

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER CLASSIFICATION USING SELF ATTENTION DEEP LEARNING ARCHITECTURE

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Keywords

Article History

Received: 24 August 2025

Accepted: 02 October 2025

Published: 16 October 2025

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Abstract

The lifelong condition named Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) prevents people from communicating, interacting socially, and behaving in ways normal people would. Early diagnosis is very important because it means that individuals who are affected by ASD get the right help and support. Traditional diagnosis methods are however, are time consuming as well as inaccurate. In order to solve these problems this research brings a deep deep learning framework which enables ASD to be detected faster and more reliably. As it is, the proposed framework is composed of two extremely strong deep learning systems, namely ResNet50 and a Bottleneck Residual Deep (BRD5). ResNet50 aids in extracting high level spatial as well as hierarchical features from images, while BRD5 brings in efficiency and accuracy in the process of classification. Each of these models uses a depth concatenation layer to combine feature important features and permits overall best performance. All of the autism image data loaded will be fed to the model using the autism-image-data. The data is processed before training by many steps such as normalizing and augmenting it, to allow the model to learn effectively and give the right result. It is shown through extensive testing on the dataset that this framework outperforms classical deep learning methods. Mainly precision, recall and computational efficiency improvements, it achieves an accuracy of 98.8%. Since the system can properly differentiate autistic from non-autistic individuals, it is a fast and reliable tool for ASD diagnosis. However, this study shows the possibility of artificial intelligence in medical imaging and ASD detection. In future research the model can be extended by including more diverse data sources and validated in real clinical environments to further make it effective in practical medical applications.

INTRODUCTION

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by significant impairments in social communication and interaction, alongside restricted, repetitive

patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. The term 'spectrum' reflects the vast heterogeneity in the presentation and severity of symptoms, as well as in the cognitive and adaptive functioning levels of

affected individuals. Core challenges in social communication include difficulties with social-emotional reciprocity, such as failure in normal back-and-forth conversation and reduced sharing of interests or emotions. Individuals with ASD often exhibit impairments in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, including poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication, abnormalities in eye contact and body language, and a lack of understanding or use of gestures [3, 4, 5]. Furthermore, deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships are common, ranging from difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts to challenges in making friends and engaging in imaginative play, which are particularly critical during early childhood development [6, 7]. Complementing these social challenges are restricted and repetitive behaviors, which can include stereotyped or repetitive motor movements (e.g., hand flapping, spinning), insistence on sameness and inflexible adherence to routines, highly restricted and fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus, and hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input, such as adverse responses to specific sounds or textures [3, 4, 7, 8]. The global prevalence of ASD, estimated by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be approximately 1 in 100 children, underscores the necessity for widespread recognition and proactive approaches, including early detection and pre-symptomatic intervention for at-risk infants to improve developmental outcomes [1, 2].

The manifestation of ASD extends beyond its core features to encompass a wide range of sensory processing differences and varying levels of cognitive and adaptive functioning. Sensory integration difficulties are a hallmark of the condition, where individuals may experience over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity to environmental stimuli such as sounds, lights, touch, or smells. This can lead to avoidance of certain situations or, conversely, sensory-seeking behaviors to self-regulate, both of which can significantly impact daily life and social participation

[23, 24]. Cognitively, ASD is associated with a broad spectrum of abilities, ranging from intellectual disability to superior intelligence, often accompanied by splinter skills or exceptional talents in specific areas like mathematics or art. Similarly, adaptive functioning the conceptual, social, and practical skills required for everyday life can vary greatly, meaning some individuals require substantial lifelong support while others achieve full independence [23, 25]. This heterogeneity necessitates highly individualized intervention strategies tailored to each person's unique profile of strengths and deficits. The exact etiology of ASD is not fully understood, but research strongly indicates a complex interaction between genetic predispositions and environmental factors. Numerous genes associated with synaptic function and brain development have been implicated, including those linked to known genetic syndromes like Rett syndrome, as well as spontaneous *de novo* mutations not inherited from parents [5, 8]. A family history of ASD also increases risk, pointing to a heritable component [4].

