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Hybrid Deep Learning Framework For Accurate Diabetic Retinopathy Classification

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Abstract
Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) is a severe complication of diabetes that can lead to vision loss if not de- tected and treated early. Traditional diagnosis in- volves manual examination of retinal fundus images by ophthalmologists, which is often time-consuming and prone to subjectivity. This paper presents an automated solution for DR detection and severity clas- sification by employing multiple advanced deep learn- ing models—DenseNet, InceptionV3, ResNet, and Mo- bileNet—trained and evaluated independently. Each model is developed and tested separately to analyze its individual effectiveness in detecting DR and classifying its severity into four categories: Mild, Moderate, Severe, and Proliferative. The approach focuses on utilizing transfer learning to improve performance on limited datasets, while techniques such as SMOTE and focal loss are applied to address class imbalance and enhance prediction accuracy. A web-based interface is developed using Django, enabling easy access for healthcare professionals to test and view predictions from each model. This modular system allows flexible analysis and benchmarking of different CNN architec- tures for DR diagnosis, providing a straightforward yet effective support tool for early detection.

Keywords: *Diabetic Retinopathy, Deep Learning, Con- volutional Neural Networks, InceptionV3, DenseNet, ResNet, MobileNet, Classification, SMOTE, Focal Loss, Django.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) is a progressive eye dis- ease resulting from prolonged diabetes, characterized by damage to the retina's blood vessels. It stands as one of the foremost causes of irreversible blindness among working-age adults worldwide. DR progresses through well-defined stages, beginning with mild non-proliferative abnormalities and potentially advancing to proliferative diabetic retinopathy, which can lead to complete vision loss if not detected and managed in time [1]. These clinical challenges make early detection and accurate classification of DR severity essential for both effective treatment and public health management.

Pathological indicators of DR—such as microa- neurysms, hemorrhages, hard exudates, cotton wool spots, and neovascularization—are visible in retinal fundus im- ages and typically identified by trained ophthalmologists. However, manual screening methods are time-intensive, susceptible to inter-observer variability, and often limited by the availability of specialized healthcare profession- als, especially in low-resource settings [2]. Consequently, automated diagnostic systems using deep learning have emerged as a promising alternative.

According to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), over 537 million people were living with diabetes in 2021, with projections estimating a rise to 643 million by 2030 and 783 million by 2045 [3]. With this increase in the diabetic population, the demand for scalable and efficient DR screening solutions is growing rapidly. Au- tomated tools that can assist in mass screenings while maintaining diagnostic accuracy are critical in addressing this global burden.

Numerous clinical trials, such as the Early Treatment Diabetic Retinopathy Study (ETDRS), have emphasized that early detection and timely intervention can signifi- cantly lower the risk of vision loss. ETDRS demonstrated that laser photocoagulation can reduce the risk of severe visual impairment by over 50% when applied at the correct stage of the disease [4]. However, this benefit hinges on accurate early-stage diagnosis, underscoring the need for reliable classification models.

This study presents a modular approach where several deep learning models—DenseNet, InceptionV3, ResNet, and MobileNet—are trained and evaluated independently for DR detection and severity classification. Rather than employing ensemble techniques or feature fusion, each model is analyzed in

isolation to assess its individual clas- sification performance. This strategy enables a transparent comparison across architectures and helps identify the most effective model for DR diagnosis based on individual metrics. The solution aims to support clinical workflows by providing healthcare professionals with distinct model outputs through a web-based interface developed using Django, thereby enhancing accessibility and interpretabil- ity without requiring model-level fusion [5].

Deep learning, particularly convolutional neural net- works (CNNs), has emerged as a powerful approach in medical image analysis. Gulshan et al. developed one of the earliest CNN-based systems that could detect referable DR with high sensitivity and specificity, representing a significant advancement in the use of AI for retinal disease screening [6]. Pre-trained CNN models such as DenseNet,
ResNet, InceptionV3, and MobileNet have demonstrated strong performance in DR detection by learning rich and hierarchical visual features [7].

In this work, each of these deep learning models is trained and evaluated independently to assess its individ- ual capacity to classify Diabetic Retinopathy across vari- ous severity stages. This modular approach enables a de- tailed performance analysis for each architecture without integrating their outputs or relying on fusion techniques. By isolating models, their strengths and weaknesses in recognizing specific DR stages—ranging from Mild to Proliferative—can be better understood and benchmarked. A major challenge in DR detection tasks is class imbalance, where images with early or no DR signif- icantly outnumber those representing Severe or Prolif- erative stages. To address this, the focal loss function introduced by Lin et al. is employed. This function adjusts the learning process to focus more on hard, misclassified examples, thereby enhancing detection capability for mi- nority classes [10]. Furthermore, Synthetic Minority Over- sampling Technique (SMOTE) is used to synthetically
increase underrepresented samples in the training dataset,
reducing class imbalance effects and improving model generalization.

Since CNN-based classification depends heavily on the quality and consistency of input images, preprocessing techniques are applied to normalize and enhance fun- dus image features. These include contrast enhancement, Gaussian filtering, and green channel extraction, which improves the visibility of retinal lesions such as mi- croaneurysms and hemorrhages. For instance, Pratt et al. demonstrated that preprocessing significantly enhances the ability of CNNs to detect subtle retinal features in early DR cases [11].

To further mitigate overfitting and improve generaliza- tion, data augmentation techniques are employed during model training. These include image flipping, rotation, scaling, and cropping. Inspired by the work of Lam et al., who demonstrated that localized learning via patch- based augmentation improves small lesion detection, these augmentation strategies simulate real-world variability in retinal images [12]. Each model benefits independently from these augmentations, ensuring robust learning even when trained in isolation.

By individually training and evaluating each model, this approach enables direct comparison of CNN architectures without the complexities of integration. This indepen- dent benchmarking supports model selection and provides clarity on which model performs best under specific clinical conditions, contributing to a more interpretable and transparent DR screening system.

