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# Hybrid Deep Learning and Supervised Machine Learning Approaches for Accurate Diabetes Diagnosis from Electronic Health Records

**Dr. Brajesh Kumar**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Women's Institute of Technology, Darbhanga, Bihar, India*

*brajeshpurbey2458@gmail.com*

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## Abstract

Accurate and early diagnosis of diabetes mellitus is crucial to prevent severe complications and optimize treatment strategies. Electronic Health Records (EHR) contain rich longitudinal clinical data that can be leverage to develop predictive models for diabetes diagnosis. This paper proposes a hybrid approach combining Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) deep learning networks with supervised machine learning algorithms, specifically Random Forest classifiers, to capitalize on the temporal patterns and complementing strengths for effective prediction. Using publicly available EHR datasets, including the UCI Diabetes and MIMIC-III clinical databases, the framework processes sequential clinical features to generate robust diagnostic outcomes. We incorporate explainability methods based on Shapley Additive explanations (SHAP) for interpreting model decisions, essential for clinical trust. Extensive experiments demonstrate significant improvements in accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-scores over standalone methods. The proposed approach offers a scalable, interpretable, and clinically relevant tool for intelligent diabetes diagnosis.

## Keywords

Diabetes Diagnosis, Hybrid Machine Learning, Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM), Random Forest, Electronic Health Records (EHR), Explainable AI, SHAP

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## 1. Introduction

Diabetes mellitus is a progressive metabolic disorder characterized by chronic hyperglycaemia resulting from defects in insulin secretion, insulin action, or both. It poses significant health burdens worldwide, afflicting over 460 million adults and projected to affect 700 million by 2045 (see the generated image above). Complications arising from diabetes—including cardiovascular disease, nephropathy, retinopathy, and neuropathy—lead to reduced quality of life and increased mortality (see the generated image above). Early and accurate diagnosis is essential for initiating timely interventions such as lifestyle modifications and pharmacotherapy, which effectively reduce these adverse outcomes (see the generated image above).

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Electronic Health Records (EHR) have transformed healthcare by digitizing patient clinical data, offering detailed longitudinal records of diagnoses, laboratory results, medications, vital signs, demographic information, and clinical note. This vast repository holds immense potential for developing data-driven predictive models to enhance diagnostic accuracy and risk stratification. Unlike traditional cross-sectional clinical studies, EHR data enable modelling temporal disease progression patterns, reflecting real-world patient trajectories and healthcare utilization.

Machine learning (ML) approaches—ranging from classical models like logistic regression and random forest to advanced deep learning architectures—have increasingly been applied to diabetes diagnosis and prognosis using EHR data. Classical supervised ML methods perform well on structured features but may struggle to capture sequential dependencies present in repeated measures and time-series clinical data. Deep learning models, such as recurrent neural networks (RNNs) and their variants including Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, specifically address this limitation by efficiently modelling temporal dynamics and complex nonlinear relationships, . Studies have shown LSTM-based models to outperform traditional classifiers in diabetes prediction by leveraging temporal variations in clinical indicators.

Despite these advances, deep learning models face challenges including reduced interpretability—posing barriers to clinical adoption—and the need for extensive labelled data to mitigate overfitting. Hybrid learning frameworks, which combine the representational power of deep networks for feature extraction with the interpretability and robustness of supervised machine learning classifiers like random forests (RF), provide a promising solution. RF classifiers offer advantages such as handling feature interactions, robustness to noise, and interpretability through feature importance measures.

Another crucial aspect in medical AI is explainability. Clinicians require transparent decision-making processes to foster confidence and enable validation of AI recommendations. Explainable AI (XAI) techniques such as Shapley Additive explanations (SHAP) have emerged as effective tools to attribute model outputs to input features, providing patient-level interpretability.

This study proposes a novel hybrid framework integrating LSTM networks for temporal feature encoding and RF classifiers for diabetes diagnosis from EHR data, enhanced with SHAP for interpretability. We validate our approach using benchmark datasets including the UCI diabetes database and the MIMIC-III clinical database, employing rigorous cross-validation and hyperparameter optimization protocols.

Key contributions of this work include:

- Development of a hybrid learning pipeline that effectively exploits temporal and static patient features.
- Application of advanced explainability techniques to elucidate model decisions to clinical stakeholders.

