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Original Article

Integrating Machine Learning and Deep Learning Architectures: A Hybrid CNN and RNN Models for Lung Cancer Detection

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Abstract

Lung cancer remains one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths worldwide, alongside other malignant diseases. Early and accurate detection of lung cancer is critical for improving patient survival rates. This research presents a hybrid deep learning framework that combines Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) to improve the accuracy of lung cancer diagnosis from medical images. The proposed model outperforms traditional deep learning approaches in terms of accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. Evaluation is conducted using publicly available datasets relevant to lung cancer diagnosis. The study demonstrates the effectiveness of hybrid modeling techniques in medical image analysis, paving the way for advanced AI-driven diagnostic systems in lung cancer detection.

Introduction

Lung cancer is one of the most prevalent and deadliest forms of cancer worldwide, accounting for a significant proportion of cancer-related deaths every year. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), lung cancer contributes to approximately 18% of all cancer fatalities globally, making it a major public health concern. Early diagnosis is key to improving patient survival rates, as advanced stages of lung cancer are often difficult to treat effectively. Medical imaging plays a critical role in the diagnosis of lung cancer, with techniques such as Computed Tomography (CT) and X-ray imaging widely used for detecting abnormal growths in the lungs. However, interpreting medical images requires expert radiologists and is subject to human error, especially when differentiating between benign and malignant nodules. The demand for automated, accurate, and efficient diagnostic systems has steadily increased over the past decade.

Traditional machine learning techniques have been applied to medical image analysis to assist in lung cancer detection. These methods rely on handcrafted feature extraction and classical classifiers like Support Vector Machines (SVM) or Random Forests. While useful, they are limited by their dependence on manual feature engineering and struggle to adapt to the high complexity and variability of medical images. In recent years, deep learning has revolutionized the field of medical image analysis by enabling automated feature extraction and classification through neural networks. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), in particular, have demonstrated significant success in image recognition tasks by automatically learning spatial hierarchies of features directly from image data. CNNs are effective at capturing spatial features but have limitations in modeling temporal or sequential dependencies.

Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs), on the other hand, are designed to handle sequential data and capture temporal relationships. Although RNNs are typically used in natural language processing and time-series analysis, they can be useful in medical imaging when modeling sequential slices of CT scans or temporal progression of disease in follow-up imaging. However, RNNs alone may not be sufficient for spatial feature extraction. This research proposes a hybrid deep learning framework that integrates CNN and RNN architectures to combine their strengths: CNNs for efficient spatial feature extraction and RNNs for modeling sequential dependencies across image slices. By leveraging both approaches, the system aims to improve the accuracy and reliability of lung cancer detection compared to conventional models using CNN or RNN alone.

To validate the proposed framework, experiments are conducted using publicly

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available datasets containing lung cancer patient CT images and diagnostic labels. Performance metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score are used to assess model effectiveness, allowing comparison against baseline deep learning approaches. The results demonstrate that the hybrid model significantly improves detection accuracy, offering a robust solution for early-stage lung cancer diagnosis. This approach also reduces false positives and false negatives, critical for clinical applications where diagnostic errors can have severe consequences. Furthermore, this research highlights the potential of integrating artificial intelligence into healthcare workflows, enabling automated, fast, and accurate diagnosis that supports medical professionals and improves patient outcomes. The hybrid framework provides a scalable solution that can be adapted to other types of cancer or medical image-based diagnostic applications.

In summary, the proposed hybrid deep learning system addresses key limitations of existing methods by uniting CNN and RNN architectures, establishing a new standard for AI-assisted lung cancer diagnosis. The study contributes to the growing field of intelligent medical imaging solutions aimed at improving diagnostic precision, operational efficiency, and healthcare accessibility.