Environmental factors are believed to interact with genetic susceptibilities to influence the likelihood of developing ASD. These include advanced parental age, prenatal exposure to certain environmental toxins or chemicals, and specific pregnancy-related complications such as maternal diabetes or obesity [3, 9]. While no single environmental factor has been conclusively identified as a sole cause, it is widely accepted that these elements, in combination with a genetic vulnerability, can disrupt typical brain development and contribute to the onset of the disorder [10]. The increasing global recognition of ASD and its complex, multifactorial nature highlights the critical need for continued research into its causes and the development of effective, personalized support systems to enhance the quality of life for individuals on the spectrum and their families.

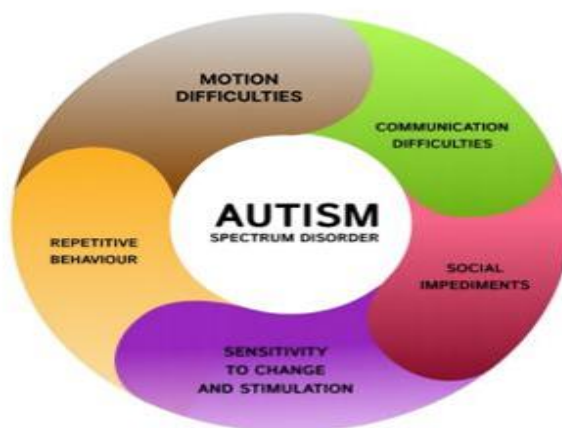


Figure 1: Autism Spectrum Disorder

The diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is based exclusively on observed behaviors and is typically conducted through a comprehensive process involving developmental history reviews and standardized behavioral assessments administered by clinicians. This process begins with a detailed developmental history provided by parents or caregivers, which is crucial for identifying early red flags such as delays in speech, social interaction, and play. Subsequently, direct behavioral observations and standardized tools are used to evaluate social communication, restricted interests, and repetitive behaviors. A critical component of the diagnostic process involves ruling out other conditions with similar presentations, such as hearing loss or neurological disorders, ensuring an accurate diagnosis that accounts for the heterogeneous nature of ASD [4]. Once diagnosed, the management of ASD involves a range of individualized, lifelong interventions. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a widely used therapy to encourage positive behaviors and reduce challenging ones, while other interventions target specific areas like social skills, communication, and academic performance. Family-centered therapies are also vital, equipping parents and caregivers with strategies to support their child's development. Although no medication can cure ASD, pharmacotherapy can help manage co-occurring symptoms like aggression, irritability, and hyperactivity, thereby improving the individual's overall quality of life [8].

In recent years, deep learning has emerged as a powerful tool to augment the diagnostic process, capable of identifying subtle, complex patterns within large, multimodal datasets such as neuroimaging (MRI, fMRI), genetic, and behavioral data. The application of models like Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) has shown high accuracy in detecting ASD-specific features from brain scans, with some studies reporting accuracy rates over 90% [14, 15]. The effective implementation of these models involves a multi-step pipeline, starting with the collection of diverse demographic, imaging, and behavioral data to enhance generalizability and mitigate bias [16, 17]. This is followed by meticulous data preprocessing including normalization and feature extraction and the selection of appropriate model architectures, such as using CNNs for spatial patterns in images and RNNs for temporal data, often combined into hybrid models for multimodal integration [16, 18, 19]. However, despite the promise of these traditional deep learning techniques, challenges remain, including limited labeled data and poor model interpretability [14, 15]. To address these limitations, particularly the inability of CNNs to capture long-distance dependencies in data, recent research proposes advanced frameworks incorporating self-attention mechanisms and architectures like ResNet50. These approaches aim to improve feature extraction, accuracy, and interpretability, ultimately paving the way for earlier,

more reliable ASD diagnosis and timely intervention [25, 26].

