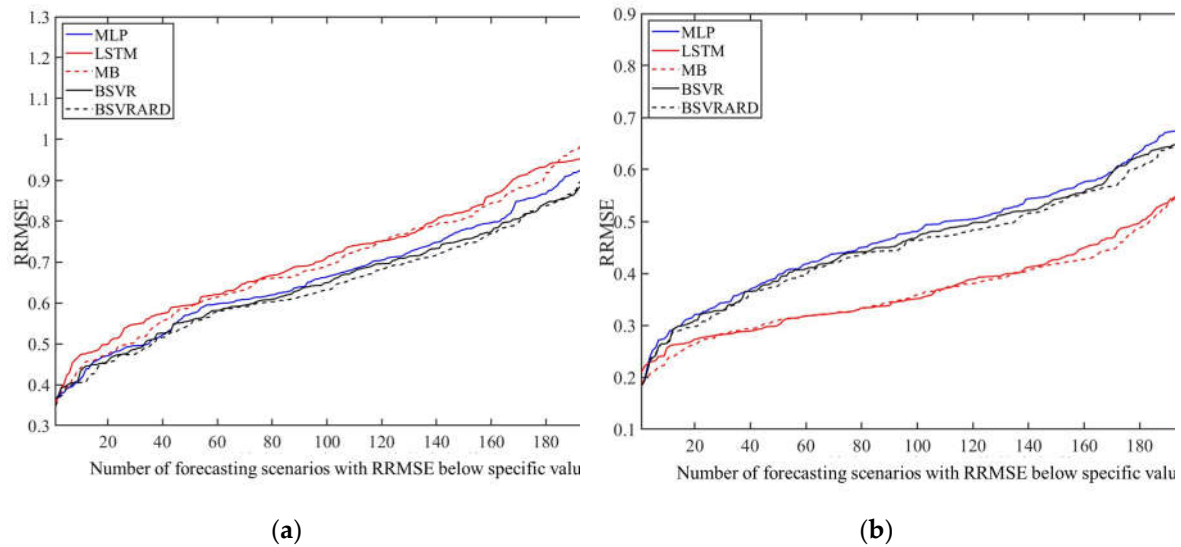


Figure 5. Model predictive performance comparison among the five models in E1 and E2. (1) E1; (2) E2.

4.2. The Relationship between Predictive Performance and TMI, MI

4.2.1. RRMSE and MI in E1

The RRMSE values of 222 forecasting scenarios and the corresponding MIs are shown in Figure 6, where the linear regression equation and p values are also illustrated. It can be seen that there is a good linear correlation relationship with correlation coefficient around -0.6 and p value less than 4.53×10^{-21} . This means that there is close connection between the predictive performance and the available information in the predictors, which can be represented by the MI. Even if the RRMSE and MI values are combined in the Figure 6(f), there is still a good linear correlation relationship. This means that the predictive performance difference caused by the model's difference is not significant compared with that caused by the difference among MIs. The overall linear regression equation is $RRMSE = -0.65 \cdot MI + 1.2$, which means that the RRMSE is 1.2 showing the model is worse than an average model when the MI is zero. Though the MI can represent the available information in the predictors to some degree and there is a good correlation between RRMSE and MI, the correlation is not very significant and needs to be further improved.