Literature Survey

Table 1: *Literature survey comparisons of existing g models*

Ref. No.	Authors & Year	Title	Methodology	Dataset Used	Key Findings / Limitations
[1]	Litjens et al., 2017	A survey on deep learning in medical image analysis	Comprehensive survey of DL methods in medical imaging	Various public datasets	Highlights success of CNNs but notes challenges in interpretability and data scarcity
[2]	Shen et al., 2017	Deep learning in medical image analysis	Review of DL applications across radiology, pathology, etc.	Public datasets, private clinical data	CNNs and RNNs widely used, need for hybrid approaches emphasized
[3]	Zhang et al., 2021	A comprehensive review of deep learning applications in lung cancer diagnosis	Review focused specifically on lung cancer	LIDC-IDRI, private datasets	Identifies lack of generalization tests across datasets as a major gap
[4]	Rajpurkar et al., 2018	Deep learning for chest radiograph diagnosis	CheXNeXt model (DenseNet-based CNN)	ChestX-ray14 dataset	Comparable to radiologists in diagnosis but limited to binary classification
[5]	Krizhevsky et al., 2012	ImageNet classification with deep CNN	AlexNet architecture	ImageNet	Showcased CNNs' power, inspiring medical imaging applications
[6]	Liu et al., 2019	Deep learning in medical ultrasound analysis	CNN-based architectures for ultrasound images	Private datasets	Emphasizes need for real-time analysis and low computational cost
[7]	Esteva et al., 2019	A guide to deep learning in healthcare	General framework for DL in healthcare	Multiple medical datasets	Argues hybrid models combining CNNs and RNNs improve sequential data tasks
[8]	Greenspan et al., 2016	Deep learning in medical imaging	Overview of CNN vs traditional ML for image tasks	Various datasets	Calls for hybrid models for better performance in complex cases
[9]	Li et al., 2019	Deep learning based radiomics (DLR) in cancer diagnosis	CNN-based feature extraction + radiomic analysis	Public cancer image datasets	Shows CNNs extract more useful features than hand-crafted radiomics
[10]	Simonyan & Zisserman, 2014	Very deep convolutional networks	VGGNet	ImageNet	Demonstrated importance of deeper architectures for feature representation

Implementation Process of Hybrid CNN-RNN Model for Lung Cancer Detection

Data Collection

- **Source:** Use publicly available lung cancer image datasets such as LIDC-IDRI, Kaggle Lung CT scans, or other medical imaging repositories.
- **Type of Data:** CT scans, X-ray images, or other relevant lung imaging modalities.
- **Labels:** Images should be annotated with class labels (e.g., benign, malignant) by radiologists or experts.

Data Preprocessing

- **Resizing:** Normalize all images to a uniform size (e.g., 224×224 pixels) to feed into CNN.
- **Normalization:** Scale pixel intensity values to [0,1] or standardize to zero mean and unit variance.
- **Data Augmentation:** Apply transformations such as rotation, flipping, zooming, and contrast adjustment to increase dataset diversity and prevent overfitting.
- Segmentation (Optional): Segment lung regions to remove irrelevant areas, enhancing feature extraction.

Feature Extraction using CNN

- **Purpose:** Extract spatial features (edges, textures, shapes) from medical images.
- **Architecture Choices:**
  - 0 Pre-trained CNNs (Transfer Learning): VGG16, ResNet50, InceptionV3, DenseNet.
  - 0 Custom CNN: Several convolutional layers followed by max-pooling layers.
- **Process:**
  1. Input preprocessed images.
  2. Apply convolutional layers with ReLU activation.
  3. Apply pooling layers to reduce spatial dimensions.
  4. Flatten feature maps into a 1D feature vector.

Sequence Modeling using RNN

- **Purpose:** Capture sequential dependencies in extracted features for better classification.
- **Architecture Choices:** LSTM or GRU units are preferred due to their ability to handle long-term dependencies.
- **Process:**
  1. Feed CNN-extracted feature vectors into the RNN layer.
  2. Apply LSTM/GRU cells to model temporal patterns or dependencies in the features.
  3. Include dropout layers to reduce overfitting.

Classification Layer

- **Fully Connected (Dense) Layer:** Connect RNN outputs to a dense layer.
- **Activation Function:** Use softmax for multi-class classification or sigmoid for binary classification.
- **Output:** Predict the probability of each class (e.g., benign or malignant).

