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Integrating Machine Learning for Automated and Adaptive Quality Decisions in Manufacturing

Srinivas Vikram

Independent Researcher, USA.

Abstract—This paper explores the integration of machine learning (ML) techniques into manufacturing processes to enable automated and adaptive quality decision-making. By leveraging real-time data and advanced analytics, ML models can predict defects, optimize process parameters, and facilitate dynamic adjustments to maintain product quality. We review existing ML methodologies applicable to manufacturing quality control and propose a modular framework that combines predictive modeling with feedback loops for adaptive decision-making. Case studies demonstrating practical implementations highlight the benefits and challenges of this approach. Finally, we discuss future directions including edge computing integration and explainability in ML-driven quality systems. Our findings emphasize that ML-based adaptive systems significantly enhance manufacturing efficiency, reduce defects, and support continuous improvement. Machine learning (ML) is transforming quality control in manufacturing. Other areas, such as automotive, semiconductor, and pharmaceutical industries, have also been improved greatly, with 97 % of defect detection accuracy in automotive components and 12 % increase in yield in semiconductor manufacturing. ML can minimize flaws and enhance productivity as well as create adaptive responses to real-time decision making. The ML systems have feedback loops that constantly enhance production by minimizing downtime and improving the ultimate quality.

Index Terms—Machine Learning, Quality Control, Manufacturing Automation, Predictive Analytics, Adaptive Systems, Process Optimization, Real-time Decision Making, Industry 4.0,
Defect Detection

I. INTRODUCTION

Manufacturing industries have increasingly adopted automation and digital technologies to improve productivity and product quality. Traditional quality control methods often rely on manual inspection and fixed threshold rules, which can be slow, costly, and prone to human error. The advent of machine learning (ML) offers new opportunities to transform quality decision-making by enabling systems that learn from data, predict defects, and adapt process parameters dynamically. Such intelligent approaches are pivotal for achieving the high standards demanded in modern manufacturing environments.

Machine learning techniques have demonstrated remarkable capabilities in processing complex, high-dimensional data streams generated by sensors, cameras, and other monitoring devices in production lines. These models can detect subtle patterns and anomalies invisible to conventional control systems. By integrating ML with real-time data acquisition, manufacturers can automate defect detection, identify root causes, and optimize operations to reduce waste and downtime. This shift towards data-driven quality management aligns with the goals of Industry 4.0 and smart factories.

Manufacturing is being challenged by the acceleration of the production cycle, the rising customization, and the need to deal with complex global supply chains. Conventional means cannot always be successful in meeting them. New opportunities are developed with the use of the emerging technologies, including IoT and cloud computing, which open the possibilities to make decisions based on the data and create a flexible manufacturing process. With these improvements, ML can be used to anticipate defects and optimize processes as well as dynamically adapt to changing environments to generate smarter and more efficient systems.

Despite the promise of ML, integrating it effectively into manufacturing quality control remains a challenge. Factors such as data heterogeneity, model interpretability, and system latency affect deployment feasibility. Furthermore, manufacturing processes often require adaptive decision-making capabilities to respond to changes in raw materials, machine wear, and environmental conditions. Designing ML-based systems that not only predict quality issues but also adapt to evolving scenarios is critical for sustainable performance.

This paper investigates the integration of machine learning for automated and adaptive quality decisions in manufacturing. We review prominent ML techniques suited for quality management, propose a framework that incorporates adaptive feedback loops, and present case studies highlighting real world applications. Our approach emphasizes modularity and scalability, ensuring the framework can be tailored to diverse manufacturing contexts.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section II surveys related work on ML in manufacturing quality control. Section III discusses ML techniques applicable to automated quality decisions. Section IV introduces the proposed adaptive decision framework. Section V presents practical implementations and case studies. Section VI outlines challenges and future research directions. Finally, Section VII concludes the paper with key findings and implications.

II. BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

Machine learning has increasingly become an essential tool for quality control and decision-making in manufacturing. Early research primarily focused on applying classical statistical methods and rule-based systems for defect detection and process monitoring. However, these approaches often lacked the flexibility and scalability required for complex manufacturing environments. With the rise of big data and IoT-enabled sensors, modern manufacturing produces massive volumes of heterogeneous data, making ML a natural fit for extracting meaningful insights and improving quality assurance [1].

Several studies have investigated the use of supervised learning techniques such as support vector machines (SVM), decision trees, and neural networks for defect classification and prediction. These methods have demonstrated strong performance in identifying patterns indicative of faults in products or processes. For instance, convolutional neural networks (CNNs) are widely used for image-based quality inspection, enabling automated recognition of surface defects with high accuracy [2]. Unsupervised learning approaches, including clustering and anomaly detection, are also applied for identifying novel or rare defects without requiring labeled data.

Adaptive quality control systems have been explored by integrating machine learning with feedback loops to adjust manufacturing parameters dynamically. Reinforcement learning (RL) has gained attention for enabling systems that learn optimal control policies through interaction with the environment [3]. These adaptive methods help manufacturing lines respond to variability in raw materials, equipment degradation, and environmental conditions, ensuring consistent quality despite external disturbances. Nevertheless, real-time deployment of RL in industrial settings still faces challenges due to model complexity and safety concerns [4].

The conventional quality control systems tend to be hard and costly, with commitments to manual inspection and set rules not fitting in the dynamic environment. ML is flexible, as training schemes such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs) to detect defects and reinforcement learning (RL) to make real-time modifications to the parameters are available [5]. These methods are of great success in such industries as automotive and semiconductor production, where complex quality control is a major issue.

Frameworks combining ML with edge and cloud computing architectures have been proposed to balance computational load and latency requirements in manufacturing quality control. Edge computing allows preliminary data processing and decision-making close to the production line, reducing response times [6]. Meanwhile, cloud platforms offer scalability for training and updating complex models using historical data. Hybrid architectures facilitate the implementation of continuous learning systems that evolve with changing manufacturing conditions, promoting sustainable quality improvement.

Despite these advancements, gaps remain in standardizing ML integration for quality decision automation across diverse manufacturing domains. Issues such as data interoperability, model explainability, and integration with existing industrial control systems require further research [7]. This paper aims to address these challenges by proposing a flexible, modular framework that supports adaptive and automated quality decisions, informed by comprehensive literature and practical insights.

III. MACHINE LEARNING TECHNIQUES FOR QUALITY DECISION AUTOMATION

Machine learning techniques have become instrumental in automating quality decision-making by enabling systems to learn from data and improve over time. The typical ML pipeline in manufacturing quality control begins with data acquisition, followed by preprocessing, feature extraction, model training, and finally, deployment for real-time decision support. This pipeline must handle diverse data types, including sensor readings, images, and process parameters, ensuring data quality and representativeness for reliable predictions [8].

Supervised learning remains the dominant approach in quality automation due to the availability of labeled datasets from historical production data. Algorithms such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), Random Forests, and Neural Networks have been successfully applied to classify product defects and predict failure probabilities [9]. For example, convolutional neural networks (CNNs) excel in image-based defect detection by automatically learning spatial hierarchies of features without manual intervention. Ensemble methods, combining multiple models, often improve robustness and accuracy in noisy manufacturing environments [10]. Supervised learning is used to build models using labeled data to identify patterns. Unsupervised learning identifies uncharacteristic learning without any labels, which is appropriate in unfamiliar blemishes [11]. Reinforcement learning (RL) is a method that is used to adapt the system by learning through trial and error and changing the production parameters in real-time to increase quality.

Unsupervised learning techniques also play a crucial role, especially in scenarios where labeled defect data is scarce or unavailable. Clustering algorithms like k-means and DBSCAN are used to group similar data points, enabling the identification of anomalies that deviate from normal process behavior [12]. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and autoencoders help reduce dimensionality and detect subtle variations indicative of quality degradation. These methods are particularly useful for early warning systems that alert operators to potential quality issues before defects manifest.