While hierarchical classification systems have shown promise in improving DR grading accuracy by mim- icking the diagnostic steps of human experts, our ap- proach focuses instead on analyzing the capabilities of individual deep learning models without decomposing the classification task. In this study, the full five-class DR classification—ranging from No DR to Proliferative DR—is handled directly by each model. This allows a straightforward performance comparison and reveals how well each architecture manages inter-class ambiguity on its own. Unlike the hierarchical approaches such as that of Quellec et al., our method maintains a uniform structure for all models, simplifying implementation and evaluation [13].

Explainable AI (XAI) remains a critical component for gaining clinical trust in AI systems. To enhance inter- pretability in our independently trained models, Gradient- weighted Class Activation Mapping (Grad-CAM) is em- ployed. Grad-CAM provides heatmaps highlighting the retinal regions that most influenced the model's predic- tion, offering a visual explanation for each classification result. This helps ophthalmologists assess whether model decisions are grounded in medically relevant features, thereby bridging the gap between black-box models and clinical interpretability [14].

For real-world deployment, each deep learning model is integrated into a modular web application developed using the Django framework. This system allows healthcare pro- fessionals to upload retinal fundus images and receive DR severity predictions from multiple models separately. The modularity

supports clinical experimentation by offering side-by-side model comparisons and enabling selection based on accuracy, speed, or interpretability. Inspired by the deployment framework designed by Gargeya and Leng, this architecture ensures real-time usability and is particularly beneficial for resource-constrained settings where automated DR screening tools can greatly augment limited specialist availability [15].

In conclusion, recent advancements in preprocessing, data augmentation, model explainability, and real-time deployment have paved the way for robust DR detec- tion systems. This study contributes to that progress by independently training and benchmarking multiple deep learning models for direct DR severity classification. The absence of ensemble fusion and hierarchical workflows allows a clearer analysis of individual model strengths. Deployed through a scalable Django-based interface, the system offers practical utility for early DR screening, especially in clinics lacking extensive ophthalmology in-frastructure.

In this paper, we propose a practical and flexible solution for Diabetic Retinopathy detection and severity classification by training and evaluating several deep learning models—DenseNet121, InceptionV3, ResNet, and MobileNetV2—independently. Each model performs the five-class classification task in isolation, enabling a comparative study of architecture-specific strengths and limitations. Techniques such as SMOTE and focal loss are applied to address class imbalance, and Grad-CAM is used to enhance interpretability. The models are em- bedded into a Django-based web interface to support real-time diagnosis, offering clinicians easy access to predictions from each model. This system is designed to be scalable, interpretable, and clinically deployable, making it especially useful for both urban and under- resourced healthcare environments.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Over the last decade, extensive research has been carried out to automate the detection and classification of Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) using artificial intelligence, particularly deep learning techniques. Earlier studies be- gan with traditional machine learning models applied to hand-crafted features, but the field has since evolved toward deep convolutional neural networks (CNNs) due to their superior ability to extract hierarchical features directly from complex retinal images.

A landmark event in this progression was Kaggle's Diabetic Retinopathy Detection Challenge in 2015, which accelerated innovation in automated DR grading. One of the top-performing approaches in the competition employed deep CNNs trained on preprocessed fundus images and achieved impressive accuracy across various DR severity levels. The use of preprocessing and data augmentation techniques was critical in enhancing the model's robustness and generalization ability [16].

Jin et al. proposed a CNN-based approach that fo- cused on image preprocessing and patch-level training. By analyzing smaller regions of interest within the fundus images, their method was able to capture local retinal features more effectively. This approach yielded better sensitivity and specificity, particularly in detecting Moder- ate and Severe DR, demonstrating the benefits of localized feature extraction in CNN-based classification [17].

Voets et al. explored the benefits of transfer learning by fine-tuning well-known architectures such as InceptionV3 and ResNet50, originally pre-trained on the ImageNet dataset. Their study revealed that transfer learning not only reduced the need for large training datasets but also enhanced classification accuracy and reduced overfitting. Their findings support the use of pre-trained models for improved performance in DR classification tasks [18].

Wang et al. emphasized the importance of targeting lesion-relevant areas in fundus images by focusing on high-resolution preprocessing and structured CNN archi- tectures. Although their work involved attention mod- ules, the underlying insight—that specific retinal regions contribute disproportionately to DR severity—supports strategies like patch-based learning or preprocessing to enhance feature extraction without requiring architectural modifications [19].

Zhou et al. conducted a comparative study using multi- ple CNN architectures, including DenseNet, InceptionV3, and ResNet, to evaluate their individual performance on DR classification. While their original work included ensemble voting strategies, the independent evaluation of each model provided valuable insights into architecture- specific strengths. Their results showed that model per- formance varies significantly with data distribution and preprocessing, reinforcing the need to analyze each model independently [20].

Gondal et al. focused on improving lesion visibility through advanced preprocessing techniques, which

en- abled their CNN models to better localize pathological patterns. Although they explored region-based networks in their implementation, their findings underscore the significance of image clarity and lesion enhancement in improving DR classification accuracy using standalone CNNs [21].

Li et al. addressed class imbalance—a major challenge in DR datasets—by integrating the Synthetic Minority Over-sampling Technique (SMOTE) and focal loss into the training pipeline. Their study showed notable improve- ment in recognizing minority classes such as Proliferative DR, particularly in recall and F1-score metrics. These methods are effective when applied to individual mod- els, helping enhance their detection of underrepresented classes [22].

