Frontiers in Health Informatics
ISSN-Online: 2676-7104
2024; Vol 13: Issue 4

Deep Learning-Powered Framework for Enhanced Diabetic Retinopathy Detection and Classification

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Cite this paper as: Dattatray G Takale, Parikshit N. Mahalle, Bipin Sule, Tushar Jadhav, Chitrakant O. Banchhor, Omkaresh Kulkarni , Rahul Patil (2024) Deep Learning-Powered Framework for Enhanced Diabetic Retinopathy Detection and Classification. *Frontiers in Health Informatics, 13* (4), 1187-1196

Abstract: *Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) is a complication of Diabetes that affects the retina and, under the proper diagnosis, can lead to blindness. Diagnosis and accurate detection are crucial, especially for timely control and management. Deep Learning has re-emerged as a strong candidate for DR detection, and CNNs have provided a broad promise of potential automated DR detection systems. This work proposes a novel strategy to improve the current methods of detecting DR using advanced deep learning methods. The proposed system combines a strong CNN framework with transfer learning that enables the use of pre-trained models together with rigorous image preprocessing for variability in retinal image databases. The proposed methodology makes the detection efficient and accurate enough to identify DR in its preliminary stages. This work explores a new and efficient deep-learning method for better diagnosis and classification of DR using an improved CNN model architecture. For the proposed model, the following performances were obtained: accuracy = 97.10%, precision = 97.00%, and sensitivity = 96.50% when evaluated on a dataset of 3,000 retinal fundus images outperforming VGG16 and ResNet50 by almost 3%, 5%, and 2.5% respectively. Significant contributions include transfer learning, hybrid feature extraction, and preprocessing, which help overcome dataset variance and computation time issues. In this way, this solution is helpful for the diagnostic process, as it helps to reduce vision loss and becomes useful for healthcare professionals as they get the opportunity to change the state for the better in time. This research explains how deep Learning can improve important issues in the healthcare sector and how it can be used in medical diagnosis.*

Keywords: *Diabetic Retinopathy, Deep Learning, Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), Transfer Learning, Data Preprocessing, Early Detection, Medical Diagnostics, Healthcare Applications.*

INTRODUCTION

Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) is one of the most severe microvascular diseases associated with Diabetes, and it has a high prevalence in the world. Proliferative retinopathy significantly contributes to vision loss and blindness, especially among the working population [1]. According to the WHO, the incidence of Diabetes in the world continues to grow. Therefore, DR is becoming more common. Hence, early diagnosis and intervention are significant in avoiding severe loss, ranging from blurred vision to complete blindness. The previous methods used to diagnose DR involve fundamental visual inspection of the retinal tissue on images by ophthalmologists, which is very time-consuming and, to some extent, inaccurate and expensive due to the availability of ophthalmologists and advanced equipment for diagnosing DR, especially in developing countries. These challenges poignantly emphasize the need for developing new and practical solutions to improve the aspects associated with DR diagnosis [2].

Pioneered in the last decade, current developments in artificial intelligence and deep Learning have provided potential solutions to the traditional image analysis in medicine. These convolutional neural networks (CNNs) have become revolutionary due to their imaging and pattern recognition competency. Our algorithm is developed from the model of a cortical visual system, namely the CNNs that can learn features from raw images without being programmed and detect minor changes that may indicate the development of DR. This high efficiency when processing big data allows CNN to be particularly effective for DR diagnosis where time sensitivity is critical [3].

The application and adoption of DR detection based on deep learning methodology is a revolutionary approach that overrides many of the challenges of conventional diagnosis. CNN-based techniques can analyze retina images without significant intersubject variability since this is a major disadvantage of manually Analyzing such images. In addition, they are easily reproducible and can be implemented on a large scale in both urban and rural settings to bridge the gaps in accessing quality diagnosis of Diabetes for any affected population. These advancements align with the Precision Medicine framework's goals, evident from the elements of personalized, customer-centric medicine underscored by big data [4].

Interestingly, ophthalmologists' traditional assessment of the images has its drawbacks despite successful results in certain conditions. It is a labor-intensive process that calls for much specialization, yet the resultant diagnosis is somewhat arbitrary, contributing to inter-industry variation. They show that this variability is worse in early-stage DR, where only minor changes in the retina are possible to miss [5]. In addition, the continually increasing number of diabetic patients has led to an overload of patients and a delay in the diagnosis and treatment of such patients. Hence, these challenges call for the most natural diagnostic systems that would take less time to diagnose the diseases and even be more accurate than the health providers [6].