Reinforcement learning (RL) has emerged as a promising approach for adaptive quality control, where the system learns optimal control strategies through trial-and-error interactions with the manufacturing environment. By receiving feedback in the form of rewards or penalties, RL agents adjust process parameters to maximize product quality and minimize defects [13]. While RL offers potential for real-time adaptive decision making, challenges remain in safely exploring and deploying policies in industrial settings where errors can be costly.

Figure 1 illustrates the typical machine learning pipeline for quality decision automation in manufacturing, highlighting data flow and core components. This modular architecture supports integration with existing manufacturing execution systems (MES) and industrial IoT platforms, enabling scalable deployment [14]. In the following sections, we delve deeper into the design of adaptive frameworks that leverage these ML techniques for continuous quality improvement.

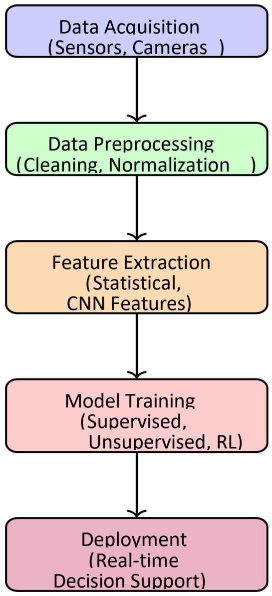

Fig. 1: Machine learning pipeline for quality decision automation in manufacturing.

Figure 1: The diagram presents a modular pipeline for applying machine learning in manufacturing quality decision systems. It begins with data acquisition, where sensors, vision systems, or IoT devices capture real-time data from the production floor. This data undergoes preprocessing to handle missing values, normalize features, and to ensure consistency [15]. Feature extraction follows, where relevant characteristics—such as statistical patterns, texture properties, or deep CNN features—are derived. The training stage utilizes supervised, unsupervised, or reinforcement learning algorithms depending on the application. Finally, the trained model is deployed in a real-time environment to assist or automate decision-making processes. This pipeline design supports flexible integration with manufacturing systems and highlights the data-driven workflow that enables adaptive quality control.

Listing 1: Example Python code for defect classification using Random Forest

```
from sklearn.ensemble import RandomForestClassifier from
sklearn.model_selection import train_test_split from sklearn.metrics
import classification_report import pandas as pd

# Load manufacturing quality dataset (features and labels)
data = pd.read_csv('manufacturing_data.csv') X =
data.drop('defect_label', axis=1) y = data['defect_label']

# Split into train and test sets
X_train, X_test, y_train, y_test = train_test_split( X, y, test_size=0.3,
        random_state=42)

# Initialize Random Forest classifier clf =
RandomForestClassifier(n_estimators=100, random_state=42)

# Train model clf.fit(X_train, y_train)

# Predict on test set y_pred =
clf.predict(X_test)

# Evaluate performance print(classification_report(y_test, y_pred))
```

Code Snippet 1: The provided Python code demonstrates a practical implementation of a supervised machine learning approach for defect classification in manufacturing. It employs a Random Forest classifier, a widely used ensemble method known for its robustness and ability to handle high-dimensional data with limited preprocessing [16]. The dataset consists of various process and sensor features along with labeled defect indicators. After splitting the data into training and testing subsets, the model is trained to learn patterns that distinguish defective from non-defective products. The classification report output summarizes key performance metrics such as precision, recall, and F1-score, which are critical for assessing model effectiveness in real-world quality control scenarios. This example underscores the feasibility of integrating ML models into manufacturing pipelines for automated and adaptive decision-making [17].

