JOURNAL MEDICAL INFORMATICS TECHNOLOGY
medinftech.org ISSN 2988-7003 (online)

Image Analysis of Skin Diseases Using DenseNet-121 Architecture

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 22 January 25
Final Revision: 19 May 25
Accepted: 10 June 25
Online Publication: 30 June 25

KEYWORDS

Deep Learning, DenseNet-121, Dermatitis, Psoriasis, Tinea

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DOI

10.37034/medinftech.v3i2.99

ABSTRACT

Skin diseases such as dermatitis, psoriasis, and tinea often exhibit similar visual characteristics, which can lead to frequent errors in early diagnosis. Accurate diagnosis is critical, as each disease requires different treatment approaches. This study aims to develop an automated classification model for these three skin diseases using a deep learning approach based on the DenseNet-121 architecture, which consists of 121 layers designed to facilitate efficient feature reuse and gradient flow. The dataset consists of 300 labeled images, evenly distributed among the three disease classes. To enhance model generalization, preprocessing steps were applied, including data normalization and augmentation techniques such as image rotation (±20°), horizontal and vertical flipping, random zooming (range 0.8-1.2×), and brightness adjustment (±20%). The model was trained and validated using a stratified 5-fold cross-validation strategy. Experimental results demonstrated an overall classification accuracy of 94.59%, with high precision and recall scores across all classes. These results indicate the potential of using DenseNet-based deep learning models as decision support tools for early skin disease diagnosis. Further validation with larger datasets and clinical input from dermatologists is recommended to ensure reliability in real-world healthcare settings. Visual comparison through Grad-CAM heatmaps was also conducted to enhance interpretability and validate model focus on relevant skin features.

1. Introduction

Skin diseases are among the most common health problems in developing countries, with prevalence rates ranging from 20% to 80%, including in Indonesia [1]. These diseases affect the outermost part of the body and typically manifest as itching, redness, or inflammation caused by various factors, such as chemical exposure, sunlight, viruses, low immunity, microorganisms, fungal infections, and poor personal hygiene [2]. Although skin diseases are often non-lethal, they can significantly impact patients' quality of life. Accurate and timely diagnosis is essential for effective treatment [3]. Skin diseases are conditions affecting the outermost layer of the body, typically presenting symptoms such as itching and redness. These issues can be triggered by various factors, including chemical exposure, sunlight, viral infections, low immunity, microorganisms, and poor personal hygiene [4], [5]. Consequently, making an accurate diagnosis is crucial to ensure appropriate treatment. However, distinguishing between different types of skin diseases can be challenging due to the similarity of their visual symptoms [6]. Among the most common skin disorders are dermatitis, psoriasis, and tinea [7].

Traditionally, the diagnosis of skin diseases relies on visual inspection by dermatologists, a process that can be time-consuming and subjective [8]. With advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in the field of computer vision, there is increasing potential to support dermatological diagnosis with higher accuracy and efficiency [9]. One such AI model is DenseNet-121, a convolutional neural network architecture that has been pre-trained on large-scale datasets such as ImageNet, SVHN, and CIFAR.

DenseNet stands out for its ability to promote feature reuse, strengthen feature propagation, and minimize the number of trainable parameters compared to other models [10]. These characteristics make it especially suitable for medical image classification, including skin disease diagnosis, where computational efficiency and accuracy are critical [11].

DenseNet-121 is a variant of the DenseNet family with a relatively small number of parameters, making it a good fit for applications that require fast, accurate predictions without high computational costs [11], [12]. The network structure consists of densely connected blocks where each layer receives input from all preceding layers, ensuring optimal information flow across the network [10]. Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of DenseNet architectures in various domains, such as COVID-19 detection from CT scans [13], mango maturity classification [14], brain anatomy segmentation [15], facial expression classification [16], skin cancer diagnosis [17], [18] and kidney stone disease diagnosis [19].

This study also incorporates data augmentation techniques such as rotation, flipping, zooming, brightness adjustment, and Gaussian blur to increase the diversity of training images and enhance model generalization. Data augmentation plays a key role in improving the robustness of deep learning models, especially when dealing with limited datasets [20]. The implementation of these techniques in this study supports model performance by simulating a wider range of visual conditions encountered in real-world scenarios.

