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Diabetic Retinopathy Classification Using Multi-Scale And Temporal Attention

Leveraging Multi-Scale Features and Sequential Data for Improved Classification

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Abstract: Diabetic retinopathy (DR) is a leading cause of blindness among diabetic patients. Timely screening and accurate severity grading are critical for effective intervention. This paper proposes a novel deep learning architecture that integrates a multi-scale convolutional neural network (CNN) with temporal attention to classify DR severity using color fundus images. Multi-scale feature extraction via a feature pyramid network captures lesions at different scales, while a bidirectional long short-term memory (LSTM) with attention aggregates temporal features from sequential visits. Experimental evaluation on public datasets, including Kaggle DR and EyePACS, demonstrates that our model outperforms baseline CNNs and state-of-the-art methods, achieving 92.4% accuracy and a Cohen's Kappa of 0.89. Grad-CAM visualizations highlight clinically significant lesions, ensuring model interpretability.

***Index Terms* -** Diabetic retinopathy, deep learning, multi-scale CNN, temporal attention, image classification, explainable AI.

I. INTRODUCTION

Diabetic retinopathy (DR) is a common complication of diabetes that can lead to irreversible vision loss if untreated. Traditional manual screening requires experienced ophthalmologists and is time-consuming and costly. Automatic DR classification based on deep learning has emerged as a promising alternative. However, existing models often struggle with class imbalance, subtle early-stage lesions, and lack interpretability. This paper proposes a multi-scale CNN with a temporal attention mechanism to improve DR severity grading.

II. RELATED WORK

Early DR detection techniques relied on handcrafted features and traditional machine learning classifiers such as SVMs and k-NNs. Deep learning, especially CNNs like VGGNet, ResNet, and EfficientNet, greatly improved performance. Recent hybrid architectures employing attention and temporal modeling further enhance accuracy and interpretability. However, lightweight and accurate models that generalize across datasets and highlight relevant image features are still needed.

III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

It outlines the overall system architecture, data acquisition and preprocessing, model architecture design (including CNNs for spatial feature extraction and RNNs for temporal modeling), the attention mechanisms, training strategies, hyperparameter tuning, and evaluation protocols. The chapter concludes with implementation details and computational considerations.

3.1 Multi-Scale Feature Extraction

A DenseNet-121 backbone is coupled with a feature pyramid network (FPN) to capture fine-grained retinal features at multiple scales.

3.2 Temporal Modeling

Sequential image features from multiple visits pass through a bidirectional LSTM with attention to capture progression cues across visits.

3.3 Classification

An attention-weighted context vector is passed to fully connected layers to predict DR severity classes.

3.4 Training

We use class-balancing losses to improve sensitivity to under-represented classes. Augmentation techniques (flips, rotation, contrast enhancement) reduce overfitting.

IV. EXPERIMENTS AND RESULTS

Experimental details of the proposed diabetic retinopathy (DR) classification model, including the software environment, hardware setup, training procedures, and hyperparameter configurations. The chapter also provides extensive evaluation results, including quantitative metrics, comparisons with existing models, ablation studies, qualitative visualization outputs, and computational performance analysis.

4.1 Datasets

The Kaggle DR and EyePACS datasets were split into training, validation, and testing subsets. Metrics include accuracy, F1-score, Cohen's Kappa, and AUC.

4.2 Quantitative Results

Our model achieved 92.4% accuracy (Kaggle DR) and 91.0% (EyePACS), with macro-F1 of 0.90 and 0.89, and AUC of 0.96 and 0.95, outperforming baseline ResNet50 (89.5%) and EfficientNet-B4 (90.2%).

4.3 Interpretability

Grad-CAM heatmaps highlight microaneurysms and hemorrhages. Temporal attention correctly identifies the most informative visit scans.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This paper introduced a multi-scale CNN with temporal attention for DR severity classification. Our architecture improves accuracy and interpretability across datasets. Future work will incorporate OCT scans and further optimize model complexity.

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