Objectives

The main objectives of this research in the use of self-attention deep learning in ASD classification are below:

Propose a Self-Attention Model for ASD Classification: a self-attention model based on the potential to more efficiently describe complex dependencies within neuroimaging and behavioral data, thus increasing the chances for accuracy in the detection of ASD [25].

Improving Explainability: mechanisms based on self-attention can point to the most contributory features in ASD classification, which also help to develop the diagnostic criteria for the clinicians involved.

Model Evaluation and Explainability: The objective of this study is to assess the performance of the self attention model by comparing it to the state of the

art models in terms of accuracy, sensitivity and specificity using multiple datasets to make sure that the model is robust. It also aims to create an ASD classifier that should be seamlessly integrated into clinical workflow to provide timely and objective diagnosis. This research makes the model more scalable and explainable, and thus more practically applicable to medical professionals to base their predictions on AI driven predictions for improved early intervention and patient outcomes. [25][27].

Literature Review:

Jungade (2020) investigated Myofascial Release (MFR) as a novel intervention for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The study, focusing on deep fascia manipulation, reported improvements in core ASD symptoms, including sensory integration, motor coordination, and behavior regulation. This suggests MFR could be a beneficial complementary therapy for enhancing motor skills and body awareness. However, the study's limitations, such as a small sample size, highlight the need for larger, controlled trials to confirm its efficacy [40].

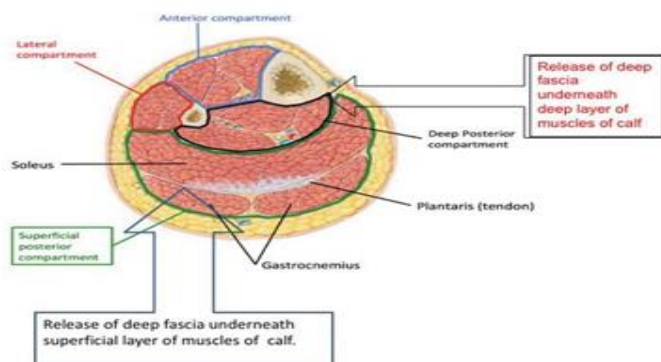


Figure 2: Cross – sectional anatomy at the level of calf muscles of leg, showing the deep fascial attachments of muscles [40]

Helverschou et al. (2023) addressed the critical need for specialized interventions for adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and co-occurring Substance Use Disorders (SUDs). Recognizing the elevated risk of SUDs in this population, often linked to challenges with impulse control, the researchers developed a manualized behavioral

therapy. This structured protocol adapted cognitive-behavioral principles for individuals with ASD, focusing on relapse prevention, coping strategies, and interpersonal skills. The study demonstrated significant outcomes, including a substantial reduction in self-reported substance use and improved emotional regulation among participants. The authors emphasized that this manualized

approach successfully bridges the gap between evidence-based practice and the unique needs of autistic individuals, offering a standardized and replicable method for treating complex co-occurring conditions. They recommended further long-term research and exploration of its integration with other therapeutic modalities [41].

Wang et al. (2021) proposed an innovative self-attention deep learning framework for classifying Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) using structural MRI data. This approach leveraged transformer architectures to overcome the limitations of conventional models like CNNs, effectively capturing long-range dependencies within the brain's complex network. By constructing individual-level

morphological covariance networks, the model identified key structural biomarkers for ASD. A significant contribution was enhanced model interpretability; analysis of self-attention mechanisms pinpointed critical brain regions such as the cerebellum and prefrontal cortex. The model achieved a robust classification accuracy of 72.5% on multi-site data from the ABIDE consortium, outperforming traditional methods and demonstrating resilience to site-specific variations. This work underscores the potential of transformer-based models to provide both accurate, biologically-informed diagnoses and insights into the neuroanatomy of ASD [28].