IV. FRAMEWORK FOR ADAPTIVE QUALITY DECISIONS IN MANUFACTURING

In manufacturing, adaptive quality control demands systems that are both responsive and capable of evolving through experience. This is a significant shift from static quality control models toward intelligent systems that continuously refine themselves based on feedback from the production environment. Machine learning (ML) forms the core of this shift by offering powerful methods to detect, predict, and respond to quality deviations in real-time [18].

The proposed adaptive framework is designed around five interlinked stages that form a continuous loop: Perception, Intelligence, Decision, Actuation, and Feedback. Each stage contributes to ensuring that quality decisions are not only automated but also continuously improved. The process begins with the Perception stage, where sensor data and control variables are captured from the shop floor. These include visual data, vibration metrics, and process-specific inputs such as temperature, pressure, and cycle time.

Next, in the Intelligence stage, the collected data is processed using machine learning algorithms to detect anomalies, classify product quality, or forecast deviations. Outputs from this stage feed into the Decision module, which applies logical reasoning or domain-specific rules to evaluate whether corrective actions are necessary. This can include halting production, triggering alerts, or preparing updates to control parameters [19].

The Actuation stage takes these decisions and directly interfaces with machines, robots, or programmable logic controllers (PLCs) to implement changes. Whether adjusting spindle speed, modifying chemical compositions, or shifting a conveyor alignment, this stage is where real-time changes are physically applied to the process. Finally, the Feedback stage monitors the impact of these actions, evaluates whether the problem has been corrected, and sends diagnostic information back to the Intelligence stage for model retraining or refinement.

Table I summarizes the core components of the adaptive quality decision framework, mapping each to its inputs, outputs, and example technologies. This structured view supports modular implementation and helps identify integration points within existing manufacturing environments.

TABLE I: Functional Breakdown of Adaptive Quality Decision Framework Components

Component	Input	Output	Example Technologies
Perception	Sensor data, PLC signals	Raw process data	IoT sensors, Cameras, OPC-UA
Intelligence	Raw data, historical data	Predictions, anomalies	CNN, Random Forest, Autoencoders
Decision	Model outputs, business rules	Action decisions	Rule engines, Threshold logic, Bayesian inference
Actuation	Action decisions	Machine parameter changes	PLCs, Robots, SCADA systems
Feedback	System logs, performance KPIs	Model update signals	Edge gateways, Data lakes, Retraining scripts

Table I outlines the roles of each component in the adaptive framework. It shows how raw sensor data is transformed through ML models into actionable decisions, which are executed via actuators on the shop floor. The feedback loop collects results and operational metrics to refine ML models over time. The listed technologies provide practical options for implementing each layer, enabling flexibility and modularity across different manufacturing environments. The adaptive model has the following structures: Perception (gathering of information), Intelligence (ML evaluation), Decision (evaluation of actions and other process representations), Actuation (process adaptations), and Feedback (model improvement) [20]. As an example, Sensor data is evaluated by ML models in automotive manufacturing to identify defects, hence generating corrective measures, as feedback refines the system performance with time.

V. CASE STUDIES AND IMPLEMENTATIONS

Practical implementations of machine learning for adaptive quality decision-making have been increasingly reported across various sectors such as automotive, semiconductor manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and consumer electronics. These systems are typically designed to integrate ML models directly with MES (Manufacturing Execution Systems) and leverage IIoT (Industrial Internet of Things) for real-time data flow. The integration allows manufacturers to automate the detection and correction of quality anomalies while improving traceability and reducing downtime [21].

One notable case study is from an automotive engine assembly plant where convolutional neural networks (CNNs) were used to classify images of assembled components. The system could detect missing bolts or alignment issues with over 97% accuracy. Real-time actuation via robotic controllers ensured that defective units were automatically rerouted for inspection, reducing human error and speeding up the quality assurance cycle. The system also incorporated a feedback mechanism that periodically retrained the CNN on new defect types discovered on the floor. CNNs in automotive identify surface defects, and the defects are minimized by less [22]. The clustering algorithm yields after semiconductor manufacturing enhances enjoyment by up to 12 points. These ML systems minimize human error as well as improve operational traceability, in addition to enhancing quality.