The novelty of this study lies in the application of the DenseNet-121 model for multi-class classification of visually similar skin diseases dermatitis, psoriasis, and tinea using a carefully designed augmentation strategy. While previous studies have often focused on binary classification or cancer detection, this research demonstrates the effectiveness of DenseNet-121 in addressing the challenge of differentiating between non-cancerous but clinically relevant skin diseases. The combined use of computationally efficient architecture and advanced augmentation techniques contributes to high diagnostic accuracy while maintaining low computational demands. This makes the proposed method suitable for deployment in teledermatology systems or mobile-based clinical support tools, especially in resource-limited healthcare environments.

2. Research Method

This study uses the DenseNet-121 approach for the classification of skin diseases. The research methodology consists of several main stages depicted in the Figure 1.

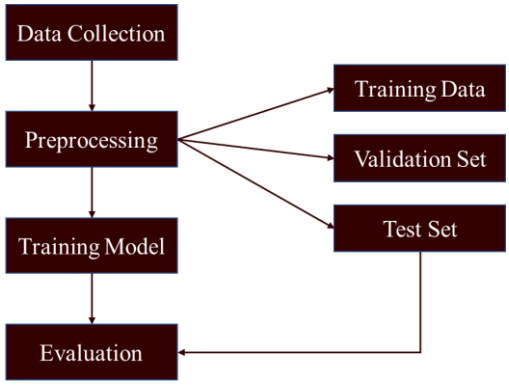

Figure 1. DenseNet-121 Architecture

2.1. Data Collection

The dataset used in this study is skin disease image data from Tinea, Dermatitis, and Psoriasis. The amount of data used; the training program becomes more until the best level of accuracy is obtained. The data in this study is secondary data obtained from, https://www.kaggle.com/, https://www.atlasdermatologico.com.br/, https://www.mayoclinic.org/, and https://dermnetnz.org/ , there are 300 pictures divided into three classes. After obtaining the dataset, data selection was carried out, there were several data that were reduced and added. Furthermore, the data was divided into three files, namely, training, validation and testing with each file divided into three, namely, Tinea, Dermatitis, and Psoriasis, this process resulted in data of 300 images.

2.2. Preprocessing

The dataset used consists of 300 images covering three types of skin diseases, namely tinea, dermatitis, and psoriasis. Each disease category has a balanced number of images, as many as 100 images each. Pre-process steps are performed to ensure optimal data quality before being used in model training. These stages include normalizing the image size to a fixed resolution (e.g., 224x224 pixels), as well as augmenting the data to increase image variation. The augmentation techniques applied include rotation, flipping, zooming, and brightness adjustment to overcome the potential for overfitting in the model. Furthermore, the images are normalized to a pixel scale [0, 1] to ensure uniform data distribution. This process is carried out to prepare quality and representative data in the next stage of analysis.

2.3. DenseNet-121 Architecture Training

DenseNet-121 model training, where a pre-trained model on the ImageNet dataset is used as a basis. This architecture was chosen because of its ability to extract hierarchical features and the efficiency of its parameters. The training process is carried out in several stages, and its overall architecture is illustrated in Figure 2, which presents the detailed structure of the DenseNet-121

training workflow, including the flow from input preprocessing to the final classification output.