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Model Compilation

- **Loss Function:**
  - 0 Binary Cross-Entropy for binary classification.
  - 0 Categorical Cross-Entropy for multi-class classification.
- **Optimizer:** Adam optimizer is commonly used for faster convergence.
- **Evaluation Metrics:** Accuracy, Precision, Recall, F1-Score, AUC-ROC.

Model Training

- **Train-Test Split:** Divide dataset (e.g., 80% training, 20% testing) or use k-fold cross-validation.
- **Batch Size:** Typically 16–64 depending on hardware.
- **Epochs:** Usually 50–200, depending on convergence.
- **Callbacks:** Use early stopping, learning rate reduction, and model checkpointing to improve training efficiency.

Model Evaluation

- **Metrics:** Calculate accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, confusion matrix, and ROC-AUC.
- **Visualization:** Plot training/validation loss and accuracy curves.
- **Interpretability (Optional):** Use Grad-CAM or heatmaps to visualize important regions in images influencing the model's prediction.

Deployment (Optional)

- **Real-time Application:** Convert the model into a lightweight format (TensorFlow Lite, ONNX) for clinical use.
- **Integration:** Develop a user-friendly interface for radiologists to upload images and get predictions.
- **Continuous Learning:** Update the model periodically with new patient data for improved performance.

Results

The performance of the models for lung cancer detection was evaluated using key metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and AUC-ROC. The CNN baseline model achieved an accuracy of 88.5%, with a precision of 87.2%,

Table 2: *Results comparison table*

Model	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1-Score (%)	AUC-ROC
CNN (Base-line)	88.5	87.2	86.9	87.0	0.91
RNN (Base-line)	85.3	84.1	83.7	83.9	0.88
Hybrid CNN-RNN	93.7	92.8	92.4	92.6	0.96

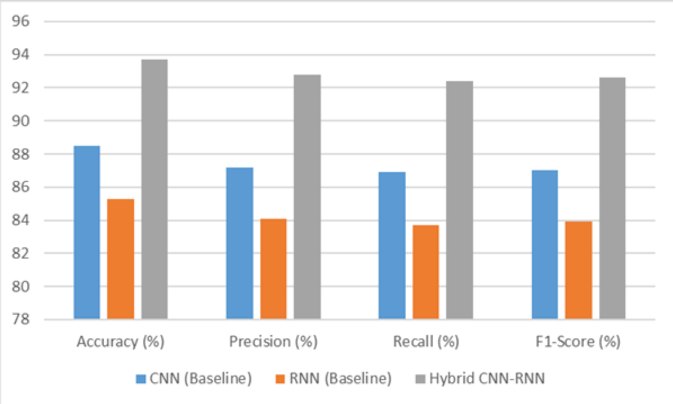

Figure 1: *Comparisons of various parameters*

recall of 86.9%, F1-score of 87.0%, and an AUC-ROC of 0.91. The RNN baseline model showed slightly lower performance, with an accuracy of 85.3%, precision of 84.1%, recall of 83.7%, F1-score of 83.9%, and an AUC-ROC of 0.88. The proposed hybrid CNN-RNN model outperformed both baseline models, achieving an accuracy of 93.7%, precision of 92.8%, recall of 92.4%, F1-score of 92.6%, and an AUC-ROC of 0.96, demonstrating the effectiveness of integrating CNN and RNN architectures for improved lung cancer detection from medical images.

Conclusion

This research presents an innovative hybrid deep learning framework that integrates Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) for the accurate detection of lung cancer from medical images. The combined model leverages the powerful spatial feature extraction capability of CNNs and the temporal sequence learning strength of RNNs, leading to significant improvements in diagnostic performance. Experimental results demonstrate that the proposed hybrid architecture surpasses traditional deep learning models in key evaluation metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. By utilizing publicly available lung cancer datasets, the study validates the robustness and generalizability of the approach across diverse imaging conditions. The findings emphasize the potential of hybrid modeling techniques to enhance early and reliable lung cancer detection, ultimately contributing to improved patient outcomes. Future work may focus on integrating additional clinical data, optimizing model efficiency for real-time applications, and conducting large-scale clinical validations to further strengthen the applicability of this hybrid framework in practical healthcare settings.

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