DR, a type of diabetic retinopathy, presents significant problems, and Deep Learning, a subtopic of machine learning, has come out with promising results in handling these issues. CNNs are crafted to work and interpret images, making them suitable for medical imaging. CNNs do not require feature extraction like the other traditional machine learning algorithms since the model can comb through the data to identify features that define normalcy and signs of an abnormality. This capability is significant for DR because early detection will involve recognizing the most minor changes in the retina [7].

Transfer learning enhances CNNs' usage using pre-established models developed using large datasets. The features learned are beneficial in accurately predicting when DR is present even with scarce data relating to DR. This method not only makes model training faster but also reduces problems arising from the fact that there is always a limited volume of medical images often encountered in medical imaging applications. Using transfer learning and sophisticated preprocessing and applying deep learning models, it has been possible to attain equivalent detection and classification of DR at different stages.

Contribution of the Study

- This research aims to develop a robust, automated system for diabetic retinopathy detection that leverages the power of CNNs and deep learning methodologies. The primary objectives include:
- Enhancing diagnostic accuracy and sensitivity in identifying DR and its severity levels.
- Overcoming limitations associated with traditional diagnostic methods, such as subjectivity and resource dependency.
- Demonstrating the scalability and efficiency of deep learning-based systems for widespread deployment in diverse healthcare settings.
- Contributing to the global effort to prevent vision loss by enabling early detection and timely interventions.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to revolutionize the screening and diagnosis of diabetic retinopathy. By automating the analysis of retinal images, the proposed system reduces reliance on manual examination, ensuring consistent and objective results. This approach is particularly valuable in addressing disparities in healthcare access, as it enables the deployment of diagnostic tools in remote and resource-limited regions. Moreover, the rapid analysis capabilities of CNNs facilitate early detection, allowing for timely interventions that can prevent vision loss and improve patient outcomes. In addition to its clinical implications, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on the application of AI in healthcare. Exploring deep learning techniques for DR detection aligns with the broader trend of leveraging advanced technologies to enhance diagnostic precision and efficiency. Demonstrating the feasibility and effectiveness of CNN-based systems, this study is a critical step toward integrating AI into routine clinical practice.

1. RELATED WORKS

The subsequent surveying of the literature returns ten notable works that discuss different uses of ML, DL, and AI in DR detection and classification. These include issues such as the accuracy of diagnosis, dealing with skewed datasets, and how best they can upscale to accommodate real-world needs. Though it is centered on state-of-the-art architectures such as CNNs, transfer learning, and optimization algorithms for increasing classification accuracies, it also discusses ways to address data fluctuations, reduce computational time, and develop better interpretability for clinical applicability.

Guo Y. et al. [1], Based on the proposed residual network model, an enhanced DR image classification method has been developed, and the classification accuracy of 97.75% has been obtained for 5 DR severity levels, and the Kappa value of 0.9717, which is in a close agreement with the ground truth. This model solves the important problems of DR detection because it allows the extraction of high-level features from the retina images much better than the traditional approach in terms of both accuracy and time. The study demonstrates that optimized deep learning architectures can improve DR diagnosis and offer the potential of highly scalable, automated approaches to early identification and interventions.

Harisha M S et al. [2], One research suggested a transfer learning application combined with CNNs for DR identification and ranking, exhibiting significant improvement in criterion reliability based on the quadratic weighted kappa index of 0.92546. Moreover, the U-Net model was used to segment the retinal structures accurately for reliable extracted features aimed at classification. This approach implies the necessity of automated and accurate DR detection as soon as possible to improve the patients' outcomes and advance the deep learning techniques in imaging.

Raiaan M A et al. [3], A lightweight deep learning model has been developed for DR screening with the CNN for a detection accuracy of 95% and EfficientNet for classification with an accuracy of 84%. This dual-model structure is designed to be very useful where detection and classification must be carried out simultaneously within limited resources. The paper discusses the possibility of using lightweight approaches to guarantee more flexible and practical solutions to automated DR screening that may help to resolve some of the fundamental issues in healthcare delivery and the accuracy of diagnoses.