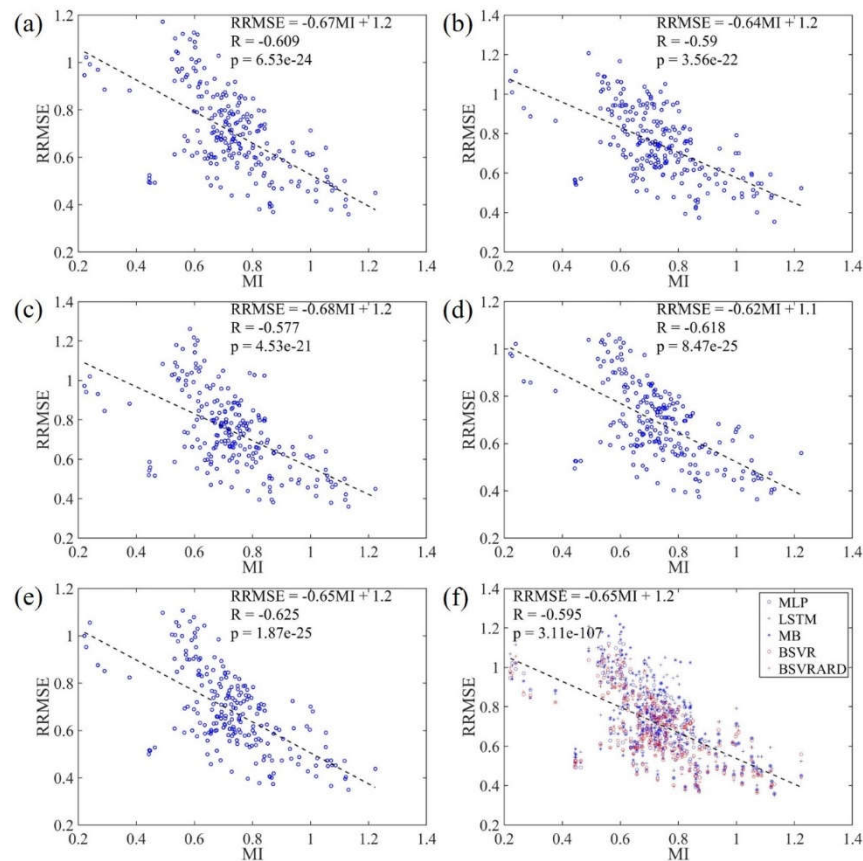


Figure 6. The relationship between RRMSE values and MI values in the 222 forecasting scenarios. (a) MLP model; (b) LSTM model; (c) MB model; (d) BSVR model; (e) BSVRARD model; and (f) all five models.

4.2.2. RMSE, RRMSE and TMI

The RRMSE and RMSE values of 222 forecasting scenarios and the corresponding TMIs are shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8 respectively. It is clear that the RMSE has negative correlation with the TMI, and the correlation coefficient is around -0.65 with p value less than 1.48×10^{-26} . However, the RMSE is affected by not only the available information in the predictors (TMI or MI) but also the statistical characteristics of the transformed runoff time series. Therefore, the RRMSE, which is calculated through dividing RMSE by standard deviation of the time series, has a stronger negative correlation with the TMI, which can be seen in Figure 7. The correlation coefficients are between -0.8 and -0.85 with p values less than 1.14×10^{-50} . Compared with the correlation coefficients of RRMSE-MI (Figure 6) and RMSE-TMI (Figure 8), the correlation coefficients of RRMSE-TMI are closer to -1. This means that the TMI can better represent the available information in the predictors compared with the MI. The main difference between MI and TMI is the way to discriminate the predictors. The MI is used to evaluate the mutual information between all predictors and predictand, but it cannot discriminate the importance of predictors. The TMI is calculated by multiplying the PMIs of predictors with weights which represent the information gain after incorporating the predictor. Therefore, the TMI can discriminate the predictors and better represent the available information.

Because the TMI can represent the available information in the predictors and has strong correlation with the predictive performance, the TMI can be used to evaluate the applicability of MLTRP in a specific forecasting scenario. If the TMI is smaller, it is inappropriate to make mid-long term runoff predictions using data-based models. It can be seen from Figure 7 that the RRMSE values of almost all models is less than 1 when the TMI is more than 0.1. This means the model can generate valuable forecasting information compared with the average model using average value as predictions. When TMI is less than 0.1, the RRMSE may be more than 1 in some forecasting scenarios.

In addition, considering the linear regression equation $RRMSE = -1.9TMI + 0.97$, the corresponding RRMSE is 0.78 with TMI equal to 0.1, which means the predictive performance is good.

In general, the predictive performance shows strong correlation with the TMI which represents the available information in the predictors, and therefore the TMI can be used to evaluate the applicability of MLTRP. The TMI more than 0.1 may represent the corresponding forecasting scenario is suitable for applying data-based model to generate valuable predictions.

