



Diabetic Retinopathy Detection using Deep Learning: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) is one of the leading causes of vision loss and blindness among diabetic patients worldwide. Early detection and timely treatment of diabetic retinopathy are essential to prevent severe retinal damage and improve patient outcomes. Traditional diagnosis methods rely on manual examination of retinal fundus images by ophthalmologists, which can be time-consuming, expensive, and prone to human error. In recent years, deep learning techniques have shown remarkable success in medical image analysis and automated disease diagnosis. This systematic review presents a comprehensive analysis of deep learning approaches used for diabetic retinopathy detection using retinal fundus images. Various deep learning models such as Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN), Transfer Learning, Recurrent Neural Networks (RNN), and hybrid architectures are reviewed based on their classification performance, dataset utilization, preprocessing techniques, and evaluation metrics. The study also discusses publicly available datasets, image enhancement methods, segmentation techniques, and performance measures including accuracy, sensitivity, specificity, precision, recall, and F1-score. Comparative analysis indicates that deep learning-based models significantly improve diabetic retinopathy detection accuracy and reduce manual diagnostic effort compared to conventional machine learning methods. The review concludes that deep learning techniques provide reliable and efficient solutions for automated diabetic retinopathy screening and can greatly assist healthcare professionals in early diagnosis and clinical decision-making.

Keywords: Diabetic Retinopathy (DR), Deep Learning, Image Classification

1. INTRODUCTION

Diabetic Retinopathy is a serious eye disorder caused by long-term diabetes that affects the blood vessels of the retina and may lead to permanent vision loss or blindness if not detected at an early stage. The increasing number of diabetic patients worldwide has significantly raised the prevalence of diabetic retinopathy, making it a major public health concern [1, 2]. Early diagnosis and timely treatment are essential to prevent severe retinal damage and improve the quality of life of patients. Traditionally, ophthalmologists diagnose diabetic retinopathy through manual examination of retinal fundus images; however, this process is time-consuming, expensive, and highly dependent on clinical expertise. In addition, manual screening may lead to diagnostic inconsistencies due to variations in image quality and disease severity [3].

Recent advancements in Deep Learning have transformed the field of medical image analysis by providing automated and highly accurate disease detection systems. Deep learning techniques, particularly Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), have demonstrated exceptional performance in extracting complex image features and identifying disease patterns directly from retinal fundus images without manual feature engineering. Various deep learning architectures such as CNN, Transfer Learning models,



Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs), and hybrid deep learning frameworks are widely used for diabetic retinopathy detection and classification tasks [4, 5].

This systematic review focuses on analyzing different deep learning-based approaches for diabetic retinopathy detection using retinal fundus images. The study examines publicly available datasets, preprocessing techniques, image enhancement methods, segmentation approaches, and classification models used in previous research works. Furthermore, performance evaluation metrics such as accuracy, sensitivity, specificity, precision, recall, and F1-score are reviewed to compare the effectiveness of different deep learning techniques. The review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of recent developments, challenges, and future research directions in automated diabetic retinopathy detection systems for smart healthcare applications [6, 7].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

B. Dombale et al. [1], proposed a diabetic retinopathy identification system using Deep Regularized Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks from retinal fundus images. The study focused on improving the accuracy and reliability of diabetic retinopathy detection by integrating deep learning architectures capable of learning complex image patterns and sequential representations. The authors applied preprocessing techniques such as image enhancement, normalization, and noise reduction to improve retinal image quality before classification. The Deep Regularized LSTM model was designed to extract significant retinal features related to lesions, hemorrhages, and microaneurysms that are commonly associated with diabetic retinopathy. Experimental evaluation was performed on retinal fundus image datasets using performance metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, sensitivity, and F1-score. The results demonstrated that the proposed regularized LSTM approach achieved better classification accuracy and reduced overfitting compared to traditional CNN-based methods. The study concluded that deep recurrent learning techniques can significantly improve automated diabetic retinopathy diagnosis and support ophthalmologists in early-stage retinal disease detection.