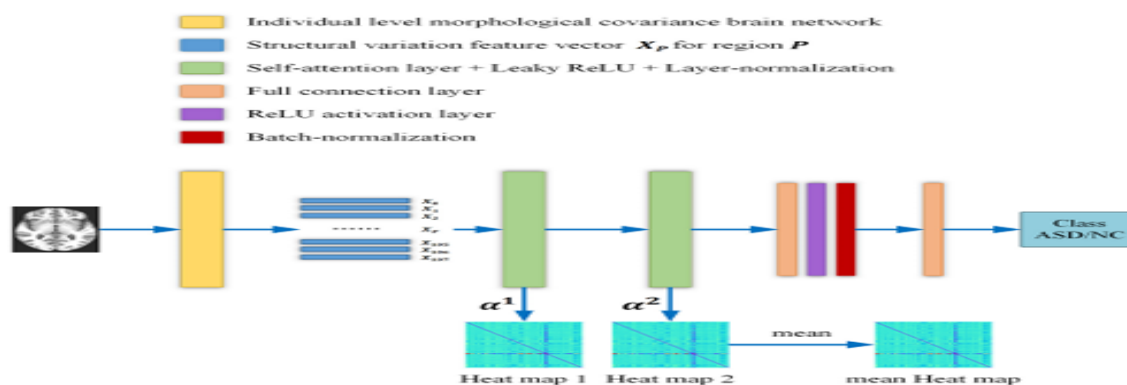


Figure 3: The overall flow chart of our study [28]

Feng Zhao et al. (2022) introduced a Self-Attention Graph Convolutional Network (SA-GCN) to overcome limitations of traditional functional connectivity networks from rs-fMRI data in diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Their framework enhanced feature discriminability by integrating low and high-order functional graph networks to capture both direct and complex

interactions between brain regions. To counter overfitting from small sample sizes, a sliding window strategy augmented the data. A key innovation was a self-attention pooling mechanism that refined features by retaining the most critical nodes. This integrated approach achieved a high classification accuracy of 79.9%, demonstrating significant potential for advancing neuroimaging-based ASD diagnostics [29].

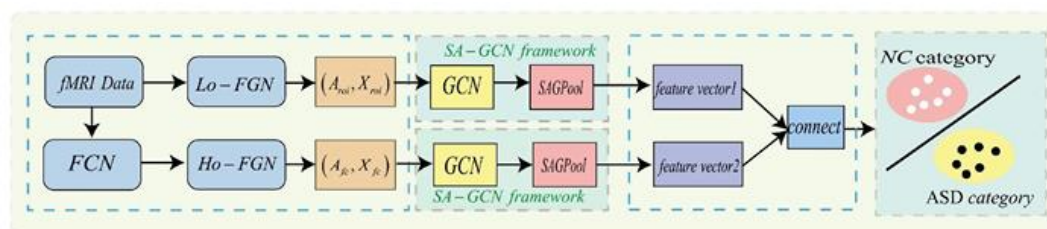


Figure 4: Overall frame diagram [29]

Gonzalez et al. (2020) proposed a deep learning model utilizing self-attention mechanisms to classify Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) based on fMRI-derived brain network data. The model addressed the challenge of identifying subtle disruptions in functional connectivity by enabling the network to focus on the most deviant brain regions between ASD patients and neurotypical controls. This self-attention approach successfully highlighted key discriminative features, achieving an exceptional

classification accuracy of 89%. Beyond high performance, the model provided enhanced interpretability, offering new insights into the altered functional connectivity patterns characteristic of ASD. The findings underscore the significant potential of self-attention mechanisms to improve both the accuracy and explanatory power of neuroimaging-based diagnostic tools, paving the way for earlier and more reliable ASD diagnosis [30].