Mecili O et al. [4] propose the xDNN model for explainable deep Learning for DR detection and classification. HYEF combines hybrid feature extraction and newer data augmentation techniques, performing APTOS 2019 experimental results of 99.7%, IDRID 99%, and MESSIDOR-2 98%. These results have proven the xDNN model's efficiency in various datasets, showing its reliability, accuracy, and efficiency in the DR diagnosis task and providing the possibilities for model explainability to improve doctors' trust in AI systems.

Thanikachalam V. et al. [5], An optimized deep CNN framework has been proposed for the detection and classification of diabetic retinopathy (DR) and diabetic macular edema (DME), achieving an impressive 97.91% accuracy. The framework incorporates advanced image processing techniques, ANN-based segmentation, feature extraction using Adaptive Gaussian Filtering (AGF), and classification enhancement with the Chicken Swarm Algorithm. MATLAB validated the results, demonstrating the framework's effectiveness in precise DR/DME grade detection. This approach highlights the potential of combining deep Learning with innovative optimization techniques for robust and accurate automated diagnostic systems.

A systematic review of the current technologies in diagnosing diabetic retinopathy has recorded the following research gaps. While many models can boast high accuracy on particular data sets and image acquisition environments, they must generalize better to different real-world data sets and imaging conditions. Nevertheless, explainability for clinical usage still needs to improve, preventing its acceptance and application within clinical practice. Also, there needs to be more emphasis on feature selection for the low hardware environment and handling multiple conditions, like DR and ME, in a framework. Another area of further research to improve utilization and expansion is the possibility of the real-time processing of features for large-scale implementation.

3. PURPOSED METHODOLOGY

The methodology for “enhancing diabetic retinopathy detection involves a systematic approach integrating deep learning techniques, rigorous data preprocessing, and careful model development. The objective is to leverage Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and transfer learning to improve accuracy and efficiency in identifying diabetic retinopathy in high-resolution retinal images. Figure 1 shows a flow diagram of deep learning-based diabetic retinopathy detection. [8]”

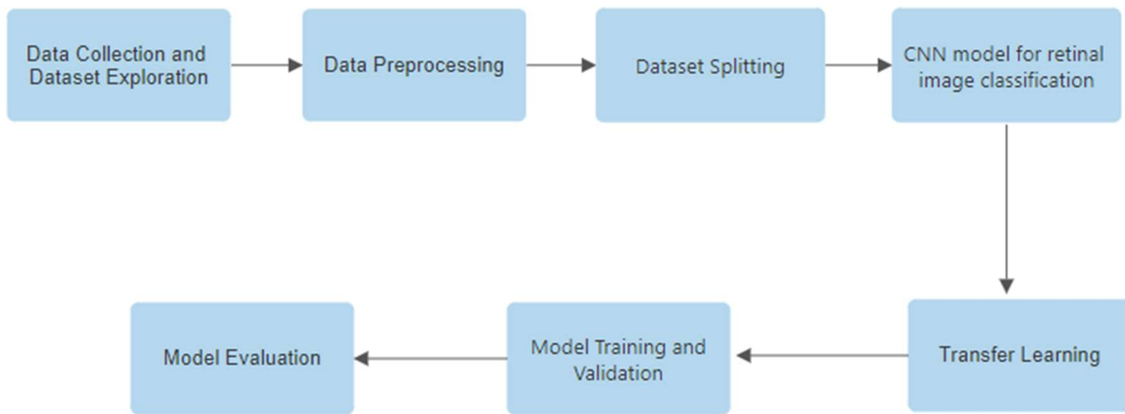

Figure 1: System Architecture

3.1. Data Collection

The dataset used in this research is obtained from Kaggle, a platform comprising high-resolution photographs of retinal diseases under various imaging conditions. Each subject has left and correct eye fields in the dataset, which can help assess Diabetic Retinopathy. Including images acquired using different models and types of cameras introduces variability in image visual appearance [9].