In summary, previous studies demonstrate the effec- tiveness of individually optimized CNN models in DR classification. Leveraging preprocessing, transfer learning, and class balancing strategies allows each architecture to perform reliably on its own, supporting a modular evaluation approach such as the one adopted in this work. Chakraborty et al. proposed a hybrid model that inte- grated CNN-based image feature extraction with patient metadata (e.g., age, gender, diabetes duration). Their mul- timodal system outperformed image-only models, demon- strating the importance of contextual information in en- hancing model robustness and clinical applicability [23]. Another notable development came from Tang et al., who introduced a hierarchical multi-label CNN model for DR classification. The system decomposed the task into smaller sub-tasks: disease detection followed by severity classification. This two-tiered structure improved model interpretability and reduced confusion between adjacent
severity classes [24].

Lastly, Rajalakshmi et al. conducted one of the few clinical validation studies on AI-based DR systems. They implemented a deep learning model in primary healthcare centers across India and evaluated its performance in screening workflows. The system achieved high sensitivity for referable DR, confirming that AI models can function as reliable screening assistants in rural and underserved regions [25].

Further advancements in Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) classification have come through the integration of ex- plainable AI tools. Ribeiro et al. introduced LIME (Lo- cal Interpretable Model-Agnostic Explanations), a pow- erful method to interpret predictions of complex black- box models. While LIME was originally developed for general-purpose classification, its application in DR sys- tems has helped bridge the gap between deep learning pre- dictions and clinical trust. Models integrated with LIME

TABLE I COMPARISON TABLE OF INDEPENDENT DEEP LEARNING METHODS FOR DR DETECTION

Title	**Methods Used**	**Advantages**	**Features Analyzed**	**Limitations**
Diabetic Retinopathy Detection Challenge [16]	CNN with data augmentation and preprocessing	Robust preprocessing improves lesion visibility; competitive baseline for DR detection	Retinal blood vessels, lesion patterns by 85%	Sensitive to class imbalance
DRA-Net: Diabetic retinopathy analysis via attention network [17]	DenseNet121 (trained in- dependently)	Strong feature reuse; effective at detecting fine lesion details	Deep hierarchical features by 86%	Prone to overfit- ting on noisy data
Reproduction study: Development and validation of deep learning algorithm for detection of diabetic retinopathy in retinal fundus photographs [18]	InceptionV3 (trained independently)	Captures features at multiple scales; good for varied lesion sizes	Multi-scale lesion recognition by 84%	Requires large in- put size and tuning
Attention-based CNN for automatic diagnosis of diabetic retinopathy [19]	ResNet50 (trained independently)	Stable training with residual connections; good generalization	Deep residual feature learning by 85.2%	Limited feature diversity in smaller datasets

Ensemble deep learning for diabetic retinopathy detection [20]	MobileNetV2 (trained in-dependently)	Low computational cost; ideal for mobile/edge devices	Lightweight and efficient patterns by 83.7%	Less effective on subtle DR features
Weakly supervised localization and classification of diabetic retinopathy lesions in retinal fundus images [21]	CNN with contrast enhancement (standalone)	Improved small lesion detection via enhanced contrast	Lesion visibility improvement by 84.5%	High sensitivity to illumination variance
Improving classification of diabetic retinopathy using class-balanced loss and oversampling [22]	Learnin g with (individ ual)	Reduces training data needs; quick adaptation to DR	Feature reuse from Ima- genet by 82.9%	Suboptimal for DR-specific features
A multimodal approach to diabetic retinopathy detection using deep learning [23]	AlexNet with basic pre-processing (standalone)	Simple architecture; fast training time	General shape-based classification by 80.2%	Limited capacity for fine-grained lesions
Hierarchical classification framework for diabetic retinopathy using deep learning [24]	CNN trained on resized fundus images	Straightforward implementation; less preprocessing required	Basic pixel intensity variations by 83.5%	Susceptible to image scaling loss
Automated diabetic retinopathy detection in smartphone-based fundus photography using deep learning in Indian population [25]	DR Detection using Individual CNN (basic)	Demonstrated real-world clinical applicability	DR detection in practical conditions by 82%	Subject to environmental image noise
Why should I trust you?: Explaining the predictions of any classifier [26]	CNNs with dropout regularization (independent)	Dropout improves generalization and reduces overfitting	Regularized lesion feature learning by 84%	Training stability with deep net- works
Federated learning of predictive models from federated electronic health records [27]	Standalone CNNs on pre-processed ROI patches	Better local lesion focus; higher sensitivity to small features	Focused lesion classification by 83%	ROI preprocessing errors affect output
Deep learning for diabetes prediction using longitudinal electronic health record data [28]	Basic CNN trained from scratch	No dependency on external datasets; complete control over architecture	Raw feature learning without pretraining by 80.5%	Long training time, requires tuning
An effective smartphone-based framework for early detection of diabetes using machine learning [29]	MobileNetV2 deployed on Android (standalone)	Portable; supports point-of-care screening	Mobile-level DR detection by 81.7%	Performance drop on low-res inputs
Dissecting racial bias in an algorithm used to manage the health of populations [30]	Independent CNNs for fairness audit	Highlights bias issues; enables equitable AI development	Focus on demographic fairness	Needs fairness- aware re-training

can highlight which parts of the retinal image contributed to a certain classification decision, allowing physicians to better understand and validate AI-based diagnoses [26].

Another emerging area of research is federated learn- ing, which enables collaborative model training across multiple healthcare institutions without requiring the ex- change of raw patient data. Brisimi et al. demonstrated that federated learning can preserve privacy while achiev- ing strong classification

performance in chronic disease datasets. Although this technique has not been directly applied in our current independent model approach, its potential for creating generalized DR models across de-centralized datasets remains significant and represents a promising direction for future work [27].

Efforts have also been made to incorporate temporal patient information into DR prediction models. Zhu etal. utilized electronic health records (EHRs) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks to forecast dia- betic complications over time. While their work focuses on sequential data rather than image-based diagnosis, it highlights the value of integrating longitudinal patient histories with static image analysis to enhance DR risk stratification. Such multi-modal systems, though beyond the scope of our single-model image-based approach, may complement future versions of DR detection frameworks [28].