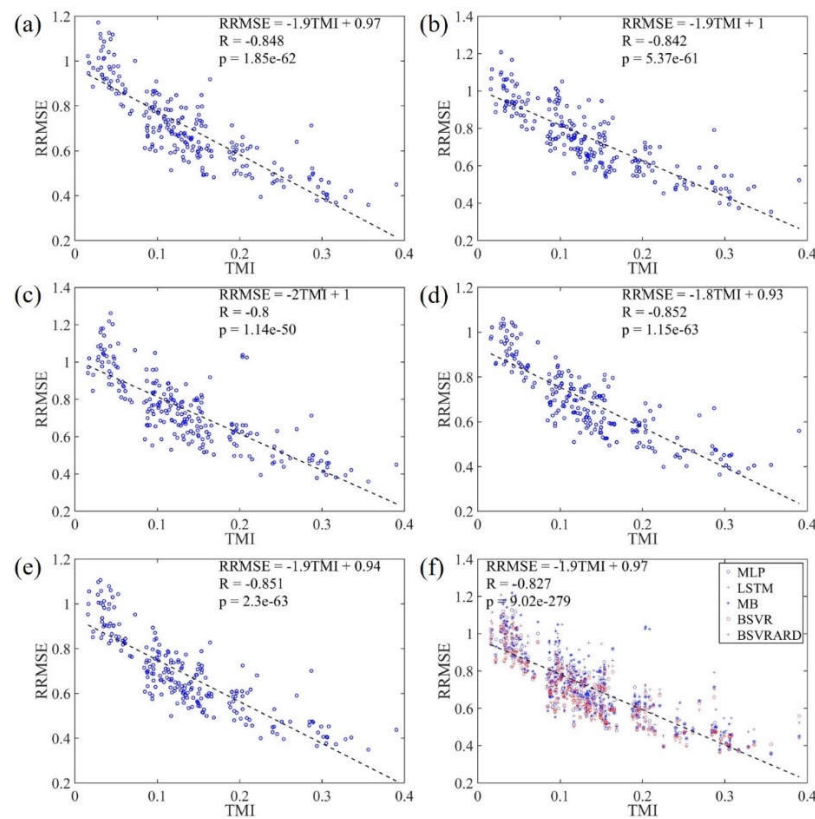


Figure 7. The relationship between RRMSE values and TMI values in the 222 forecasting scenarios. (a) MLP model; (b) LSTM model; (c) MB model; (d) BSVR model; (e) BSVRARD model; and (f) all five models.

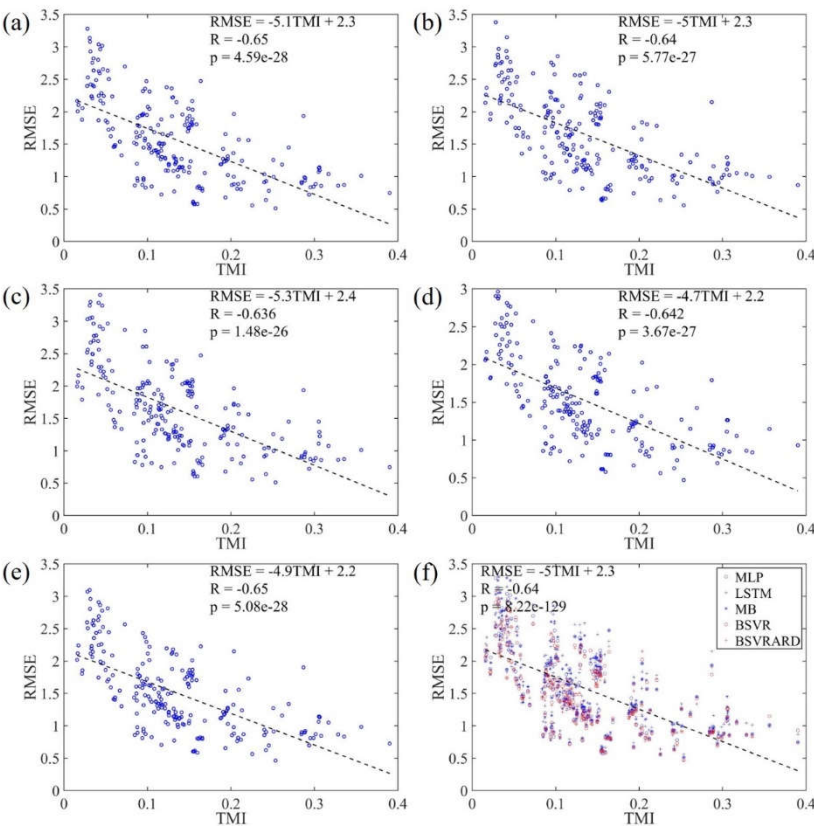


Figure 8. The relationship between RMSE values and TMI values in the 222 forecasting scenarios. (a) MLP model; (b) LSTM model; (c) MB model; (d) BSVR model; (e) BSVRARD model; and (f) all five models.