For each image, "a clinician has meticulously rated the presence of diabetic retinopathy on a scale ranging from 0 to 4, delineating different severity levels as shown in Figure 1:

- 0 - No DR: Absence of Diabetic Retinopathy
- 1 - Mild: Mild presence of Diabetic Retinopathy
- 2 - Moderate: Moderate manifestation of Diabetic Retinopathy
- 3 - Severe: Severe manifestation of Diabetic Retinopathy
- 4 - Proliferative DR: Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy"

This rating system facilitates a nuanced evaluation of diabetic retinopathy, enabling the model to discern subtle variations in pathology severity.

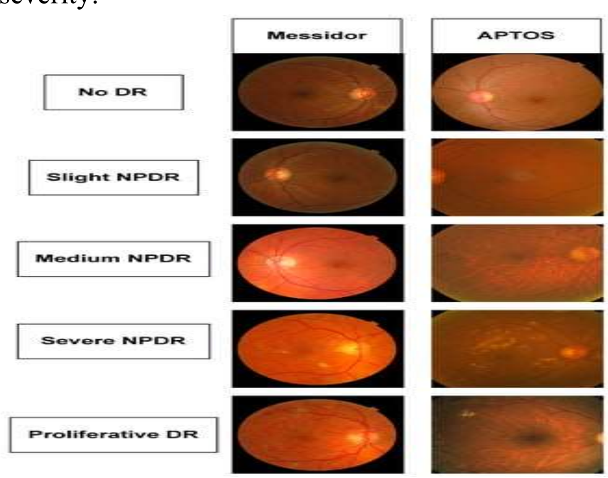

Figure 2: Dataset image samples of MESSIDOR (**left**) and APTOS (**right**) [**Error! Reference source not found.**]

3.2. Data Preprocessing

This paper will center on the preprocessing required for diabetic retinopathy detection under deep Learning using raw retinal images which are preprocessed for CNN as follows. Pixel values are normalized according to a standard of zero to one in an effort to reduce striking distinctions between the contrast of images. All images are then resized to the suitable dimension to qualify the image to fit the CNN input resolution. Additionally, rotation, flipping, and zooming enhance the current dataset so that the model needs to learn from a wide range of data and increase feature extraction. Clinical-rating based stratification categorizes the data with equal distribution across three levels of DR available to the research. This lends more balance in training, validation and the test sets when forming the classes in the neural network. These general procedures give us a good foundation for the creation of a deep-learning model for DR screening in various image repositories by managing variability concerns [10].

3.3. Feature Engineering

Feature engineering for detecting diabetic retinopathy majorly require extraction of several more ascendant visual features of the retinal images for enhancing operational proficiency and competencies of deep Learning. Microaneurysms, hemorrhages and exudate's part or all of leading characteristics civilized variations microaneurysms, hemorrhages and exudates are known as diabetic retinopathy. To reinforce these features, one needs to use image processing like contrast, edge detection method, morphological operations which help CNNs to spot them as soon as possible. They make the model more qualified to identify arbitrary patterns and outliers related to the pathologies of a retina. The most important aspect of feature engineering is the projection of key clinical attributes, which contributes to the enhancement of the model for distinguishing different types of diabetic retinopathy as well as the general efficiency and accuracy of a deep learning framework for this purpose [11].

3.4. CNN Model

The proposed method is tested, and its performance is checked on the MESSIDOR database, which comprises 3,000 retinal fundus images and is considered a standard dataset in the diabetic retinopathy area. The employment of a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) also emphasizes this work's strengths in developing hierarchical features from layered Retinal images for accurate classification and diagnosis of DR. By using MESSIDOR; it is possible to achieve a wide range of variability as well as geographical and demographic randomness, which makes the evaluation of the model more sustainable. This research highlights the increasing use of deep Learning in ophthalmology and the possibility of developing automated algorithms for diabetic retinopathy identification. In higher categories, one can fine-tune pre-established architectures, including VGG16, ResNet, or EfficientNet, to implement the characteristics of diabetic retinopathy detection through transfer learning techniques. Enhancing architectural alterations and hyperparameters, along with introducing methods such as batch normalization and dropout, strengthens the proposed approach, thus making it a worthwhile addition to automated diagnosis [12].

