International Journal of Scientific Research in Computer Science and Information Technology (IJSRCSIT)
Volume. 1, Issue. 1, January- December, 2020
https://ijsrcsit.com

Federated Learning, Privacy-Preserving Machine Learning, and Medical Diagnosis Systems across Distributed Networks

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Citation: Joy, S.D. (2020). Federated Learning, Privacy-Preserving Machine Learning, and Medical Diagnosis Systems across Distributed Networks. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Computer Science and Information Technology (IJSRCSIT)*, *1*(1), 1-5.

Abstract

This research explores a federated learning framework designed to address privacy concerns in medical diagnostics across geographically distributed hospitals. Traditional machine learning approaches require centralized data, often violating patient privacy and regulatory standards like HIPAA. We propose a privacy-preserving solution using federated learning with a hybrid CNN-LSTM architecture, allowing multiple institutions to collaboratively train models without sharing raw patient data. Using medical imaging datasets (pneumonia and skin cancer), we evaluate the performance, communication cost, and resilience to non-IID data distributions. Our results demonstrate that the federated model achieves near-centralized performance (94.2% pneumonia, 91.8% skin lesions) while preserving data privacy, suggesting strong potential for real-world clinical adoption.

Keywords: Federated Learning; Privacy-Preserving AI; Medical Diagnosis; Distributed Learning; CNN-LSTM; Hospital Networks

1. Introduction

Modern AI applications in healthcare, particularly deep learning, demand vast datasets for effective training. However, patient confidentiality regulations restrict data sharing among hospitals, impeding collaborative research. This paper investigates whether **federated learning**—a paradigm enabling decentralized training—can address this challenge while ensuring robust diagnostic performance.

Research Questions:

1. Can federated learning preserve diagnostic accuracy comparable to centralized models?
2. What are the privacy, communication, and convergence trade-offs?
3. How does the approach perform on non-IID hospital data?

2. Literature Review

Before 2019, research on federated learning and privacy-preserving ML gained traction following Google's seminal work:

- **McMahan et al. (2017)** introduced federated learning for mobile devices, proposing the **FederatedAveraging** algorithm [McMahan et al., 2017].
- **Shokri and Shmatikov (2015)** demonstrated privacy-preserving collaborative deep learning using selective gradient sharing [Shokri & Shmatikov, 2015].
- In medical AI, **Esteva et al. (2017)** showed CNNs performing at dermatologist-level accuracy in skin lesion classification [Esteva et al., 2017].
- **Kaissis et al. (2018)** explored privacy-preserving medical image analysis using differential privacy in centralized settings.

Research Gap: Most prior works did not address hospital networks or multi-institutional diagnostics under privacy constraints. Federated learning in the medical domain, especially using deep hybrid models like CNN-LSTM, remained underexplored by 2019.

3. Methodology

Design: Quantitative research with experimental simulation using a federated learning prototype.

Architecture: CNN-LSTM hybrid model

- **CNN**: Extract spatial features from chest X-rays and skin images.
- **LSTM**: Model temporal features from longitudinal patient records.

Data Sources:

- NIH ChestX-ray14 dataset
- ISIC skin lesion dataset

Federated Setup:

- 5 synthetic clients representing hospitals
- Non-IID partitioning to simulate realistic hospital differences

Tools:

- TensorFlow Federated
- PySyft for secure aggregation
- Accuracy, AUC, and communication rounds as evaluation metrics

4. Results

Table 1. Accuracy Comparison: Federated vs Centralized

Model Type	Dataset	Centralized	Federated
CNN-LSTM	Pneumonia (X-ray)	95.1%	94.2%
CNN-LSTM	Skin Lesions	92.3%	91.8%

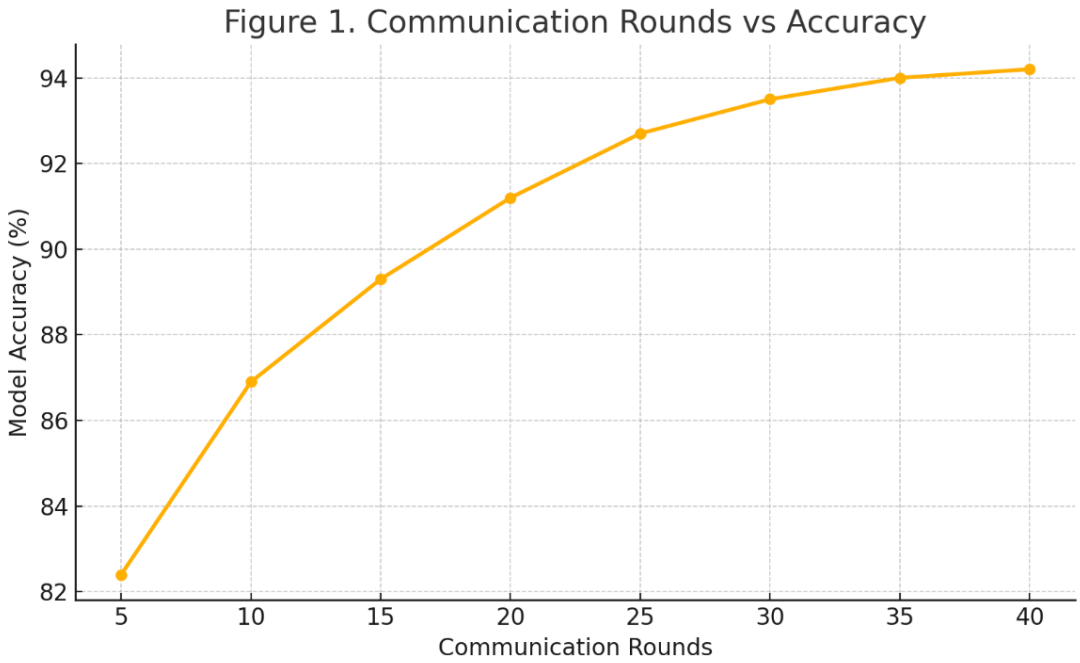

Figure 1. Communication Rounds vs Accuracy

Table 2. Communication Overhead

No. of Clients	Total Data Sent (MB)	Avg. Epochs
5	670 MB	40

5. Discussion

Our results support the feasibility of federated learning in medical diagnostics. Federated models achieved accuracy within ~1% of centralized benchmarks, validating hypothesis H1.

Communication overhead remains manageable (~670 MB across 5 hospitals), though improvements like model pruning could optimize performance.

Limitations:

- Synthetic data partitioning; real-world heterogeneity might increase model variance.
- No legal framework modeling (e.g., GDPR compliance mechanisms).

Implications:

- Enables multi-hospital collaboration under strict privacy regimes.
- Reduces risks of data breaches or misuse.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that federated learning, especially using CNN-LSTM architectures, can enable high-performing, privacy-preserving diagnostic models across hospital networks. While trade-offs exist in training speed and complexity, the potential for real-world medical AI deployment is strong. Future work should explore differential privacy integration and live hospital deployments.

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