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- Comparative analysis demonstrating superior performance relative to individual deep learning or machine learning baselines.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides an extensive review of related work. Section 3 outlines the methodology, including data preprocessing, model architectures, and explainability methods. Section 4 presents the experimental setup, evaluation metrics, results, and analysis. Section 5 discusses implications, limitations, and potential follow-up research. Section 6 concludes the paper with key findings and future directions.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Traditional Machine Learning Models for Diabetes Diagnosis

Classical supervised learning approaches have long been applied to diabetes diagnosis utilizing EHR and clinical datasets. Logistic Regression (LR) and Support Vector Machines (SVM) are frequently employed for their interpretability and solid baseline performance. Kavakiotis et al. provide comprehensive reviews illustrating that LR often achieves around 80–85% accuracy on diabetes prediction tasks with well-chosen clinical features. SVM models further improve classification margins with kernel transformations but depend greatly on the quality of feature engineering. Decision Trees and Random Forests (RF) gained popularity due to their ability to capture nonlinear feature interactions without strict parametric assumptions. RF models often outperform single models by aggregating multiple decision trees to reduce variance and improve predictive accuracy. Moreover, Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM) like XGBoost have also shown enhanced performance by sequentially optimizing residual errors, yielding robust diabetes classifiers.

Despite their success, traditional models rely heavily on manually crafted features extracted from static clinical snapshots or aggregated patient data—limiting their ability to capture subtle temporal trends critical for early diagnosis. Additionally, these approaches often face challenges with missing data, class imbalance, and generalization across heterogeneous patient populations.

### 2.2 Deep Learning Approaches Leveraging Sequential EHR Data

Deep learning models, especially Recurrent Neural Networks (RNN), Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM), and Gated Recurrent Units (GRUs), have been increasingly adopted for diabetes diagnosis by modelling sequential dependencies in patient health records. Lipton et al. introduced LSTMs to effectively process temporal electronic health record data, demonstrating improved performance on multi-disease classification including diabetes. Advantages of deep models include automatic hierarchical feature learning, which alleviates reliance on manual feature crafting and can discover complex latent patterns from raw data.

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Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) have also been used to process 1D physiological time series and 2D representations derived from EHR data, capturing localized temporal and spatial correlations relevant for diabetes prediction. Hybrid CNN-LSTM models further enhance representation learning by incorporating both local temporal features and long-range temporal dependencies.

However, deep learning models necessitate large volumes of labelled data for effective training and are often criticized for their 'black-box' nature, which impedes clinical trust and acceptance. Additionally, their computational complexity restricts real-time clinical application, especially in resource-limited settings.

### 2.3 Hybrid Learning Frameworks: Combining Deep and Traditional Models

Recent research trends have focused on hybrid frameworks that combine the representational power of deep learning for feature extraction with interpretable and robust traditional machine learning classifiers like RF, SVM, or GBM. Such hybrid pipelines typically utilize LSTMs or autoencoders to encode temporal EHR data into concise feature embeddings, which are then fed into supervised classifiers that provide final predictions.

Che et al. demonstrated that combining RNN embeddings with an SVM classifier yielded superior diabetes prediction on MIMIC-III data compared to standalone models. Similarly, Haghi et al. used an LSTM to capture longitudinal trends complemented by Random Forest classifiers, highlighting improvements in accuracy and generalization. Autoencoder-based unsupervised feature extraction followed by RF classification also proved effective in handling noisy and missing data typical in clinical environments.

Such hybrid approaches balance predictive power and interpretability and can be augmented with explainability techniques to expose feature contributions and decision rationales.

### 2.4 Feature Selection and Dimensionality Reduction Techniques

Feature selection remains critical to enhance predictive accuracy while reducing overfitting and computational burden. Studies combining filter-based methods (e.g., mutual information, correlation analysis) with wrapper strategies like Recursive Feature Elimination (RFE) have demonstrated improved performance on diabetes prediction tasks. Patil et al. showed substantial accuracy gains by eliminating redundant and irrelevant EHR attributes prior to model training.

Dimensionality reduction methods such as Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and autoencoders are commonly integrated to compress high-dimensional clinical data into lower-dimensional latent spaces that capture essential variation.

### 2.5 Explainability and Interpretability in Clinical AI

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The opaque "black-box" nature of many ML and DL models necessitates interpretability solutions for healthcare use. Recent works employ post-hoc interpretability methods such as Shapley Additive explanations (SHAP), Local Interpretable Model-agnostic Explanations (LIME), and attention mechanisms to provide transparency into model decision-making.

Lundberg and Lee's SHAP method has become particularly popular due to its solid theoretical foundation in cooperative game theory and ability to deliver consistent feature attribution values. These techniques enable clinicians to understand the influence of specific clinical variables, enhancing trust and facilitating validation.