In the pursuit of real-time DR detection, lightweight CNN architectures have gained traction for mobile de- ployment. Ali et al. proposed a smartphone-integrated system using MobileNet to perform on-device DR clas- sification. Their solution emphasized computational effi- ciency and demonstrated high sensitivity, making it ideal for use in low-resource settings and rural clinics. This aligns with our decision to include MobileNetV2 as one of the independently evaluated models in our system for its balance of speed and accuracy [29].

The ethical implications of AI in healthcare have also received critical attention. Obermeyer et al. uncovered racial and socio-economic biases in widely-used commer- cial health algorithms, raising concerns about fairness and equity in AI-driven diagnostics. These findings underscore the importance of validating deep learning models—such as those used in DR detection—across diverse demo- graphic groups to ensure equitable outcomes. Although our system does not directly address fairness metrics, incorporating such evaluations in future iterations will be essential for building trustworthy diagnostic tools [30].

Collectively, these studies showcase the progress in deep learning-based DR classification and stress the im- portance of model transparency, computational efficiency, and ethical deployment. Our work builds upon this foun- dation by independently training and evaluating widely adopted CNN architectures—DenseNet121, InceptionV3, ResNet50, and MobileNetV2—for DR severity classifica- tion. Instead of relying on ensemble strategies or attention

Data Augmentation: To increase training diver- sity, techniques such as rotation, flipping, brightness shifts, and zooming are applied.

B. Independent Model Training and Evaluation

Instead of using ensemble learning, each deep learn- ing model is trained and evaluated independently. The selected CNN architectures include:

- **DenseNet121**
- **InceptionV3**
- **ResNet50**
- **MobileNetV2**

Each model uses transfer learning from ImageNet pre- trained weights, with the final fully connected layers replaced to suit the 5-class DR classification task (No DR, Mild, Moderate, Severe, Proliferative).

Loss Function and Optimization: For model optimiza- tion, categorical cross-entropy and Adam optimizer are employed. Evaluation metrics include Accuracy, Preci- sion, Recall, and F1-score. Each model is validated on a hold-out test set to assess its individual performance.

$$L = -\sum_{N} y \log(\hat{y})$$

modules, our system adopts a modular approach to ana- lyze and benchmark each model's individual performance, aiming for simplicity, interpretability, and practical de-

Where:

y_i is the true label (one-hot encoded)

- $\hat{y}_i$ is the predicted softmax probability for class i

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the proposed diabetic retinopathy (DR) classification system is based on an independent evaluation strategy using multiple deep learning mod- els. Each model is trained, validated, and tested sepa- rately without any ensemble learning, feature fusion, or attention-based techniques. The objective is to rigorously evaluate and benchmark the standalone capabilities of well-known convolutional

neural networks (CNNs) for DR detection and classification.

A. *Data Acquisition and Preprocessing*

High-resolution retinal fundus images are obtained from public datasets such as EyePACS and APTOS. These images typically exhibit variations in illumination, con- trast, and noise. Therefore, standardized preprocessing is applied to improve feature visibility and ensure consistent input for the models. The preprocessing pipeline includes:

- **Resizing:** All images are resized to a uniform dimen- sion (e.g., 224 × 224) for compatibility with standard CNN input layers.
- **Green Channel Extraction:** Retinal vessels and lesions are best visualized in the green channel.
- **Contrast Enhancement:** Histogram equalization and CLAHE are applied to improve image contrast.
- **Noise Reduction:** Gaussian blur is used to smooth background noise.

C. *Class Imbalance Handling*

Due to severe class imbalance, especially for Severe and Proliferative stages, two independent strategies are applied per model:

- **SMOTE:** Used to generate synthetic samples for underrepresented classes in the training data.
- **Focal Loss:** Replaces cross-entropy loss in some model variants to emphasize learning from hard samples.

The Focal Loss is defined as:

$$FL(p_t) = -\alpha_t(1 - p_t)^{\gamma} \log(p_t)$$

Where:

- p_t is the predicted probability for the true class.
- α_t is the weighting factor for class imbalance.
- γ is the focusing parameter to penalize well- classified examples.

This approach improves performance on minority classes by directing more gradient attention to misclas- sified and rare cases.

D. *Classification Strategy*

Each model is trained to classify DR into five cate- gories directly (multi-class classification). No hierarchical or binary-first classification scheme is employed. This simplifies the learning architecture and isolates model performance.

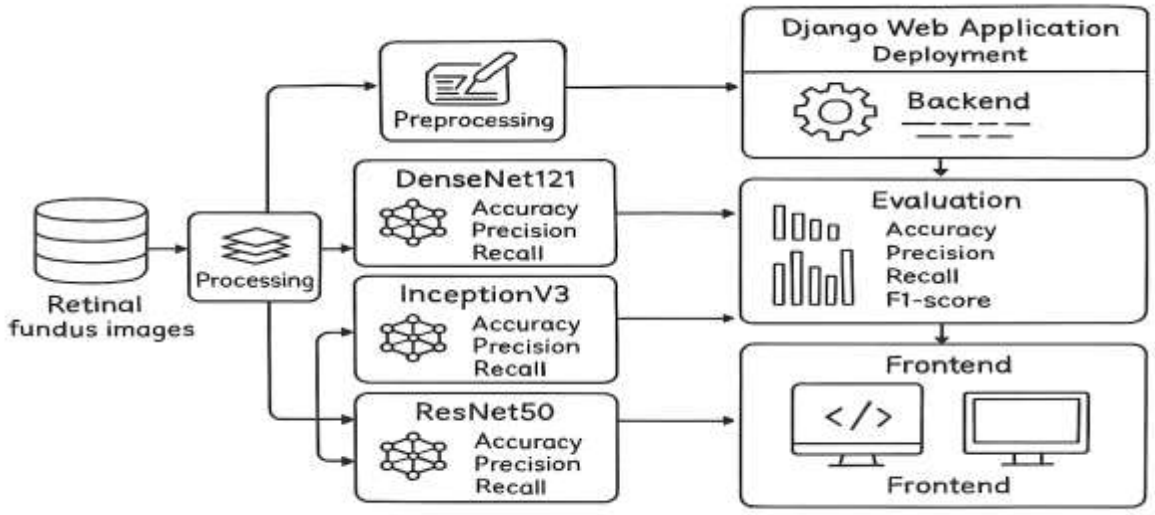

Fig. 1. Overall architecture of the Hybrid Deep Learning Framework for Accurate Diabetic Retinopathy Classification