S. Nayak et al. [2], presented a deep learning-based framework for early diabetic retinopathy detection using retinal fundus images. The primary objective of the study was to develop an intelligent healthcare system capable of identifying retinal abnormalities at early stages to prevent vision loss among diabetic patients. The researchers utilized Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) for automatic feature extraction and disease classification from retinal images. Preprocessing methods including image resizing, contrast enhancement, and normalization were employed to improve image clarity and learning efficiency. The proposed deep learning model was trained on retinal image datasets containing different diabetic retinopathy severity levels. Experimental analysis showed that the CNN-based system achieved high detection accuracy, sensitivity, and specificity compared to conventional machine learning techniques. The authors emphasized that early-stage automated detection systems can reduce manual screening effort and improve healthcare accessibility in remote and resource-limited regions.

T. R et al. [3], proposed a diabetic retinopathy diagnosis system using deep neural networks for enhancing disease detection performance. The study focused on improving retinal image classification accuracy through advanced deep learning architectures capable of learning complex pathological features from retinal fundus images. Various preprocessing methods such as image denoising, enhancement, and segmentation were implemented to highlight retinal lesions and improve model training quality. The



researchers utilized deep neural network models for multiclass diabetic retinopathy classification and evaluated the system using parameters including accuracy, recall, precision, specificity, and F1-score. Experimental findings indicated that deep neural networks significantly outperformed traditional image processing and machine learning approaches in terms of diagnostic accuracy and robustness. The study concluded that deep learning models can provide reliable and efficient automated diabetic retinopathy screening systems for smart healthcare applications.

J. T et al. [4], developed a multimodal deep learning-based system for diabetic and retinal complication detection. The proposed framework integrated multiple data sources including retinal fundus images and diabetic patient information to improve disease prediction accuracy and diagnostic reliability. The study employed deep learning techniques for feature extraction and classification of retinal abnormalities associated with diabetic retinopathy and other retinal complications. Preprocessing stages included image enhancement, normalization, and segmentation to improve retinal feature visibility and reduce noise effects. The multimodal deep learning system demonstrated improved detection performance compared to single-modality approaches due to its ability to combine complementary medical information. Experimental evaluation showed high classification accuracy, sensitivity, and specificity in identifying diabetic retinal complications. The authors concluded that multimodal deep learning frameworks can significantly improve automated retinal disease diagnosis and assist clinicians in comprehensive patient monitoring.

M. Akram et al. [5], proposed an uncertainty-aware diabetic retinopathy detection system using ensemble Bayesian deep learning techniques. The research focused on improving prediction reliability and handling uncertainty in automated medical diagnosis systems. The proposed framework combined ensemble learning with Bayesian deep neural networks to provide both classification results and confidence estimation for retinal disease prediction. Image preprocessing techniques such as contrast enhancement, normalization, and augmentation were applied to improve dataset quality and model generalization capability. The Bayesian ensemble deep learning approach was evaluated on retinal fundus image datasets using performance metrics including accuracy, precision, recall, sensitivity, and uncertainty estimation measures. Experimental results demonstrated that the uncertainty-aware framework improved diagnostic reliability and reduced incorrect predictions compared to standard deep learning models. The study highlighted the importance of uncertainty estimation in medical AI systems for increasing physician trust and improving clinical decision-making.

D. Deepika et al. [6], proposed a data-driven hybrid model for reliable diabetic retinopathy detection using artificial intelligence techniques. The study aimed to enhance detection performance by combining multiple machine learning and deep learning approaches for retinal image analysis. The researchers applied preprocessing techniques such as image filtering, enhancement, normalization, and feature extraction to improve the visibility of retinal lesions. The hybrid framework integrated deep neural networks with traditional data-driven analytical methods to improve classification robustness and reduce false predictions. Experimental analysis demonstrated that the proposed hybrid model achieved superior performance in terms of accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score compared to standalone machine learning approaches. The study concluded that hybrid artificial intelligence systems can provide reliable automated diabetic retinopathy diagnosis and support efficient healthcare screening programs.



G. Revathi et al. [7], proposed a high-performance feature extraction framework for dimensionality reduction and enhanced diabetic retinopathy detection accuracy. The research focused on improving computational efficiency and classification performance through optimized feature extraction methods from retinal fundus images. The authors implemented image preprocessing and dimensionality reduction techniques to remove redundant information while preserving significant retinal features associated with diabetic retinopathy. Advanced feature extraction algorithms and deep learning classifiers were utilized to identify retinal abnormalities with improved efficiency and reduced computational complexity. Experimental evaluation revealed that the proposed framework achieved enhanced classification accuracy, reduced processing time, and improved feature representation compared to conventional approaches. The study emphasized that efficient feature extraction and dimensionality reduction techniques play an important role in developing real-time diabetic retinopathy screening systems.