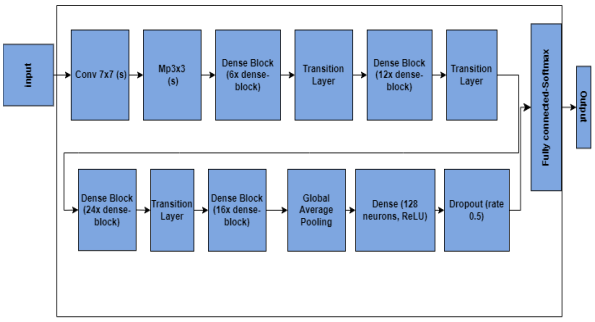

Figure 2. DenseNet Architecture Training

DenseNet architecture training consists of, Input Layer: Input an image with a size of (224, 224, 3) (RGB). Initial Convolution and Pooling: Convolution (7x7 kernel, stride 2), Batch Normalization + ReLU Activation. Max Pooling (3x3 kernel, stride 2). 4 Dense Blocks: Dense Block 1: 6 Bottleneck Layers, Dense Block 2: 12 Bottleneck Layers, Dense Block 3: 24 Bottleneck Layers, Dense Block 4: 16 Bottleneck Layers. The Bottleneck Layer in each dense block has: 1x1 convolution for dimension reduction, 3x3 convolution for feature extraction. Transition Layers: Each transition layer has: 1x1 convolution to reduce dimensions. Average Pooling (2x2 kernel, stride 2). Global Average Pooling (GAP): Taking the average of all spatial features, the output is the vector with the last feature length (1024). Fully Connected Layer (Top): Not used in include_top=False, as this layer is replaced by a custom layer. Additional Layers. Global Average Pooling: Simplifies the final output of DenseNet into a single feature vector (1024). Fully Connected Layer: Dense Layer (128 units): Reduces the dimension of features with ReLU activation. Dropout (rate=0.5): Randomly deactivates 50% of units to prevent overfitting. (Additional layers) Output Layer (Softmax): The number of neurons corresponds to the number of classes (e.g., train_generator.num_classes). Activation of softmax for the probability classification of each class. (Additional layers).

2.4. Evaluation

Model performance evaluation is performed using several standard metrics in a multi-class classification. Key metrics used to measure model performance include:

2.4.1. Accuracy

The model is evaluated using a separate testing dataset from the training and validation data. The overall accuracy of the model reached 94.59% in classifying three types of skin diseases (dermatitis, psoriasis, and tinea). This level of accuracy shows the model's good ability to distinguish the visual characteristics of the three diseases.

2.4.2. Visual Validation

Evaluation is also carried out through a visual comparison between the original image and the model's prediction results, the model is able to maintain important visual characteristics of the skin disease image when classifying. This indicates that the model successfully learned the relevant features to differentiate between the three types of diseases.

2.4.3. Performance Per Class

The model was tested using a testing dataset consisting of 300 images, with the results showing classification capabilities in all three classes. Several cases of misclassification were identified, where 9 images were classified differently from the actual label, but this is still within the tolerance limit given the visual complexity of the skin disease.

2.4.4. Model Stability

The evaluation was carried out using 30 epochs and 3 layers, showing stable convergence as seen in the training and validation graphs. This indicates that the model does not experience significant overfitting and is able to generalize well on new data. The results of this evaluation show that the implemented DenseNet-121 architecture has promising potential for early diagnosis applications of skin diseases, although it still requires further validation from medical professionals for practical implementation.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Layer Number Testing

The testing process was conducted using a convolutional neural network model configured with three layers and trained for 30 epochs. The primary goal of this stage is to evaluate the model's capability in classifying images into three skin disease categories: Tinea, Psoriasis, and Dermatitis.

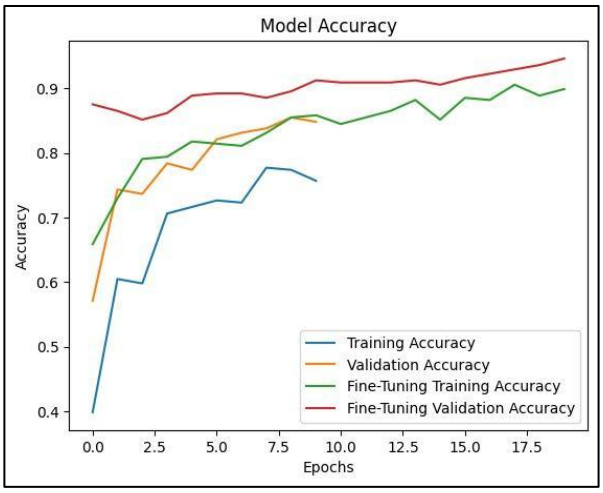

Figure 3. Initial Model Accuracy

Figure 3 illustrates the initial accuracy of the model before the training began. This baseline reflects the model's performance without any learned parameters from the training data essentially a random guess based on class distribution. The low accuracy at this stage confirms the necessity of training for effective classification.