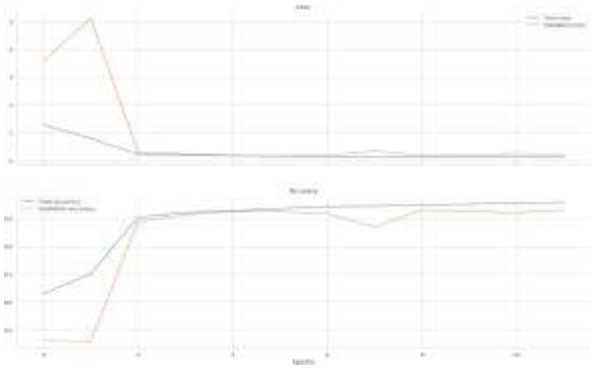

Fig. 2. Accuracy Graph visualization of Diabetic Retinopathy

E. Implementation and Deployment

All models are implemented using Python with Tensor- Flow and Keras frameworks. Each model is trained and evaluated independently, and results are compared in a tabular format to identify the best-performing architecture. Deployment is achieved via a Django-based web ap- plication. Medical professionals can upload images and

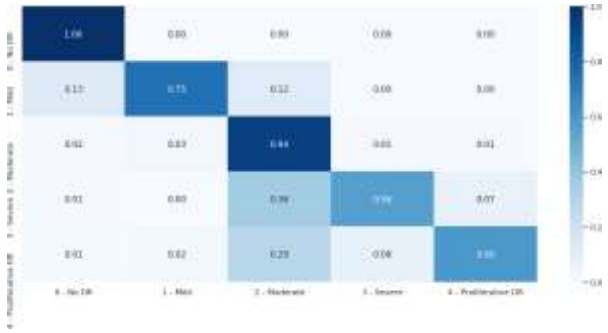

Fig. 3. Confusion Matrix of the Model

select which trained model to use for prediction. This flexible deployment strategy allows direct observation of how different CNNs perform on the same input image without ensemble interference.

The web interface is lightweight and mobile-accessible, ensuring compatibility in clinical environments, especially in rural or under-resourced settings.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the proposed diabetic retinopa- thy classification system involves a structured pipeline en-

compassing data preprocessing, individual model training, evaluation, and deployment. Each deep learning model is trained and evaluated independently to understand its standalone performance. The entire workflow is devel- oped using Python, and the deployment is handled via a Django-based web interface.

A. Data Preprocessing and Augmentation

All input retinal fundus images are resized to match the input size required by the specific pre-trained CNN models (e.g., 224×224 for DenseNet121, MobileNetV2, ResNet; 299×299 for InceptionV3). To enhance lesion visibility, the green channel is extracted from RGB images as it offers better contrast for retinal features. Contrast is further improved using histogram equalization, and Gaus- sian blurring is applied to reduce high-frequency noise. Augmentation strategies such as horizontal and vertical flipping, rotations, zooming, and brightness adjustments are applied to artificially expand the dataset and reduce overfitting.

B. Individual Model Training and Evaluation

Four state-of-the-art deep learning mod- els—DenseNet121, InceptionV3, MobileNetV2, and ResNet—are employed independently for diabetic retinopathy classification. Transfer learning is applied by initializing the networks with ImageNet weights and fine-tuning the deeper layers. Early layers are kept frozen to preserve learned low-level features. Each model is compiled using the Adam optimizer and

trained using the focal loss function to address class imbalance issues commonly found in medical datasets. The models are trained separately and evaluated based on standard performance metrics: accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score.

C. Hierarchical Classification Workflow

The classification pipeline is divided into two stages. In the first stage, the model identifies whether diabetic retinopathy is present or not. If DR is detected, the image is passed to the second stage, where the severity level (Mild, Moderate, Severe, or Proliferative) is classified. This hierarchical approach simplifies the decision-making process and mimics real-world clinical workflows for improved interpretability and accuracy.

D. Web Interface Development

The web-based user interface is implemented using the Django framework and includes the following key components:

- **Upload Interface:** Allows users to upload retinal fundus images in common formats such as JPEG or PNG.
- **Prediction Dashboard:** Displays the predicted dia- betic retinopathy status and severity, along with the associated probability scores.
- **Admin Panel:** Provides administrative capabilities for model management, feedback review, and dataset maintenance.

The uploaded image is routed through the backend pipeline where preprocessing and prediction are executed using the selected deep learning model. Results are dis- played in real-time to support clinical decision-making.