4.2.3. The Linear Regression Equations between RRMSE and MI, TMI

The linear regression equations between RRMSE and MI, TMI are shown in Figures 7 and 8 and the slopes and intercepts are summarized in Table 3. It can be seen that the intercepts are around 1.2 when MI is the independent variable and around 1 when TMI is the independent variable. When the predictor set is empty, the MI and TMI are 0 and the fitted RRMSE values should be 1.2 and 1 respectively. Meanwhile, the forecasting results show be the average values of the time series and the real RRMSE of forecasting model should be 1. From this perspective, the TMI can represent the predictive performance better.

It can also be seen from Table 3 that the slopes differ among different models. The difference of slopes can partly explain the difference of five models. A less slope value (larger absolute value) means the model is more sensitive to the available information in the predictors. For the MB and LSTM models, the slope is less than the BSVR and BSVRARD model, because these models are more able to use the information in the predictors. For the MLP, the model’s predictive performance is also sensitive to the TMI because the model may fall in local optima and the model performance is not stable.

Table 3. The slopes and intercepts of linear regression equations between RRMSE and MI, TMI.

Independent		Model					
Variable		MLP	LSTM	MB	BSVR	BSVRARD	All
MI	Slope	-0.665	-0.638	-0.681	-0.620	-0.654	-0.652
	Intercept	1.192	1.215	1.240	1.142	1.159	1.190
TMI	Slope	-1.937	-1.907	-1.976	-1.787	-1.862	-1.894
	Intercept	0.970	1.008	1.011	0.932	0.935	0.972

4.3. The Influence of Rainfall on the Predictive Performance and TMI

In E2, where the rainfall is included in predictors, five models' predictive performance become better significantly, which may be reflected by the change of TMI. Therefore, the RRMSE and TMI values in E2 are calculated and shown in Figure 9. It can be seen from the Figure 9 that the TMI values are between 0.05 and 0.65 and the RRMSE values are between 0.2 and 0.9 after incorporating the rainfall into the predictor set. Compared with the results obtained without rainfall in predictors (Figure 7), the TMI values increase 0.01-0.31 and the corresponding RRMSE decrease -0.01-0.69. It can also be seen from Figure 9 that the RRMSE levels off when along with the increase of TMI.

After the incorporation of rainfall, the five models show different features. For the LSTM and MB models, the TMI values are all more than 0.1, and the RRMSE values are less than 0.8. But for the MLP, BSVR and BSVRARD models, there still exists 13.5 forecasting scenarios where the TMI is less than 0.1 and the RRMSE values are around or more than 0.8. The reason for the difference of TMI among the five models is that the time series information is used in the LSTM and MB models.

It can be seen from Figure 9 that there is still significant negative correlation between the RRMSE and TMI. For the three point models (MLP, BSVR and BSVRARD), the correlation coefficients are around -0.83. But for the LSTM and MB models, the correlation coefficients are -0.62 and -0.67 respectively. The difference of five models in terms of the coefficients is caused by the difference among the model structure. The LSTM and MB models use time series data as model input. But the time series characteristics are not considered in the calculation of PMIS, and therefore the TMI can only partly explain the available information in the input time series data. Nevertheless, the overall correlation coefficient for all five models is -0.80.