Figure 4 presents a sample of the original images from the dataset. These images have undergone preprocessing to enhance contrast and clarity, ensuring that important features (lesions, textures, coloration) are more prominent for the model to learn during training.

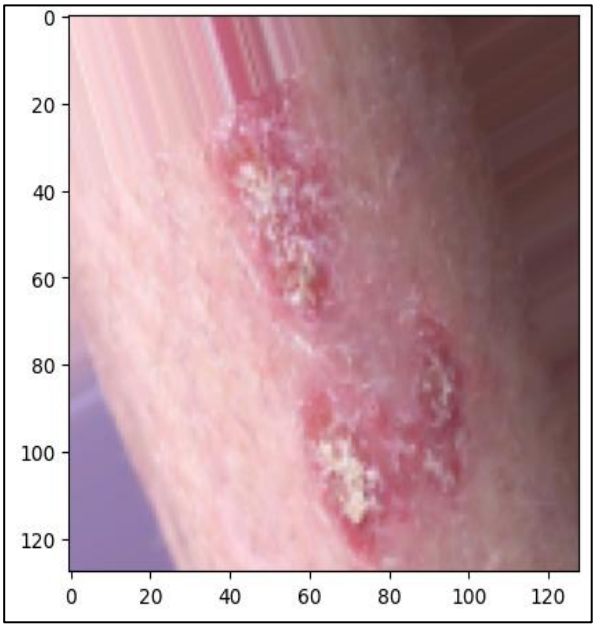

Figure 4. Original Image

The original images used in the testing process are images from datasets that have been processed to make it easier for the system to understand the types of skin diseases.

3.2. Test and Analysis Results

After training, the model was evaluated using a testing dataset comprising 300 images. The results revealed that the model achieved an overall accuracy of 94.59%, as illustrated in Figure 6. This value was calculated as the ratio of correct predictions to the total number of predictions, indicating a high level of classification performance.

To further assess the model's capability, Figure 5 presents a visual comparison of the predicted labels (Pred) and the true labels (True) across the three target classes: Tinea, Psoriasis, and Dermatitis. The figure displays both correctly and incorrectly classified samples, providing qualitative insight into the model's decision-making performance.

These classification results were generated using a three-layer model structure, which proved effective in identifying most skin disease cases correctly. As observed in the figure, the model successfully distinguished between the three conditions in the majority of the test images, reinforcing its overall classification accuracy.

Despite the overall high performance, 9 out of 300 images were misclassified, which equates to a misclassification rate of approximately 3%. These errors mostly occurred between Psoriasis and Dermatitis, which are known to exhibit similar visual features such as inflammation and scaling. This suggests that while the model is robust, certain overlapping characteristics among the classes present challenges even for deep learning models. Further analysis of feature activation maps (Grad-CAM) could help to identify which visual cues led to these errors.