A. Vinora et al. [8], proposed a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN)-based diabetic retinopathy detection system designed for mobile devices. The study focused on developing a lightweight and portable retinal disease screening framework capable of operating efficiently on mobile platforms for remote healthcare applications. The proposed CNN architecture automatically extracted retinal features and classified diabetic retinopathy severity levels from retinal fundus images captured through mobile-compatible systems. Preprocessing techniques including image resizing, normalization, and enhancement were applied to improve image quality and optimize model performance on resource-constrained devices. Experimental results showed that the mobile-based CNN system achieved promising detection accuracy and low computational requirements while maintaining reliable classification performance. The study concluded that mobile deep learning applications can improve accessibility to diabetic retinopathy screening in rural and underserved healthcare regions.

N. Verma et al. [9], proposed an uncertainty-aware deep neural network with temperature scaling for diabetic retinopathy grading. The study focused on improving classification confidence and calibration in automated retinal disease diagnosis systems. The proposed framework utilized deep neural networks combined with temperature scaling techniques to generate well-calibrated prediction probabilities for diabetic retinopathy severity grading. The authors applied preprocessing and augmentation methods to improve retinal image quality and increase dataset diversity during model training. Experimental analysis demonstrated that the uncertainty-aware model provided better reliability and prediction calibration compared to standard deep learning approaches. The study highlighted that confidence-aware medical AI systems can reduce diagnostic risk and improve physician trust in automated retinal screening applications.

H. Siebert et al. [10], proposed an uncertainty-aware diabetic retinopathy screening framework using deep kernel learning with EfficientNet architecture. The research focused on integrating uncertainty estimation with advanced deep learning models to improve the reliability of retinal disease diagnosis. The EfficientNet-based deep kernel learning framework was designed to extract highly discriminative retinal features while simultaneously estimating prediction uncertainty for safer medical decision-making. Image preprocessing methods such as normalization, augmentation, and enhancement were applied to improve retinal image representation and model generalization capability. Experimental findings demonstrated that



the proposed framework achieved high diabetic retinopathy classification accuracy along with reliable uncertainty estimation performance. The authors concluded that combining EfficientNet with deep kernel learning techniques can significantly improve the robustness, interpretability, and clinical reliability of automated diabetic retinopathy screening systems.

Problem Formulation:

Diabetic retinopathy is one of the major causes of blindness among diabetic patients worldwide, and early detection is essential to prevent severe vision loss. Traditional diagnosis methods rely on manual examination of retinal fundus images by ophthalmologists, which is time-consuming, costly, and prone to human error. In many healthcare centers, especially in rural and remote areas, the availability of experienced eye specialists is limited, leading to delayed diagnosis and treatment. Furthermore, retinal images often contain variations in illumination, noise, low contrast, and complex lesion patterns, making accurate disease identification difficult through conventional techniques.

Existing machine learning-based diabetic retinopathy detection systems require manual feature extraction and may fail to identify complex retinal abnormalities effectively. Although deep learning approaches have shown promising performance, challenges such as insufficient dataset quality, class imbalance, overfitting, high computational complexity, and lack of interpretability still affect the reliability of automated diagnosis systems. In addition, many existing models struggle to accurately classify different severity stages of diabetic retinopathy from retinal fundus images.

Therefore, there is a need to develop an efficient deep learning-based diabetic retinopathy detection system that can automatically extract important retinal features, improve classification accuracy, reduce false predictions, and provide reliable disease diagnosis. The proposed system should enhance early-stage detection performance while minimizing computational cost and supporting intelligent healthcare applications for fast and accurate retinal disease screening.

3. DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

Diabetic Retinopathy is a diabetes-related eye disease that occurs when high blood sugar levels damage the blood vessels of the retina. The retina is the light-sensitive tissue located at the back of the eye that helps in vision. Over time, damaged blood vessels may leak fluid or blood, causing blurred vision and severe eye complications. If diabetic retinopathy is not diagnosed and treated at an early stage, it may lead to partial or complete blindness. The disease mainly affects people suffering from long-term diabetes and progresses through different stages ranging from mild retinal damage to severe proliferative diabetic retinopathy.