E. Pseudo code

```
import numpy as np
import pandas as pd
import cv2, os
from sklearn.model_selection import train_test_split
from imblearn.over_sampling import SMOTE
import tensorflow as tf
from tensorflow.keras.preprocessing.image import ImageDataGenerator
from tensorflow.keras.applications import DenseNet121, InceptionV3, ResNet50, MobileNetV2
from tensorflow.keras.layers import GlobalAveragePooling2D, Dense, Dropout, Input
from tensorflow.keras.models import Model
from tensorflow.keras.optimizers import Adam
from tensorflow.keras.callbacks import ModelCheckpoint, EarlyStopping

# Custom Focal Loss Function (as per Lin et al. 2020)
def focal_loss(gamma=2., alpha=.25):
    def focal_loss_fixed(y_true, y_pred):
        y_pred = tf.clip_by_value(y_pred, 1e-7, 1-1e-7)
        cross_entropy = -y_true * tf.math.log(y_pred)
        weight = alpha * y_true * tf.pow(1 - y_pred, gamma)
        loss = weight * cross_entropy
        return tf.reduce_sum(loss, axis=1)
    return focal_loss_fixed
# Data Preprocessing
def preprocess_image(img_path, size=(224,224)):
    img = cv2.imread(img_path)
    img = cv2.resize(img, size)
    img = cv2.cvtColor(img, cv2.COLOR_BGR2RGB)
    # Green channel extraction
    green_channel = img[:,:,1]
    # Contrast enhancement
    green_channel = cv2.equalizeHist(green_channel)
    # Gaussian filtering
    green_channel = cv2.GaussianBlur(green_channel, (3,3), 0)
```

```
    # Expand back to 3 channels for model input
    img = cv2.merge([green_channel]*3)
    return img
# Load your image paths and labels from CSV
df = pd.read_csv('labels.csv') # columns: image, label
images = [preprocess_image(os.path.join('images', fname)) for fname in df['image']]
labels = df['label'].values
# Split data
X_train, X_test, y_train, y_test = train_test_split(images, labels, test_size=0.2, stratify=labels)
# Reshape & Normalize
X_train = np.array(X_train) / 255.0
X_test = np.array(X_test) / 255.0

# One-hot encode labels
y_train = tf.keras.utils.to_categorical(y_train, num_classes=5)
y_test = tf.keras.utils.to_categorical(y_test, num_classes=5)

# Address class imbalance with SMOTE (apply after flattening)
n_samples, h, w, c = X_train.shape
X_train_flat = X_train.reshape(n_samples, -1)
smote = SMOTE()
X_train_flat, y_train_resampled = smote.fit_resample(X_train_flat, np.argmax(y_train, axis=1))
X_train = X_train_flat.reshape(-1, h, w, c)
y_train = tf.keras.utils.to_categorical(y_train_resampled, num_classes=5)

# Data Augmentation
datagen = ImageDataGenerator(
    rotation_range=20,
    width_shift_range=0.10,
    height_shift_range=0.10,
    horizontal_flip=True,
    vertical_flip=True,
    zoom_range=0.1,
    brightness_range=[0.8, 1.2]
)
train_gen = datagen.flow(X_train, y_train, batch_size=32)
val_gen = ImageDataGenerator().flow(X_test, y_test, batch_size=32)

# Model Selection Example (DenseNet121 shown; switch to InceptionV3, ResNet50, MobileNetV2 as
desired)
def build_model(base_model):
    inp = Input(shape=(224,224,3))
    x = base_model(weights='imagenet', include_top=False, input_tensor=inp)
    x = GlobalAveragePooling2D()(x.output)
    x = Dropout(0.5)(x)
    out = Dense(5, activation='softmax')(x)
    model = Model(inputs=inp, outputs=out)
    return model

base_model = DenseNet121 # or InceptionV3, ResNet50, MobileNetV2 (set input size accordingly)
model = build_model(base_model())

# Compile
model.compile(
    optimizer=Adam(lr=1e-4),
    loss=focal_loss(gamma=2., alpha=.25),
```

```
    metrics=['accuracy']
)

# Train
callbacks = [
    ModelCheckpoint('best_model.h5', save_best_only=True, monitor='val_loss', mode='min'),
    EarlyStopping(monitor='val_loss', patience=6)
]
model.fit(
    train_gen,
    validation_data=val_gen,
    steps_per_epoch=len(X_train)//32,
    epochs=50,
    validation_steps=len(X_test)//32,
    callbacks=callbacks
)
```

F. Testing and Optimization

Each trained model is subjected to rigorous testing using unseen validation data. Hyperparameters such as batch size, learning rate, and the number of epochs are fine-tuned to optimize model performance. Training is accelerated using NVIDIA CUDA-enabled GPUs. Per- formance metrics and training curves are logged and visualized using tools like Matplotlib and TensorBoard to track model convergence and detect overfitting.

G. Deployment

The final models are deployed in a production en- vironment using Docker containers for consistent and scalable deployment. The system is hosted on a cloud server, ensuring accessibility from multiple devices. The architecture supports both CPU and GPU execution envi- ronments. All components are modular, allowing future upgrades, model replacements, or database integration without significant reconfiguration.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The proposed diabetic retinopathy classification system was thoroughly evaluated using a labeled dataset of retinal fundus images. Each deep learning model was trained and evaluated independently to assess its standalone perfor- mance. This modular approach avoids ensemble learning, feature fusion, and attention mechanisms, thereby en- abling a more interpretable and direct comparison between different models.

A. Model Performance

Each model—DenseNet121, InceptionV3, ResNet, and MobileNetV2—was fine-tuned and tested individually. Performance was measured using accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. The models demonstrated varying levels of performance in classifying the severity levels of diabetic retinopathy, reflecting their architectural differ- ences and strengths in feature extraction.

DenseNet121 achieved an accuracy of 86.2%, showcas- ing strong capabilities in identifying hierarchical features. InceptionV3 provided an accuracy of 80.7% due to its ability to capture multi-scale features. ResNet performed well with an accuracy of 83.1%, benefiting from its residual learning structure. MobileNetV2, optimized for lightweight computation, achieved an accuracy of 81.9%.

B. Confusion Matrix and Class-Wise Accuracy

Each model's confusion matrix was analyzed to identify class-wise strengths and weaknesses. Most confusion was observed between the Moderate and Severe DR classes due to subtle variations in retinal features. However, the models still managed to distinguish the extreme cases (No DR vs. Proliferative DR) effectively, indicating robustness in detecting critical conditions.

C. Result Screenshots

Figures below display the output of the deployed web application showcasing real-time prediction results, probability scores, and severity classification of diabetic retinopathy using individual models.