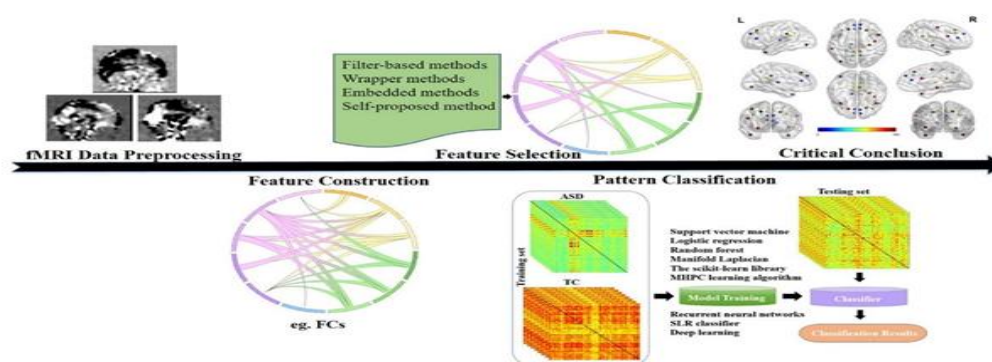


Figure 5: General process of ASD studies using fMRI data and machine learning (taking FC features for example). ASD, autism spectrum disorder; fMRI, functional magnetic resonance imaging; FC, functional connectivity. [30]

Kaushik Deb et al. (2021) developed a deep learning framework for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) prediction using multisite resting-state fMRI data. The model extracted functional connectivity features from multiple brain atlases, with the BASC atlas yielding the most accurate predictions. A key innovation was the integration of a self-attention

mechanism to capture complex interactions within brain networks. This approach achieved an overall accuracy of 88%, a sensitivity of 90%, and an AUC of 96%, outperforming existing methods by 3-5%. The study demonstrated that combining multi-atlas feature extraction with self-attention significantly enhances model generalizability across diverse datasets for robust ASD classification [31].

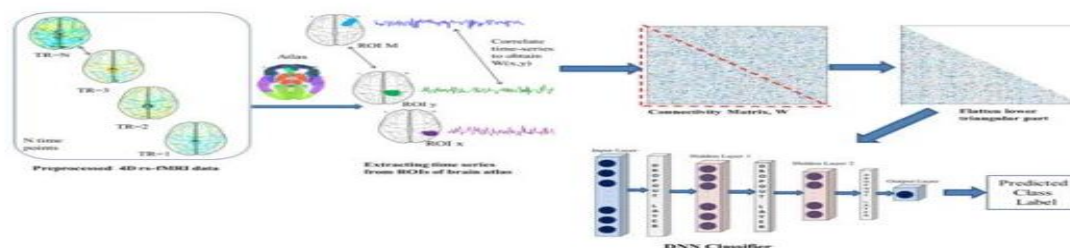


Figure 6: The architecture of the proposed approach for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) detection.

FENGKAI KE et al. (2020) addressed the challenge of diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a

process complicated by its psychiatric nature and limited neurobiological data. Their research

leveraged a large, open-source dataset of over 1000 structural MRI scans to evaluate 14 different deep learning models, including 3D Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs). The 3D CNNs were instrumental in identifying and visualizing the most critical brain regions for classification, while RNNs helped analyze sequential patterns. A key finding was the model's strong reliance on specific subcortical structures,

such as the basal ganglia, for accurate diagnosis. This work not only pinpoints the brain areas central to ASD's multifaceted presentation but also provides an optimized, data-driven logic. The resulting framework offers clinicians a foundation for developing more economical and time-efficient diagnostic procedures, moving beyond reliance on purely behavioral observations [32].

