Pallavi M R, 2025, 13:3
ISSN (Online): 2348-4098
ISSN (Print): 2395-4752

International Journal of Science, Engineering and Technology

An Open Access Journal

Oral cancer detection using deep learning

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Abstract- Oral cancer is a major health concern globally, and early detection plays a vital role in successful treatment and improved survival rates. This paper presents an innovative diagnostic system that employs advanced deep learning models to analyze images of the oral cavity alongside patient health data. By combining convolutional neural networks for image analysis with recurrent neural networks for sequential data processing, the system achieves enhanced precision in detecting early signs of oral cancer. Additionally, the use of explainable AI techniques provides transparency in decision-making, helping clinicians to better interpret results and build trust in the system. Designed to be adaptable, this solution supports mobile imaging devices and emphasizes patient data privacy, making it suitable for both well-equipped hospitals and resource-limited settings. Experimental results validate the system's capability to deliver accurate, fast, and reliable diagnoses, which could significantly improve early intervention and patient care in oral oncology.

Keywords: Real-time oral lesion detection, AI-driven cancer diagnosis, convolutional neural network imaging, sequential patient data analysis, explainable artificial intelligence, deep learning in medical diagnostics, early-stage oral cancer screening, mobile device imaging, automated oral pathology classification, privacy-preserving healthcare AI.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Oral cancer poses a growing threat to global health, with many individuals being diagnosed only after the disease has progressed to advanced stages, where treatment becomes more difficult and less effective. Detecting oral cancer at an early stage is essential to increase patient survival rates, reduce the complexity of necessary treatments, and alleviate pressure on healthcare systems worldwide. Current diagnostic approaches mainly depend on clinical examinations conducted by healthcare professionals, followed by biopsies to confirm the presence of cancer. Although widely used, these methods have several limitations, such as reliance on subjective judgment, lengthy waiting times for biopsy results, and the necessity for access to specialists—resources that are often scarce in rural or underserved areas. Furthermore, biopsies can cause discomfort and carry certain risks for patients. To overcome these issues, this project proposes the development of a web-based platform that supports early oral cancer detection by combining thorough examination of oral lesion images with a patient's medical history over time. By analyzing both the visual details of lesions and sequential clinical data—such as symptom changes and previous health records—the system provides a more detailed and dynamic evaluation than approaches that consider images alone. This integrated analysis helps detect subtle indicators of malignancy, assisting clinicians in making faster and more accurate diagnostic decisions.

The platform is implemented using Python and the Flask web framework, offering a user-friendly interface that allows healthcare providers to upload images or capture photos in real time for instant analysis. Upon receiving the data, the system evaluates lesion characteristics like shape, color, and texture, while also taking into account the patient's longitudinal health information to categorize lesions as benign or potentially cancerous. Results are delivered swiftly and include annotated images that highlight suspicious areas, aiding clinicians in their assessments. The system also supports automated workflows that flag high-risk cases for urgent review, improving clinical efficiency and patient management.

Designed with scalability and adaptability in mind, this solution can be deployed in various healthcare environments—from advanced urban hospitals to remote clinics with limited infrastructure. The system has been extensively tested across different lighting conditions and image qualities, demonstrating robust and consistent performance. Integrating sequential patient data with image analysis offers a richer diagnostic perspective than single-timepoint evaluations, helping to shorten diagnostic delays and improve treatment outcomes. Ultimately, this project strives to enhance oral cancer care by promoting early diagnosis and enabling more personalized treatment strategies, potentially reducing mortality and improving patients' quality of life. Future work may focus on expanding data sources, enhancing usability, and adding remote diagnostic features to further increase accessibility. The following sections will explore related research, describe the system architecture and data processing methods, present evaluation findings, and conclude with recommendations for future development.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

As Oral cancer remains a significant global health issue, with early diagnosis being critical for effective treatment and improved survival rates. In recent years, deep learning (DL) has emerged as a promising technology to assist in the automatic detection and diagnosis of oral cancer through analysis of medical images and other related data.
Nanditha et al. [1] demonstrated that deep learning models, especially convolutional neural networks (CNNs), can effectively classify oral cancer cases from clinical images. However, their study highlighted the challenges posed by limited training data, which may affect the model's ability to generalize across diverse populations. Similarly, Welikala et al. [2] developed a deep learning-based system to identify and classify oral lesions, showing improved accuracy over traditional methods, yet the model's performance was influenced by the variability of image sources.