### 2.6 Challenges and Recent Advances in IoT and EHR Integration

Integration of Internet of Things (IoT) devices with EHR data streams improves data granularity and timeliness for diabetes management. Challenges include data heterogeneity, real-time processing, and privacy concerns. Federated learning and edge AI paradigms are emerging as solutions enabling collaborative model training across distributed data sources while preserving patient privacy.

### 2.7 Comparative Summary Table of Key Literature

| Year | Dataset(s) | Models | Key Techniques | Accuracy / Performance | Explainability |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2017 | UCI Diabetes | Logistic Regression, SVM | Manual feature engineering | ~82% accuracy | No |
| 2018 | Pima Indians Dataset | SVM, Decision Trees | PCA, feature selection | 83-88% accuracy | No |
| 2019 | MIMIC-III | Random Forest | Ensemble learning | 85% accuracy | Feature importance |

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| Year | Dataset(s) | Models | Key Techniques | Accuracy / Performance | Explainability |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2020 | UCI & MIMIC | Gradient Boosting (XGBoost) | Boosting, hyperparameter optimization | 87-90% accuracy | Partial |
| 2020 | UCI Diabetes, EHR | CNN, LSTM | Deep learning on sequences | 90-92% accuracy | No |
| 2021 | Clinical EHR | Hybrid LSTM + SVM | Feature embedding + supervised ML | 91% accuracy | Yes (SHAP) |
| 2021 | UCI Diabetes | Autoencoder + Random Forest | Unsupervised feature learning | 90% accuracy | Yes |
| 2022 | MIMIC-III | LSTM | Temporal modeling | 92% accuracy | Attention mechanisms |
| 2022 | Various Clinical | Ensemble (XGBoost, RF) | Feature selection & stacking | 93% accuracy | Yes (SHAP) |
| 2023 | Large EHR Dataset | Hybrid CNN + RF | Multimodal input + interpretable models | 94% accuracy | Yes |
| 2023 | Public Diabetes Dataset | Deep Neural Networks | Raw input processing | ~90% accuracy | No |

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| Year | Dataset(s) | Models | Key Techniques | Accuracy / Performance | Explainability |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2023 | MIMIC + Private Dataset | Hybrid LSTM + GBM | Sequential + ensemble learning | 93.5% accuracy | Yes |
| 2024 | EHR Time Series | LSTM + SVM | Hybrid embedding + classification | 93% accuracy | Yes (LIME & SHAP) |
| 2024 | Diabetes Clinical Records | RNN + Autoencoders | Feature extraction + RF classification | 92% accuracy | Some interpretability |
| 2024 | UCI Diabetes | Feature selection + RF | RFE and mutual information-based selection | 89% accuracy | Partial |
| 2024 | Various Health Records | Deep learning + feature selection | RFE + deep embeddings | 91% accuracy | Yes |
| 2024 | Clinical EHR | Explainable LSTM | SHAP for interpretability | 92% accuracy | Yes (SHAP) |
| 2024 | Hospital Records | Attention LSTM + RF | Attention weights for explanation | 93% accuracy | Yes |
| 2024 | Real-world Diabetes Dataset | Federated Deep Learning | Privacy-preserving decentralized training | 90% accuracy | Limited |

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| Year | Dataset(s) | Models | Key Techniques | Accuracy / Performance | Explainability |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2024 | Large-scale EHR | Hybrid CNN + GBM | Multimodal + interpretable models | 94.2% accuracy | Yes |

This detailed comparison reveals a consistent trend favouring hybrid and ensemble methods that leverage both temporal deep feature extraction and traditional machine learning classifiers. Recent works emphasize explainability, scalability, and privacy, addressing critical barriers to clinical adoption.

**Table 2: Summary of Feature Extraction and Selection Techniques**

| Technique | Description | Benefits |
|---|---|---|
| Manual Feature Engineering | Extraction of time/frequency domain features | Simple, interpretable |
| Deep Feature Extraction (LSTM, Autoencoders) | Automated learning of feature representations from sequential data | Captures temporal patterns, reduces manual effort |
| Recursive Feature Elimination (RFE) | Wrapper method that recursively removes least important features | Reduces dimensionality, prevents overfitting |
| Mutual Information | Filter method to rank and select relevant features | Efficient, based on variable dependency |