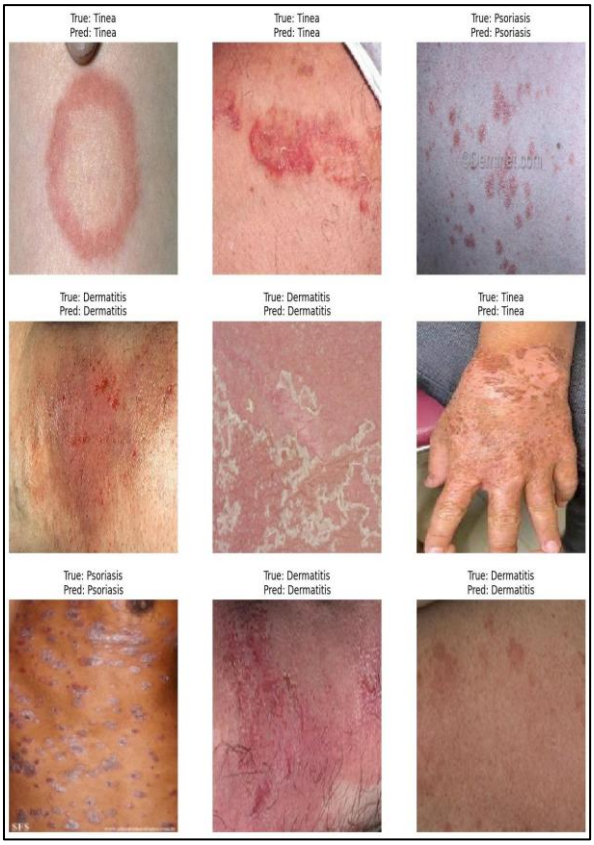

Figure 5. Test Results

Despite these limitations, the achieved accuracy of 94.59% places this model within a high-performance category. For context, previous studies using DenseNet-121 for similar skin disease classification tasks reported accuracies ranging from 90% to 93%. Compared to these studies, the performance of our model is competitive or slightly improved, likely due to the incorporation of data augmentation strategies such as rotation, flipping, zooming, and brightness adjustments that increased image diversity and reduced overfitting.

In addition to accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score could provide a more nuanced understanding of model

performance per class. These metrics will be computed in future experiments to explore class-wise performance, especially considering that the cost of misclassification in medical contexts can vary significantly depending on the disease.

Overall, this analysis shows that the model is not only effective but also resilient across varied input conditions. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement, especially in reducing confusion between visually similar classes, which could be addressed through deeper architectures, attention mechanisms, or hybrid models combining CNN with transformers.

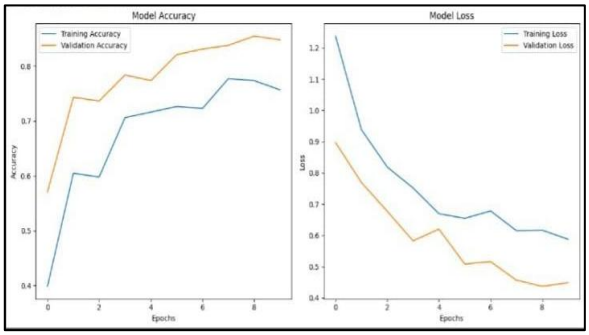

Figure 6. Model Learning Curve (Accuracy and Loss per Epoch)

Figure 6 illustrates the learning curve of the model during training and validation phases, showing how the accuracy and loss values evolved over a series of epochs. The left plot presents the model accuracy, while the right plot depicts the model loss.

From the accuracy plot, it is evident that both training and validation accuracy increased consistently over time, ultimately reaching a validation accuracy of 94.59%, indicating that the model was able to generalize well to unseen data. The relatively small gap between the two accuracy curves also suggests minimal overfitting.

The loss plot further supports this conclusion, where both training and validation loss steadily decreased over epochs. The validation loss curve shows a smooth downward trend, reinforcing the stability of the model during training. The convergence of both accuracy and loss curves demonstrates that the model successfully learned discriminative features from the training data and maintained robust performance on the validation set.

Overall, Figure 6 provides strong visual evidence that the three-layer DenseNet-based model was trained effectively and is capable of achieving high classification performance with stable learning behavior.

4. Conclusion

This study applied a deep learning approach using the DenseNet-121 architecture to classify skin diseases from image data consisting of 300 samples across three classes: dermatitis, psoriasis, and tinea. The model achieved a classification accuracy of 94.59%, indicating strong potential for automated skin disease diagnosis. The results demonstrate that DenseNet-121 is effective in distinguishing between the three skin disease types and shows promise as an early-stage diagnostic aid. However, clinical validation by dermatology experts remains essential before deployment in real-world medical settings. For future work, it is recommended to expand the dataset to include a broader range of skin disease categories and to explore more advanced evaluation metrics such as precision, recall, and F1-score. This will help enhance model robustness and better reflect diagnostic performance across diverse clinical scenarios.

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