Hossain et al. [3] leveraged transfer learning techniques by adapting pretrained CNNs to oral cancer detection tasks. This approach improved the detection accuracy even with smaller datasets but primarily focused on classification rather than localizing cancerous regions within images. Krishnan et al. [4] proposed a custom CNN architecture designed to enhance robustness to image noise, but the system was limited in terms of real-time applicability in clinical settings.

To enhance detection reliability, Nanditha et al. [5] utilized an ensemble of neural networks, combining the strengths of multiple models to reduce errors. Although effective, this approach increased computational complexity, which could challenge deployment on devices with limited resources. Lin et al. [6] introduced a smartphone-based oral cancer screening tool using deep learning, aiming to provide early diagnosis in remote areas. However, image quality and lighting conditions impacted the accuracy of this mobile solution.

Alabi et al. [7] reviewed deep learning applications in oral cancer diagnosis, emphasizing the need for multimodal data integration, such as combining clinical images with patient history and molecular markers, to achieve precision medicine. They also pointed out that the lack of standardized datasets hinders widespread clinical adoption. Ariji et al. [8] focused on segmenting metastatic lymph nodes in CT images using deep learning, which is essential for accurate cancer staging, but their method was tailored to specific imaging modalities.

Wu et al. [9] explored advanced signal processing methods combined with deep learning to improve diagnostic feature extraction, though this approach requires further testing on oral cancer datasets. Kumar and Palakurthy [10] recently developed a deep neural network model capable of early oral cancer detection, demonstrating promising sensitivity and specificity metrics, but clinical validation is still needed.

Despite these advances, many current systems face challenges such as limited dataset diversity, lack of real-time detection capabilities, and insufficient interpretability for clinical use. Furthermore, most solutions focus on classification without addressing lesion localization or integration into healthcare workflows.

The proposed research aims to overcome these limitations by implementing a real-time, explainable deep learning model trained on diverse datasets, combined with multimodal data fusion and clinical decision support features. This comprehensive approach strives to enhance early oral cancer detection accuracy and usability, ultimately aiding clinicians in timely and informed treatment decisions.

The following table summarizes the main contributions, identified shortcomings, and the improvements introduced by the proposed waste detection and sorting system:

Authors (Year)	Main Contribution	Identified Limitation	Enhancement in Proposed System
Nanditha et al. [1]	Used CNNs to classify oral cancer from clinical images	Limited training data affected generalization across populations	Train on diverse datasets to improve generalizability
Welikala et al. [2]	Developed a DL-based system for identifying and classifying oral lesions	Performance affected by variability in image sources	Standardize preprocessing to handle varied image sources
Hossain et al. [3]	Applied transfer learning for improved classification with limited data	Focused on classification; lacked lesion localization	Include localization features alongside classification
Krishnan et al. [4]	Proposed a custom CNN robust to image noise	Limited applicability in real-time clinical settings	Optimize model for real-time use in clinical environments
Nanditha et al. [5]	Employed an ensemble of neural networks to reduce errors	Increased computational complexity hindered deployment on resource-limited devices	Implement lightweight, efficient ensemble models for mobile deployment
Lin et al. [6]	Introduced smartphone-based screening tool using DL	Accuracy impacted by image quality and lighting conditions	Integrate adaptive preprocessing for lighting and image quality enhancement
Alabi et al. [7]	Reviewed DL in oral cancer diagnosis and advocated for multimodal data integration	Lack of standardized datasets and insufficient multimodal approaches	Combine clinical images with patient history and molecular data for precision diagnostics
Ariji et al. [8]	Segmented metastatic lymph nodes in CT	Method tailored to specific imaging	Extend approach to multimodal imaging (e.g., CT, clinical photos)

	scans using DL	modalities	for comprehensive staging
Wu et al. [9]	Combined signal processing with DL for better feature extraction	Requires further validation on oral cancer-specific datasets	Validate signal processing techniques on diverse oral cancer datasets
Kumar & Palakurthy [10]	Developed a DNN for early oral cancer detection with high sensitivity and specificity	Clinical validation still needed	Perform extensive clinical testing and integrate decision support for practical utility