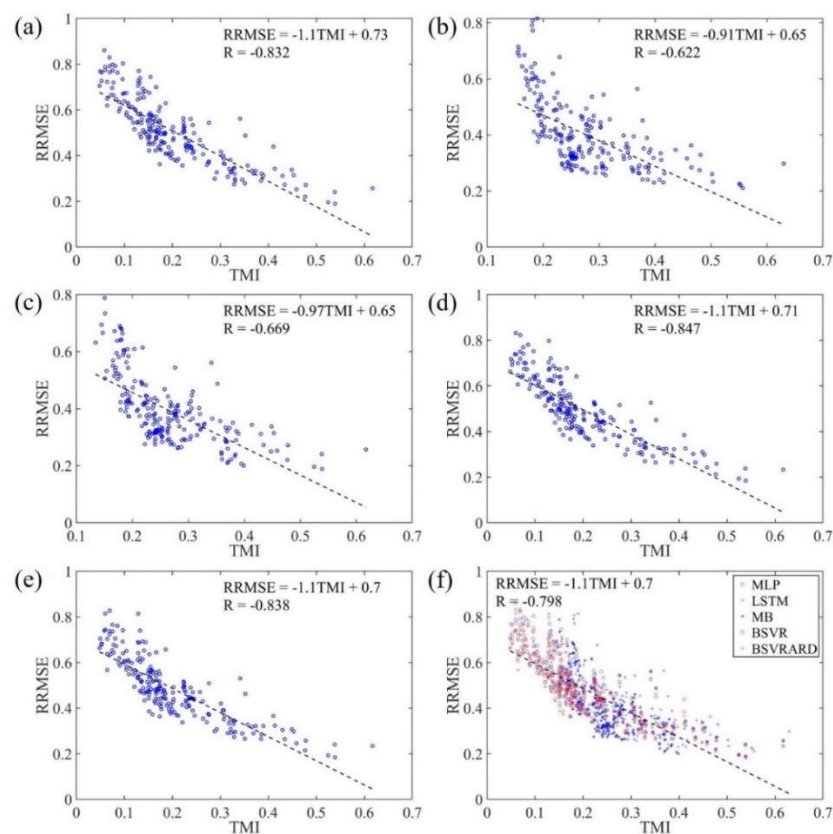


Figure 9. The relationship between RRMSE values and TMI values in the 222 forecasting scenarios with rainfall in predictors. (a) MLP model; (b) LSTM model; (c) MB model; (d) BSVR model; (e) BSVRARD model; and (f) all five models.

5. Conclusions

In this study, the total mutual information (TMI) index is developed based on the predictor selection method named PMIS, which recognize predictors based on the mutual information (MI) and partial MI (PMI). In order to examine the relationship between the TMI and the predictive performance, five AI models (MLP, LSTM, MB, BSVR, BSVRARD) are applied in 37 hydrological stations in Australia to predict monthly runoff in the future 1-6 months, and the RMSE and RRMSE are used to evaluate the predictive performance in 222 forecasting scenarios. The relationship of TMI and RMSE, RRMSE in two different experiments, the difference of which is the application of the rainfall. The main conclusions are as follows:

(1) The developed TMI index can represent the available information in the predictors better than the MI index, and has significant negative correlation with the RRMSE. The correlation coefficients are between -0.8 and -0.85 when the rainfall is not included in predictors. And when the rainfall is included in predictors, the coefficients are between -0.62 and -0.85.

(2) The developed TMI index can be used to evaluate the applicability of MLTRP. Along with the increase of TMI, the available information increases and the model's predictive performance become better. When TMI is more than 0.1, the available information in the predictors can support the construction of MLTRP models and the model can generate valuable predictions. When TMI is less than 0.1 and near 0, the MLTRP may be not suitable in the forecasting scenarios.

(3) The five AI models have significant different performance in different scenarios. When the rainfall is not included in the predictors, the complex LSTM and MB models using time series as inputs perform worse than the MLP, BSVR and BSVRARD models. After the incorporation of rainfall in predictors, the TMI increases significantly and the complex LSTM and MB models, which can better utilize the contained information in the predictors, perform better than the other three models.

(4) The difference of the five models can be partly explained by the developed TMI index. The slopes of the linear regression equation between the RRMSE of the LSTM and MB models and the TMI are less than those for the BSVR and BSVRARD models. This means the LSTM and MB models are more sensitive to the available information in predictors (i.e., TMI), and therefore the change of model predictive performance for LSTM and MB models are more significant than that of the BSVR and BSVRARD models after the incorporation of rainfall into predictors.

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