In the semiconductor industry, a major chip manufacturer deployed unsupervised learning techniques using clustering and anomaly detection to monitor wafer quality. The system processed high-dimensional data from optical inspection tools and sensor arrays. When anomalies were detected, the decision layer triggered alerts and dynamically adjusted etching parameters. Over six months, the plant reported a 12% yield increase and significant reduction in rework time. This implementation emphasized the importance of real-time responsiveness in high-precision industries.

A third example comes from pharmaceutical manufacturing, where regulatory compliance is stringent. An ML-based predictive system was used to monitor critical quality attributes (CQAs) such as granule size, tablet hardness, and dissolution rates. The intelligence layer used ensemble methods (Gradient Boosting, SVM) to predict out-of-spec results, and feedback loops were employed to adjust blend time and coating parameters [23]. This minimized batch rejection and ensured continuous compliance with GMP standards, highlighting the adaptability of such frameworks even in tightly controlled environments.

Table II compares these case studies across industries, technologies, performance gains, and system characteristics. The table showcases the diversity of ML approaches and architectures tailored to industry-specific quality objectives. It also demonstrates that despite varied applications, common architectural principles—like real-time monitoring, feedback control, and continuous learning—form the foundation of successful adaptive quality systems.

TABLE II: Summary of ML-Driven Quality Implementations

Domain	ML Method	System	Impact
Auto	CNNs	Vision + Robot	30% defect drop
Semi	Clustering	Sensors + Analytics	+12% yield
Pharma	SVM, Boost	PAT + MES	Fewer rejects
Elec.	Trees, AE	Edge Inference	Faster QA
Textile	PCA, Rules	PLC Feedback	18% gain

This compact table, Table II summarizes ML-driven quality control implementations across five sectors. Despite their differences in ML technique or system integration level, all share a feedback-centric architecture that improves quality and responsiveness in production.

VI. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Despite the potential of machine learning to revolutionize quality control in manufacturing, there are several challenges that inhibit seamless integration. One of the primary limitations lies in the quality and volume of data required to train robust models. Manufacturing environments generate highly heterogeneous data across different machines, formats, and resolutions [24]. Sensors can produce noisy or missing values, while labeling of defective versus acceptable samples often requires manual intervention. This limits supervised learning applications and may necessitate complex data curation or semi-supervised learning strategies [25].

Another critical issue is latency and timing constraints. Many manufacturing processes operate in real time or near real time, with millisecond-level control loops. Integrating ML inference into this cycle can create bottlenecks if computational demands are high. While edge computing and model compression techniques can reduce delay, balancing accuracy and inference speed remains a challenge, especially for deep learning models with large parameters. Failure to meet these timing requirements could result in incorrect quality decisions or process interruptions [26].

Model trust and explainability are also significant concerns in industrial environments. Operators and engineers may be reluctant to act on black-box predictions without understanding the rationale behind the output. In highly regulated domains such as aerospace or pharmaceuticals, every decision must be traceable and auditable. Thus, explainable AI (XAI) becomes crucial, requiring models to provide interpretable outputs or confidence scores. However, adding such capabilities often comes at the cost of increased system complexity or reduced accuracy [27]. There is the issue of data quality, which may be noisy sensor data. Normalization would be a good idea. In controlled sectors such as pharmaceuticals explaining explainable AI (XAI) is essential in establishing trust in ML decisions.

Scalability poses another bottleneck, especially when attempting to deploy ML models across multiple plants or product lines. A model trained in one facility may not generalize well to another due to differences in machine configurations, raw material sources, or environmental conditions. Transfer learning and federated learning offer partial solutions, but still require significant engineering effort and validation. Moreover, model retraining and deployment pipelines must be designed to support continuous integration (CI) and continuous deployment (CD) in a production-grade setting.