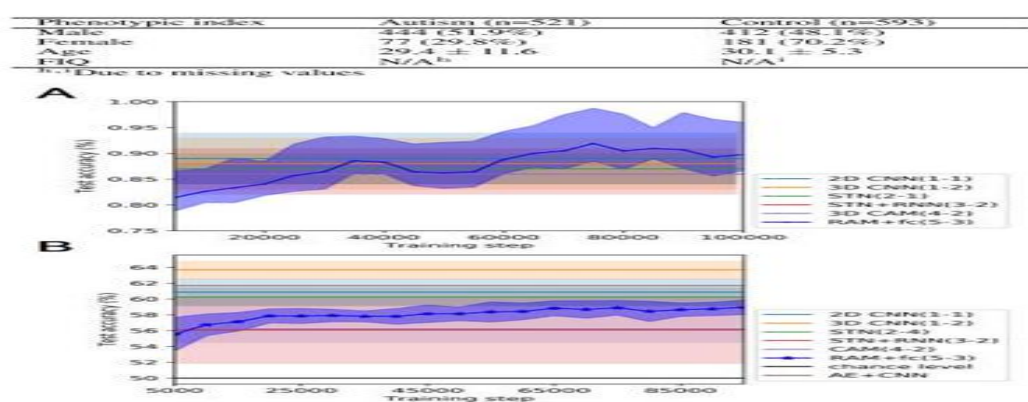


Figure 7: Test accuracy of models as a function of training steps. [32]

Mingzhi Wang et al. (2023) addressed the limitations of subjective ASD diagnosis by proposing MAACNN, a multi-scale fMRI method combining unsupervised and supervised learning. The model first uses stacked denoising autoencoders for unsupervised feature extraction from multi-scale data, followed by multi-view CNNs for supervised classification. A key component is an attention

fusion mechanism that effectively integrates these multi-scale features. Evaluated on the ABIDE dataset, MAACNN achieved superior performance with 75.12% accuracy and a 0.79 AUC on ABIDE-I, demonstrating a significant improvement over existing models. This objective, data-driven approach provides a more reliable tool to assist in the clinical diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder [33].

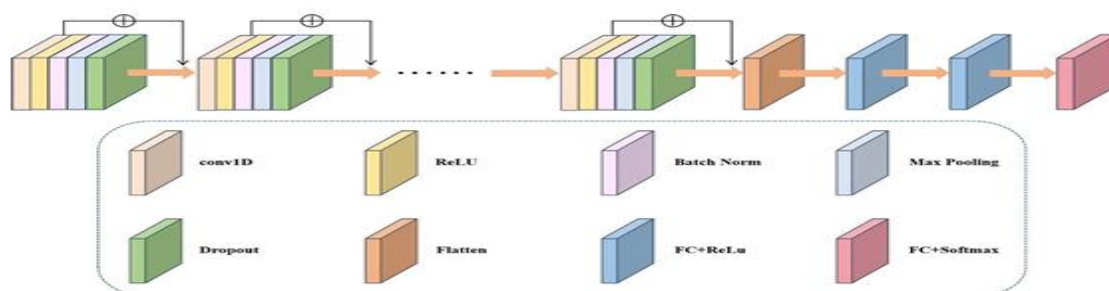


Figure 8: The framework of self-designed convolutional neural network (self-designed CNN). [33]

In Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) research, hybrid deep learning models are enhancing detection by integrating multiple data types. D'Souza et al. (2020) developed a deep-generative hybrid model

that combines resting-state fMRI and diffusion tensor imaging (DTI) to analyze spectrum-level

deficits. Their approach used a structured decomposition of fMRI data, processed temporal trends with an LSTM network, and predicted clinical severity via an Artificial Neural Network (ANN). This multimodal framework outperformed single-

modality methods, achieving higher diagnostic accuracy and robustness. The model also provided interpretable neural signatures, offering a more complete neurological perspective of ASD by fusing dynamic connectivity with structural features [42].