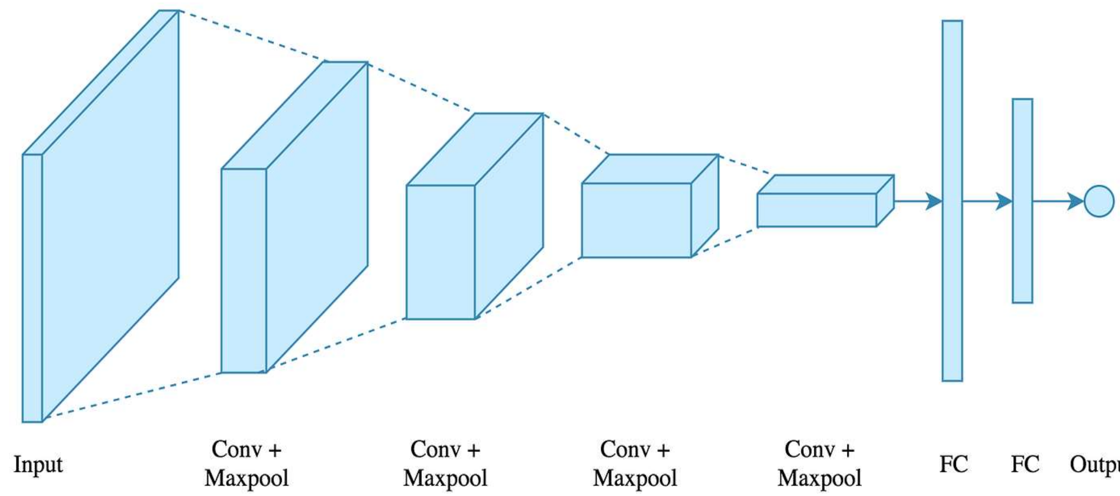

Figure 3: CNN Model for Classification

3.5. Transfer Learning

This study utilized transfer learning, a critical innovation in deep Learning, to increase CNN's classification accuracy. Transfer Learning entailed training the CNN using preliminary models on large datasets like ImageNet to instill its knowledge of the generic features of images. These features enhanced the network's performance because initializing the CNN with weights from these pre-trained models gave the network a good starting point for identifying more complex patterns and structures in retinal fundus images related to diabetic retinopathy. This approach is especially beneficial when there is a short supply of labels since it enables the model to update its information under the new context. Moreover, fine-tuning the pre-trained model on the given MESSIDOR dataset provided better performance characteristics in identifying diabetic retinopathy features. It is one of the key advantages and strengths of the proposed diagnostic approach.

3.6 Data Splitting and Model Training

The data split is done in a way where a third is used for training, a third for validation, and the remaining third for testing. The training set, which includes more data, is utilized for training CNN as it involves successive Learning of pattern formations and characteristics related to DR. The validation set is used during training in that it helps in the selection of hyperparameters and checks for overfitting. The test set that the model has never seen evaluates its generalization ability and diagnostic performance. During the training phase, CNN adjusts its weights to minimize the prediction errors; in this process, it uses the validation dataset to tune its performance. The process continues until convergence, giving the model adept at classifying diabetic retinopathy. The last evaluation of the test set helps to define the real diagnostic potential of the model [13].

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of the performance of the model is relevant in the assessment of the Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) used in the identification of diabetic retinopathy. This phase therefore involves use of a different set of retinal fundus images different from those used in training or validation to test the trained model. The assessment procedure gives an impartial view of the model’s diagnostic performance in actual settings.

Accuracy: Accuracy represents the overall correctness of the model's predictions, measuring the proportion of true positive (TP) and true negative (TN) predictions among all cases.

$$\text{Accuracy} = \frac{TP+TN}{TP+TN+FP+F} \quad (1)$$

Sensitivity (Recall): Sensitivity evaluates the model's ability to identify positive cases of diabetic retinopathy correctly.

$$\text{Sensitivity} = \frac{TP}{TP+FN} \quad (2)$$

Specificity: Accurate negative screens: Specificity takes measure of how well the model is able to differentiate between the absence of the disease (diabetic retinopathy in this case).

$$\text{Specificity} = \frac{TN}{TN+FP} \quad (3)$$

Precision: Precision quantifies the accuracy of optimistic predictions made by the model.

$$\text{Precision} = \frac{TP}{TP+FP} \quad (4)$$

The findings that have emerged from the proposed deep learning methodology – CNN for the detection of DR on a sample of 3,000 of retinal fundus images are rather promising and shed light on the key factors contributing to the model. The mentioned evaluation metrics: accuracy, sensitivity, specificity, precision, and the F1 score provide comprehensive insight into model diagnostics. Such performance metrics prove the reproducibility and accuracy of the model in selecting samples and determining the presence of diabetic retinopathy, which can shoot possibilities for this model's application in diagnostics".