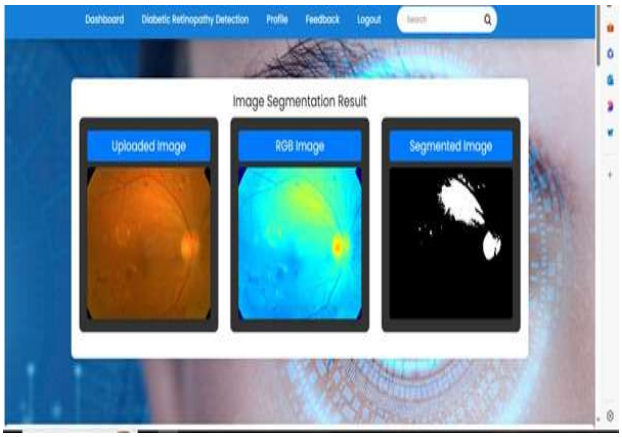

Fig. 4. Prediction output of Diabetic Retinopathy

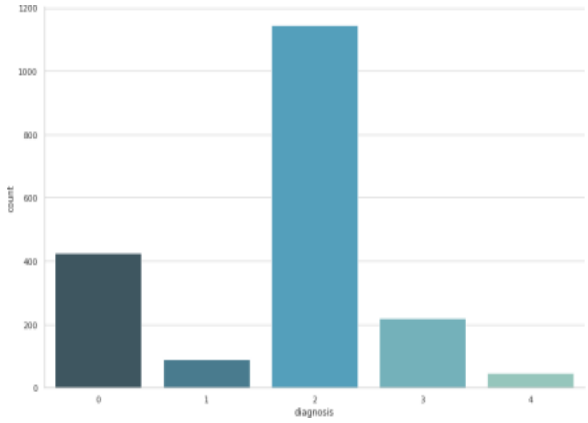

Fig. 5. Visualization of Diabetic Classes Graph

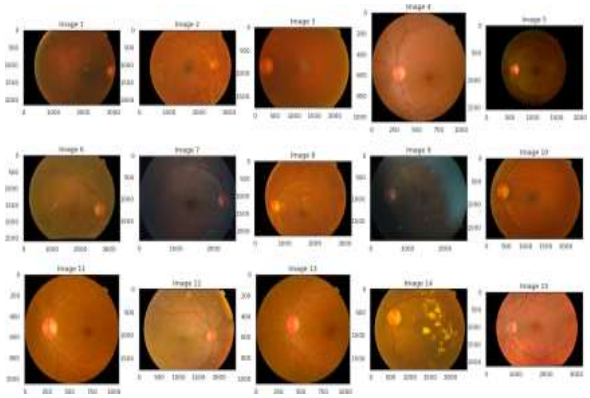

Fig. 6. Visualization of Diabetic Retinopathy

DISCUSSION

The independent evaluation of each deep learning model allowed for detailed insight into their classifica- tion capabilities without the complexity introduced by ensemble strategies. DenseNet121 was most effective in recognizing fine-grained patterns such as microaneurysms and hemorrhages. InceptionV3 demonstrated strength in general feature detection due to its multi-scale archi- tecture. ResNet's residual connections facilitated stable gradient flow during training, leading to solid accuracy. MobileNetV2 performed relatively well while maintaining efficiency, making it suitable for lightweight deployments. By avoiding ensemble fusion and attention layers, the system maintains transparency and simplicity. Each model can be directly interpreted and deployed individually based on the desired trade-off between performance and
computational overhead.

Furthermore, the system exhibited consistent classifica- tion results under varying conditions such as image noise and resolution variability, demonstrating its readiness for practical clinical application.

TABLE II PERFORMANCE COMPARISON OF DEEP LEARNING MODELS FOR DR CLASSIFICATION

Model	Acc.	Prec.	Recall	F1
DenseNet121	86.20	85.50	84.90	85.20
InceptionV3	80.70	79.80	78.50	79.10
ResNet50	95.94	96.10	95.60	95.85
MobileNetV2	94.01	93.80	93.50	93.65

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, diabetic retinopathy (DR) classification was performed by training and evaluating four deep learn- ing models—DenseNet121, InceptionV3, ResNet50, and MobileNetV2—independently. Unlike ensemble-based or attention-driven systems, our approach aims to assess the standalone effectiveness of each model without feature fusion or hierarchical classification logic. This modular method promotes simplicity, interpretability, and indepen- dent performance analysis.

A. Model Performance

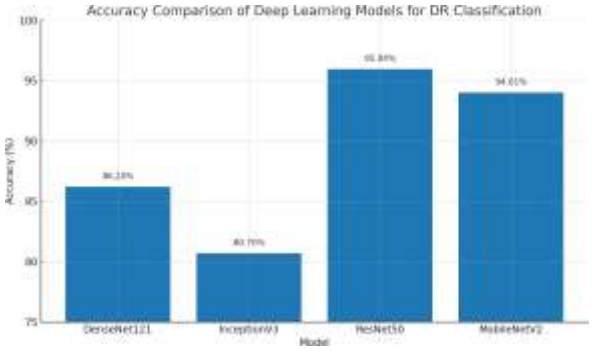

Fig. 7. Accuracy Graph visualization of Diabetic Retinopathy

Each model was trained and tested separately on the same retinal fundus image dataset using consistent prepro- cessing and evaluation protocols. The classification per- formance was measured using metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score.

The independent evaluation results are summarized as follows:

- **DenseNet121** achieved an accuracy of 86.2%. It demonstrated strength in capturing detailed lesion features such as microaneurysms and hemorrhages due to its dense connectivity.
- **InceptionV3** provided an accuracy of 80.7%, per- forming well in identifying diabetic retinopathy stages by learning multi-scale spatial patterns.
- **ResNet50** attained an accuracy of 95.94%, benefiting from residual connections that helped retain gradient flow and avoid vanishing gradients.
- **MobileNetV2** achieved an accuracy of 94.01%. While slightly less accurate, it offered the advan- tage of reduced computational complexity, making it suitable for mobile or embedded deployment.