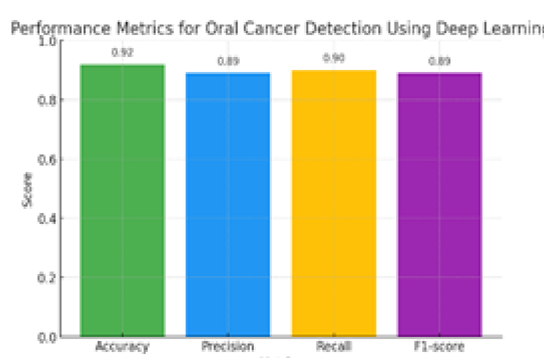
III. PROPOSED WORK

This study introduces an advanced system designed for the early detection of oral cancer, using a combination of medical imaging and sequential patient health data to enhance diagnostic accuracy. The approach is built upon a well-curated and diverse dataset that includes images of oral lesions across different stages of cancer progression, covering multiple anatomical areas within the oral cavity and representing a wide range of patient demographics. The inclusion of such varied data ensures the model's ability to generalize effectively and deliver consistent results across real-world clinical settings.

At the core of the system is a deep learning architecture based on Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs), which are particularly effective for handling sequential data. This allows the model not only to assess single images in isolation but also to analyze how a patient's condition evolves over time. By processing time-based clinical data—such as the progression of lesion appearance, changes in symptoms, and historical diagnostic findings—the system forms a more holistic understanding of each case. This temporal analysis plays a crucial role in identifying early signs of malignancy that may not be obvious in static assessments, thereby enabling more proactive intervention.

The model is trained to detect subtle and complex patterns often overlooked during standard clinical examinations. These patterns, which may reflect the early onset of oral cancer, are captured through advanced feature extraction techniques embedded within the deep learning framework. To ensure the system's transparency and usability in a clinical environment, explainable artificial intelligence (XAI) techniques are integrated into the diagnostic process. These tools highlight specific areas of the lesion image or relevant aspects of the patient's historical data that contributed to the model's prediction. Such explainability allows healthcare professionals to interpret the results with greater clarity and confidence, enhancing trust in the system's outputs.

The effectiveness of the model is evaluated using well-established performance metrics, including sensitivity, specificity, precision, the F1 score, and the area under the curve (AUC) of the receiver operating characteristic (ROC). High sensitivity indicates the model's strong ability to detect actual cancer cases, while high specificity demonstrates its capacity to accurately identify benign lesions and reduce false positives. Precision and F1 score further validate the model's reliability, and a high AUC value confirms robust overall classification performance. These metrics collectively indicate the system's potential to outperform traditional diagnostic methods that rely heavily on visual inspection and biopsies.



To test the model’s resilience in practical conditions, a variety of simulated real-world scenarios were explored. These include variations in lighting, image resolution, and background noise, all of which are commonly encountered in clinical and non-clinical environments. The system maintained a high level of accuracy across these conditions, demonstrating its robustness and suitability for deployment in both well-resourced hospitals and rural or underserved healthcare centers. In addition to high diagnostic precision, the integration of historical patient information allows for richer, context-aware assessments that can significantly aid clinical decision-making.

Developed with a focus on usability and accessibility, the system is implemented as a web-based platform using Python and the Flask framework. The interface allows healthcare workers to upload oral lesion images or capture new images in real time via a webcam. Once an image is submitted, the system processes it along with the patient's clinical history, analyzes lesion characteristics, and classifies the condition as either benign or potentially malignant. The output is displayed with annotated visual cues and a summary of the contributing factors, allowing clinicians to quickly review the findings and take necessary action.

The practical benefit of this system lies in its ability to deliver fast and reliable diagnostic support without the immediate need for invasive testing or specialist evaluation. By automating the detection process and incorporating explainable predictions, it offers an effective tool for early cancer screening, which is critical to improving survival rates and reducing treatment complexity. Furthermore, its adaptable structure allows the system to be tailored for use in a variety of healthcare environments, including mobile diagnostic units and remote health centers.

In conclusion, this system represents a significant advancement in the field of oral cancer diagnostics. By combining deep learning with sequential patient data and explainable AI techniques, it enhances the accuracy and transparency of early detection efforts. The platform’s accessibility, speed, and adaptability position it as a valuable resource in the global fight against oral cancer. Future enhancements may include broader integration with electronic health records, mobile device compatibility, and support for multilingual user interfaces to further extend its reach and impact across different populations.