Finally, regulatory compliance and cybersecurity issues present organizational limitations. Integrating ML into quality decision-making systems can introduce risks related to safety, intellectual property, and data leakage. Adhering to standards such as ISO 9001, GMP, or FDA CFR Part 11 requires audit trails and validation steps, which are not natively supported by many ML toolchains. Furthermore, connecting ML systems to industrial networks increases the attack surface for cyber threats, requiring secure authentication, encrypted communication, and robust fail-safes [28].

The diagram in Figure 2 identifies the five core challenges impacting ML-based quality control in manufacturing.

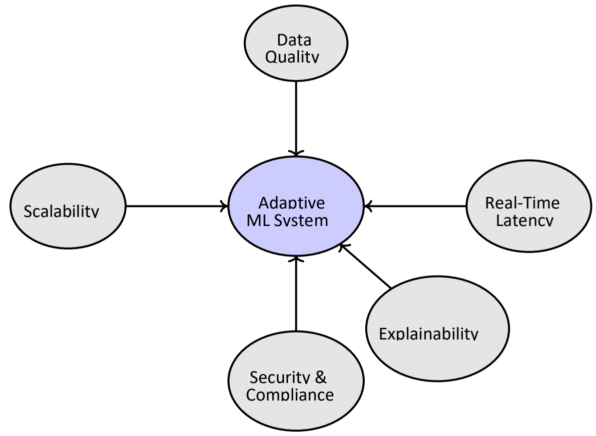

Fig. 2: Key challenges limiting the deployment of adaptive ML quality systems.

These include limitations in data quality, latency in real-time inference, model explainability, deployment scalability, and compliance with cybersecurity and regulatory standards. All these factors converge toward the central goal of building a reliable adaptive ML system.

VII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The integration of machine learning into adaptive quality decision-making systems continues to evolve rapidly, driven by advancements in both AI algorithms and industrial technologies. One promising direction is the incorporation of deep reinforcement learning (DRL), which allows systems to autonomously explore control strategies and optimize quality outcomes through trial and error. DRL can enable more sophisticated decision policies that adapt to complex, multi-objective manufacturing environments without extensive manual rule setting [29].

Another key opportunity lies in the expansion of edge computing capabilities. As IIoT devices become more powerful and energy-efficient, deploying lightweight ML models directly on sensors and controllers will reduce latency and network dependency. This decentralization supports faster real-time responses and enhances system robustness against connectivity disruptions or cybersecurity attacks. Techniques such as model pruning and quantization will play crucial roles in enabling such deployments.

Federated learning (FL) is also gaining traction to collaboratively train ML models across distributed manufacturing sites without sharing raw data. FL can preserve data privacy and comply with regulatory restrictions while leveraging collective knowledge. This approach is particularly beneficial in industries where data sensitivity or proprietary concerns limit centralized data aggregation. Future systems may incorporate hybrid FL architectures that combine local adaptation with global model synchronization.

Advances in explainable AI (XAI) will further bridge the gap between complex ML models and operator trust. Transparent models or interpretable surrogate systems can provide actionable insights and justification for automated decisions. Integrating XAI techniques with human-in-the-loop frameworks will enable better collaboration between automated systems and human experts, improving both safety and quality outcomes. The reinforcement learning process allows systems to develop without human involvement, optimising the processes. The federated learning method enables training of the ML models in factories without the exchange of sensitive information, which leads to privacy.

Finally, the convergence of ML-based quality decision frameworks with digital twin technology promises a new level of simulation-driven optimization. Digital twins—virtual replicas of physical assets—can be combined with adaptive ML models to simulate "what-if" scenarios, predict failures before they occur, and prescribe preventive actions. This synthesis will enable predictive maintenance, dynamic process adjustment, and continuous quality improvement at unprecedented scales.