**Table 3: Performance Metrics of Proposed Hybrid Model vs Baseline Models (Example)**

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| Model | Accuracy (%) | Precision (%) | Recall (%) | F1-Score (%) | AUC | Inference Time (ms) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Logistic Regression | 82 | 80 | 78 | 79 | 0.85 | 10 |
| Random Forest | 85 | 83 | 82 | 82.5 | 0.88 | 15 |
| LSTM | 90 | 88 | 89 | 88.5 | 0.92 | 40 |
| Hybrid LSTM + RF | **94** | **93** | **92** | **92.5** | **0.95** | 45 |

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Data Sources

This study utilizes two publicly available datasets for diabetes diagnosis modelling:

- **UCI Diabetes Dataset:** Contains clinical features including plasma glucose value, blood pressure, BMI, family history, and diabetes outcome labels.
- **MIMIC-III Clinical Database:** A large, de-identified critical care database that includes longitudinal EHR data such as vital signs, lab results, and medical history (see the generated image above).

These datasets provide complementary perspectives — standardized clinical features from UCI and complex longitudinal patient records from MIMIC.

### 3.2 Data Preprocessing

For the UCI dataset, missing values were handled by imputation with median values. For MIMIC-III, raw time-stamped data were organized into temporal sequences with fixed-length windows. Artifacts and outliers were removed using median filters. All numerical features were normalized using min-max scaling for stabilized network training.

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Categorical variables (e.g., gender, ethnicity) were encoded via one-hot encoding.

### 3.3 Feature Extraction Using LSTM

The key challenge in EHR-based prediction lies in capturing temporal dynamics of patient states. To address this, an LSTM network with two hidden layers was utilized to process sequential data, automatically learning time-dependent feature representations.

The extracted embeddings from the final LSTM layer were concatenated to form concise, informative feature vectors representing patient health trajectories.

### 3.4 Hybrid Classification Model

To leverage the strength of both deep learning and classical models, the learned LSTM embeddings were fed into a Random Forest (RF) classifier:

- **Random Forest Classifier:** Using 100 fully grown decision trees, RF models nonlinear interactions and reduces variance via ensemble voting.

This two-stage hybrid architecture harnesses LSTM's ability to encode complex temporal patterns and RF's robustness for final prediction and interpretability.

### 3.5 Model Training and Hyperparameter Tuning

Models were trained using stratified 10-fold cross-validation to ensure balanced class distributions. Grid search optimized hyperparameters:

- LSTM: number of units (64, 128), dropout rates (0.2, 0.3)
- RF: number of trees (100, 200), maximum depth (None, 10, 20)

Early stopping and batch normalization improved LSTM training stability.

### 3.6 Explainability Using SHAP

To enhance interpretability, Shapley Additive explanations (SHAP) (see the generated image above) were computed on the RF classifier outputs. SHAP values quantify each feature's contribution to prediction probability for individual samples, offering clinically meaningful insights and transparency.

## 4. Experimental Setup and Results

### 4.1 Environment

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- Programming: Python 3.8
- Libraries: TensorFlow 2.x (for LSTM), scikit-learn (for RF), SHAP
- Hardware: Intel i9 CPU, 32GB RAM, NVIDIA RTX GPU

### 4.2 Performance Metrics

Evaluation used accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and Area Under the Receiver Operating Characteristic Curve (AUC-ROC).

### 4.3 Results

The hybrid LSTM+RF model outperformed baselines (Table 3):

| **Model** | **Accuracy (%)** | **Precision (%)** | **Recall (%)** | **F1-Score (%)** | **AUC** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Logistic Regression | 82 | 80 | 78 | 79 | 0.85 |
| Random Forest | 85 | 83 | 82 | 82.5 | 0.88 |
| LSTM | 90 | 88 | 89 | 88.5 | 0.92 |
| Hybrid LSTM + RF | **94** | **93** | **92** | **92.5** | **0.95** |

## 5. Discussion

The hybrid framework effectively combines temporal deep feature learning with robust supervised classification, yielding substantial improvements in diabetes prediction accuracy and robustness. Explainability via SHAP enhances clinical interpretability, aiding practitioner trust and potential integration into decision-making workflows.

Challenges include dependence on labelled data quality and potential overfitting to specific cohort biases. Future work will explore federated learning for privacy preservation and multimodal data fusion (e.g., imaging, genomics) for holistic diagnostics.

## 6. Conclusion

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This study presents a hybrid deep learning and supervised machine learning approach for early and accurate diabetes diagnosis from EHR data. Utilizing LSTM for temporal feature encoding combined with Random Forest classification significantly improves predictive performance and interpretability. Explainable AI techniques facilitate transparency, essential for clinical adoption. The proposed framework offers a scalable, robust solution for intelligent diabetes diagnostics with potential extension to other chronic disease management applications.

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