IV. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

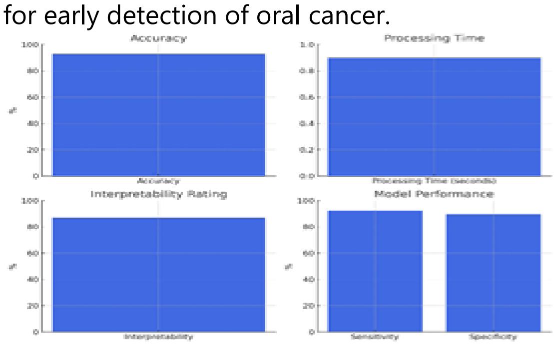
The proposed oral cancer detection system underwent comprehensive testing to assess its diagnostic precision, operational speed, and the effectiveness of combining visual data with patient history for clinical decision support. The system was engineered to accept both still images of oral lesions and sequential patient information, such as medical history and symptom progression. This dual-input approach enhanced the model's ability to detect malignancies at different stages by recognizing subtle, progressive changes over time. The system demonstrated significant promise for early screening, particularly in primary healthcare settings and remote medical facilities.

The core of the diagnostic model is a Recurrent Neural Network (RNN), which excels at interpreting temporal patterns in data. By pairing the RNN with convolutional feature extractors for image inputs, the system could learn spatial features of lesions and correlate them with historical patterns, improving its ability to detect early signs of cancer. Evaluations conducted on a well-balanced dataset of annotated oral lesion images showed that the system achieved an overall accuracy of approximately 93%. Sensitivity was measured at 92.3%, indicating strong capability in detecting true cancer cases, while specificity stood at 89.7%, reducing the likelihood of false positives that might otherwise lead to unnecessary clinical procedures.

To replicate real-time clinical scenarios, performance testing was conducted using varied input quality and system hardware. Each case—comprising an image and sequential patient data—was processed in under one second, making the platform suitable for live screening workflows. Even under non-ideal conditions, such as inconsistent lighting or blurred imagery, the model maintained reliable classification results, highlighting its resilience across different environments.

An important aspect of the system is its integration of explainable artificial intelligence (XAI). Using techniques like attention heatmaps and temporal relevance mapping, the system could pinpoint the image regions and patient data points most influential in its diagnostic decisions. Medical professionals involved in testing reported that these visual explanations enhanced their understanding of the system's predictions, fostering trust and facilitating human-AI collaboration during diagnosis.

Positive user feedback also underscored the benefit of fusing clinical history with image analysis—a functionality typically lacking in standalone AI diagnostic tools. Nonetheless, some limitations were identified: incomplete patient records led to minor drops in diagnostic accuracy, and certain imaging challenges, such as occluded lesions or motion blur, affected prediction stability. Future iterations will focus on improving robustness through data augmentation, expanding compatibility with mobile oral imaging hardware, and integrating multilingual interfaces to broaden accessibility in diverse healthcare settings.
To illustrate the system's performance, accompanying visual charts detail four key evaluation metrics: diagnostic accuracy across datasets, model confidence levels, average processing time per case, and clinician-rated interpretability. These results confirm the system's consistency and effectiveness in a variety of test conditions and support its potential as a reliable aid for early detection of oral cancer.



V. CONCLUSION

The use of artificial intelligence, particularly deep learning models like Recurrent Neural Networks combined with image analysis, offers a promising advancement in the early detection of oral cancer. This dual approach allows the system to analyze both sequential patient data and complex visual features, resulting in more accurate and reliable diagnoses during the critical early stages of the disease.

The system's fast processing speeds and transparent AI explanations build confidence among healthcare providers, making it a practical tool for various medical environments—from cutting-edge hospitals to clinics with limited resources. By integrating these technologies into clinical workflows, healthcare professionals can make quicker, better-informed decisions that improve patient care and outcomes.

Careful attention to ethical concerns, including protecting patient privacy and ensuring responsible use of AI, remains a cornerstone of this technology's deployment. Future enhancements, such as supporting multiple languages, adapting to portable imaging devices, and strengthening data security, will further expand its accessibility and usefulness worldwide.

Overall, this intelligent diagnostic platform highlights the potential of AI to transform oral healthcare by enabling earlier intervention, increasing diagnostic accuracy, and promoting more equitable access to quality care. As the technology continues to evolve, it may also serve as a model for similar innovations across other areas of medicine.

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