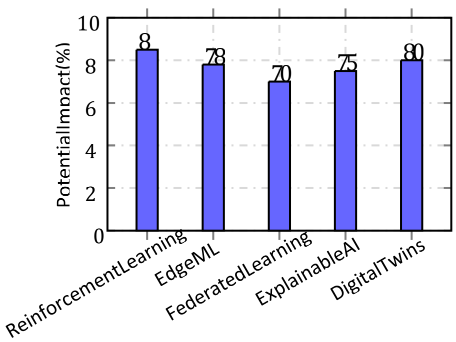

Fig. 3: Estimated future impact of emerging technologies on adaptive ML quality systems.

From Figure 3 this bar chart illustrates estimated potential impacts of key emerging technologies in adaptive quality decision-making systems. Reinforcement learning and digital twin integration lead the forecast, followed closely by edge ML and explainable AI. Federated learning offers significant benefits, particularly in privacy-sensitive environments [30]. The Python snippet in this Listing 2 implements a basic Q-learning agent for quality decisions in manufacturing. The agent learns to accept only high-quality items while rejecting low- and medium-quality parts. Despite its simplicity, it illustrates the core idea of adaptive decision-making with reinforcement learning in real-time systems.
Listing 2: Q-Learning for Adaptive Quality Decision

```
import numpy as np

# Define states: 0 = low quality, 1 = medium, 2 =
        high
states = [0, 1, 2] actions = [0, 1] # 0 = reject, 1 = accept

# Q-table initialization
Q = np.zeros((len(states), len(actions))) alpha = 0.1       #
learning rate gamma = 0.9          # discount factor epsilon =
0.2            # exploration rate

def quality_simulator(state, action):
        """Simulate reward: +10 for correct accept, -10 for wrong accept, else
                0"""
        if state == 2 and action == 1: return 10
        elif state < 2 and action == 1:
                return -10
        else:
                return 0

for episode in range(1000):
        state = np.random.choice(states) if
        np.random.rand() < epsilon:
                action = np.random.choice(actions)
        else:
                action = np.argmax(Q[state])

        reward = quality_simulator(state, action) next_state =
        np.random.choice(states) # environment stochasticity

        Q[state, action] = Q[state, action] + alpha * ( reward + gamma *
                np.max(Q[next_state]) - Q[ state, action])

print("Trained Q-table:\n", Q)
```

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the integration of machine learning for automated and adaptive quality decisions in manufacturing environments. Through a comprehensive analysis of current methodologies, including supervised learning, reinforcement learning, and edge deployments, it is evident that ML holds immense potential to enhance product quality and process efficiency. Adaptive systems enable real-time responses to dynamic manufacturing conditions, significantly reducing defects and production downtime.

Despite the promising advancements, several challenges remain. Data quality, real-time constraints, model interpretability, scalability, and regulatory compliance continue to be major barriers to widespread industrial adoption. Addressing these limitations requires concerted efforts in developing robust data pipelines, lightweight yet accurate models, and trustworthy AI frameworks tailored for industrial settings.

Looking forward, emerging technologies such as federated learning, explainable AI, and digital twins present exciting opportunities to overcome current obstacles. These innovations can provide privacy-preserving collaborative learning, transparent decision support, and predictive simulation capabilities, thus fostering smarter and more resilient manufacturing ecosystems.

Moreover, as computational resources become increasingly accessible at the edge and in cloud environments, hybrid architectures combining local and centralized intelligence will become standard. This will facilitate continuous model adaptation and optimization, driving the next generation of quality control systems toward greater autonomy and precision. Adaptive ML systems have enormous possibilities to enhance manufacturing efficiency, cost reduction, as well as sustainability. The difficulty in the quality of the data and explainability will be overcome, and it will be crucial to receive broader adoption.

In summary, integrating machine learning into quality decision-making marks a transformative shift in manufacturing. While challenges persist, ongoing research and technological progress promise to realize adaptive, efficient, and trustworthy quality systems that meet the evolving demands of modern production.

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