Symptoms of Diabetic Retinopathy

The common symptoms of diabetic retinopathy include:

- Blurred or distorted vision
- Difficulty seeing at night
- Floaters or dark spots in vision
- Sudden vision loss
- Eye pain or pressure
- Fluctuating vision clarity
- Reduced color vision

- Dark or empty areas in the visual field

In the early stages, diabetic retinopathy may not show noticeable symptoms, which makes regular eye screening very important for diabetic patients.

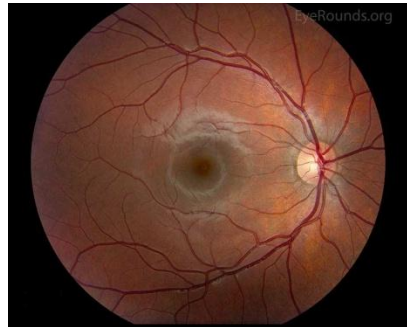


Figure 1: DR

Types of Retinal Abnormalities

The major retinal abnormalities observed in diabetic retinopathy include:

- **Microaneurysms:** Small red dots caused by weak retinal blood vessels
- **Hemorrhages:** Blood leakage inside retinal tissues
- **Exudates:** Yellowish deposits formed due to fluid leakage
- **Cotton Wool Spots:** White patches caused by nerve fiber damage
- **Neovascularization:** Growth of abnormal new blood vessels in advanced stages

4. DEEP LEARNING

Deep Learning is an advanced subset of machine learning that uses artificial neural networks with multiple hidden layers to automatically learn patterns and features from large amounts of data. It is inspired by the working mechanism of the human brain, where neurons process information and make intelligent decisions. Deep learning algorithms are capable of handling complex tasks such as image classification, speech recognition, object detection, natural language processing, and medical image analysis with high accuracy. Unlike traditional machine learning methods, deep learning models automatically extract important features from raw data without requiring manual feature engineering.

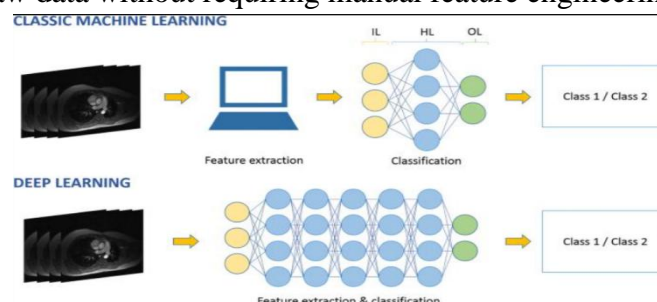


Figure 2: Deep Learning

In medical imaging applications such as diabetic retinopathy detection, deep learning techniques, especially Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), are widely used for analyzing retinal fundus images. CNN models learn important retinal features such as microaneurysms, hemorrhages, and exudates directly from images and classify disease severity levels efficiently. Deep learning improves diagnostic accuracy, reduces human effort, and enables automated disease screening systems for smart healthcare applications.



5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, diabetic retinopathy is a serious diabetes-related eye disease that can lead to permanent vision loss if not detected and treated at an early stage. Traditional manual screening methods are time-consuming and highly dependent on ophthalmologists, which increases the need for automated and intelligent diagnostic systems. Deep learning techniques, particularly Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), have demonstrated remarkable performance in retinal fundus image analysis for diabetic retinopathy detection and classification. Various studies reviewed in this work indicate that deep learning models provide high accuracy, sensitivity, specificity, and reliable disease grading compared to conventional machine learning approaches. In addition, preprocessing methods, feature extraction techniques, uncertainty-aware learning, and multimodal frameworks further improve diagnostic performance and clinical reliability. Therefore, deep learning-based diabetic retinopathy detection systems offer effective, fast, and cost-efficient solutions for smart healthcare applications. Future research can focus on real-time mobile screening systems, explainable artificial intelligence, lightweight deep learning models, and integration with cloud-based healthcare platforms to improve accessibility and early diagnosis for diabetic patients worldwide.

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