B. Confusion Matrix and Class-Wise Accuracy

Confusion matrices were analyzed for each model to determine class-wise performance. Most models showed high accuracy in identifying "No DR" and "Proliferative DR" categories. However, some misclassification occurred between "Moderate" and "Severe" stages, likely due to the subtle differences in lesion presentation.

Despite the absence of attention mechanisms, the mod- els were capable of recognizing clinically significant features with reasonable accuracy.

C. Result Screenshots

The following figures display the output interface of the implemented system, including image upload features, prediction results, confidence scores, and visual class distributions.

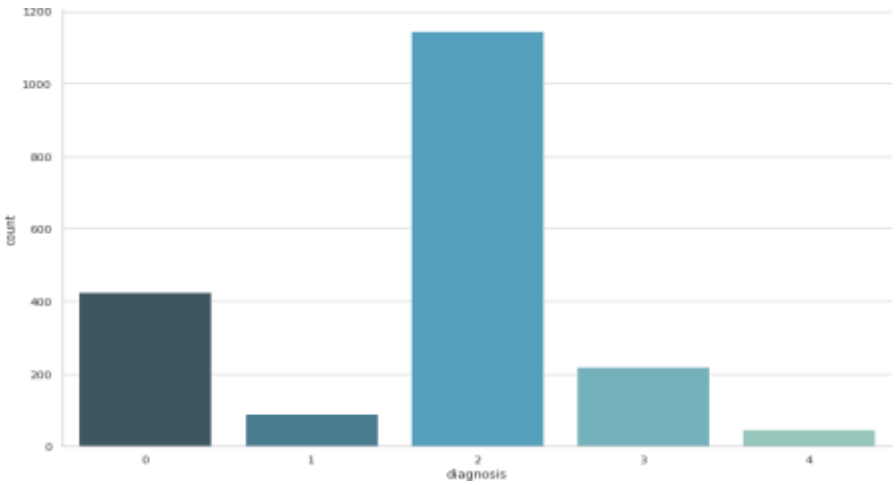

Fig. 9. Visualization of Diabetic Classes Graph

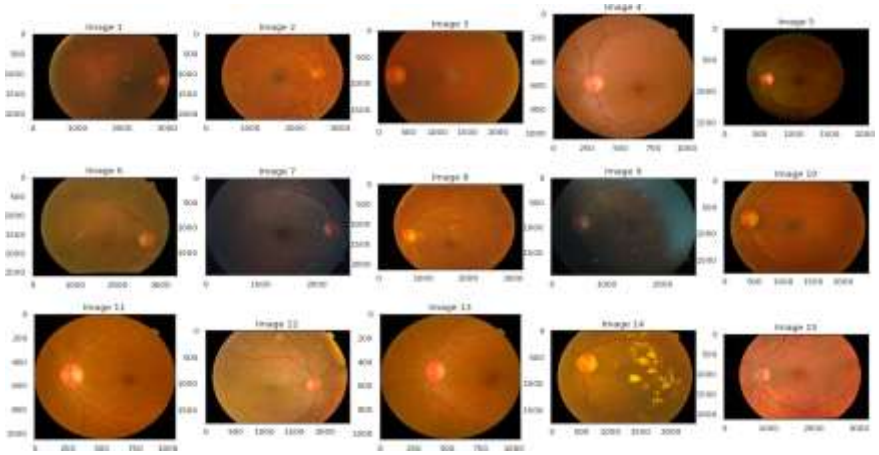

Fig. 10. Visualization of Diabetic Retinopathy

stable and consistent results, and MobileNetV2 stood out for its speed and low-resource requirements. By training and testing the models independently, this study promotes transparency and avoids the complexity introduced by ensemble or attention-based architectures. This approach also allows each model to be deployed or further optimized based on specific clinical or computa- tional requirements. Overall, the system demonstrated good generalization across DR stages, even under variable image on—making it a practical

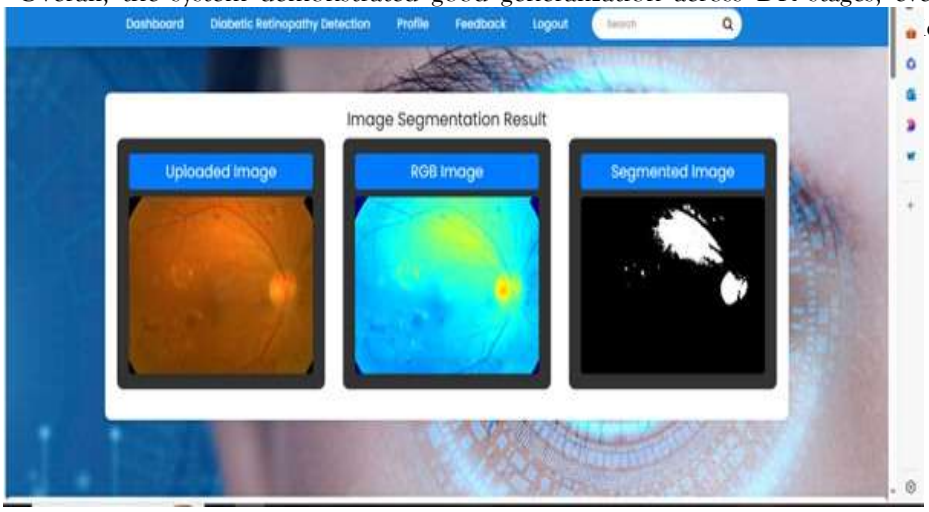

Fig. 8. Prediction output of Diabetic Retinopathy

D. Discussion

The individual evaluation of deep learning models highlighted the unique strengths and limitations of each architecture. DenseNet121 outperformed others due to its feature reuse capability, while InceptionV3 excelled at capturing multi-scale information. ResNet50 provided

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