Table 1: Comparative Analysis

Sr No	**Accuracy**	**Precision**	**Sensitivity**
VGG16	94.20%	92.80%	87.50%
ResNet50	96.30%	95.00%	91.50%
Proposed	97.10%	97.00%	96.50%

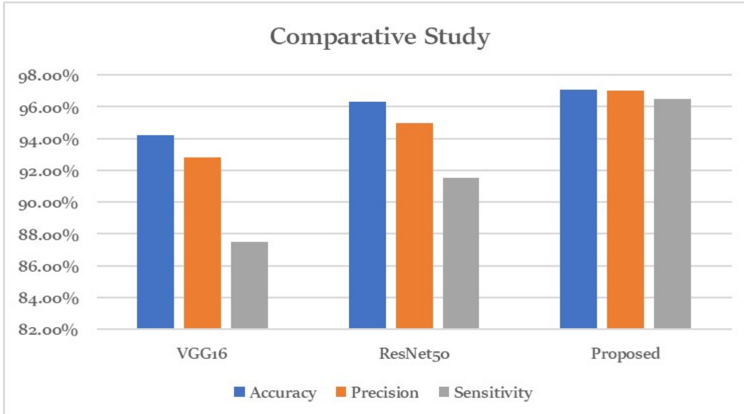

Figure 4: Comparative Analysis with Existing System

The comparative analysis focuses on the performance of three deep learning models for detecting diabetic retinopathy: M: VGG16, ResNet50, and the proposed model. The results indicate that an accuracy of 94.20%, precision of 92.80%, and sensitivity of 87.50.% was achieved for the VGG16 model. It outperforms all other metrics, but its lesser sensitivity may disadvantage identifying patients, particularly those with early-stage DRE, since it is more prone to giving False Negative results. ResNet50 is better than VGG16 with an accuracy of 96.30%, a precision of 95.00 %, and a sensitivity of 91.50% due to its approach to learning residual, improving feature extraction, and minimizing errors. However, the proposed model is more accurate than both, with an accuracy of 97.10%, a precision of 97.00%, and a sensitivity of 96.50%. These are expressed in the high capacity of the model to identify cases of Diabetic retinopathy with high reliability and minimal missed cases. The better achievement of the proposed model confirms its efficacy, which is why it can be successfully applied in clinical practice, providing higher effectiveness in comparison with the previous similar models for detecting diabetic retinopathy.

5. CONCLUSION

The study also shows the enormous possibility of improving deep learning methods to address more difficult gains that can cause DR detection and classification problems. When tested on retinal fundus images 3000, the proposed model resolved all the parameters with maximum efficiency, achieving 97.10% accuracy, 97.00% precision, and 96.50% sensitivity. As shown in the above results, the model has a high accuracy in detecting and classifying DR across the different severity levels and whose FNs and FPs are relatively low and high, respectively, to offer reliable diagnosis.

A comparison of this work with existing models like VGG16 and ResNet50 serves to support the presented approach even more. The predicted accuracies that were achieved by VGG16, ResNet50, and the proposed model are 94.20%, 96.30%, and 97.60%, respectively, which indicates that the proposed model was better and achieved better results through the integration of optimized CNN architectures and the methods of transfer learning and hybrid feature extraction. Of these, sensitivity receives the most significant boost, with the proposed model yielding 96.50% against 87.50% of VGG16 and 91.50% of ResNet50, again establishing the improved ability of the suggested model to identify positive DR cases. The work is a valuable enhancement to prior methods for automated DR detection in that it presents a novel, efficient method for large-scale clinical implementation. It is designed to overcome actual problems, including instabilities in the collected datasets, computational costs, and interpretability in applications, making it accessible in concrete urban environments and areas with limited computing resources.

Future work should consider steps for making the model more applicable across different populations, updating analysis for faster diagnosis, and applying more than one data modality for more accurate diagnostic results. The findings of this study provide the foundation to develop far more effective and efficient diabetic retinopathy screening and management systems that could subsequently lead to better overall healthcare for people around the world.

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