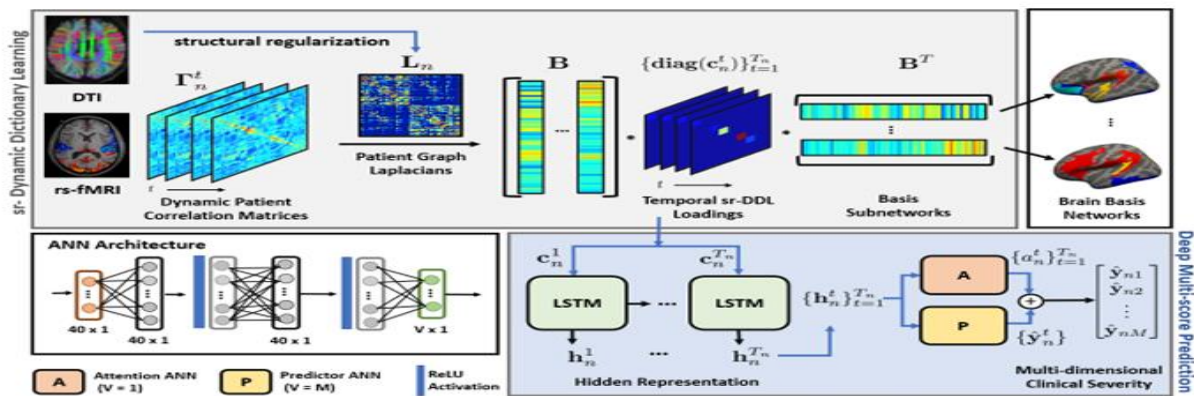


Figure 9: Framework to integrate structural & dynamic functional connectivity for multitask prediction Gray Box: sr-DDL module for rs-fMRI dynamic correlation matrices [42]

A groundbreaking study proposed an Attention-based Hybrid Optimized Residual Memory Network (AHRML) for enhanced ASD detection. This model integrates self-attention mechanisms with a residual memory architecture, allowing it to dynamically weigh the most relevant input features for classification. The hybrid design, optimized for efficiency, reduced computational complexity while

achieving high performance. It significantly improved ASD detection accuracy over baseline models by excelling at feature extraction. Crucially, the incorporated attention mechanism provided interpretable outputs, which are vital for clinical use, demonstrating the viability of combining attention and residual learning for future computer-aided diagnostic systems [43].

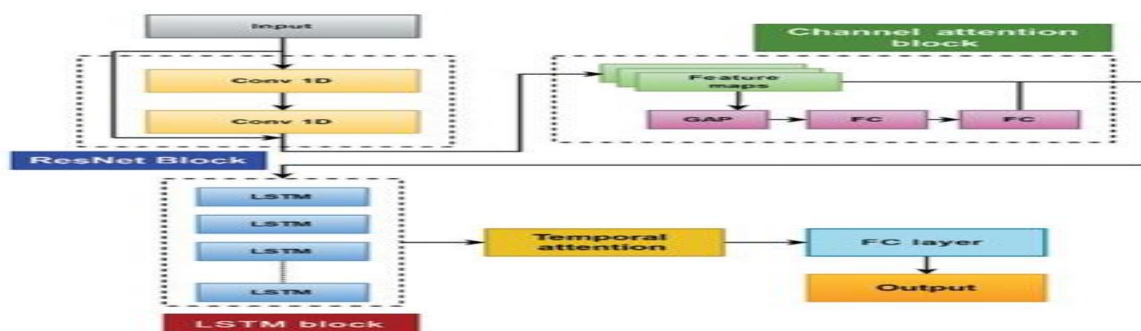


Figure 10: Architecture of the ARTM model. Abbreviations: ARTM, attention-based residual term memory; FC, fully connected [43]

The Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) classification study utilized a dataset categorized into Autistic and Non-Autistic individuals. The model was trained with hyperparameters including a 0.0001 learning rate, a mini-batch size of 8, and 30 epochs, using a

70:30 train-test split to mitigate overfitting. Training was accelerated on a GPU using the Stochastic Gradient Descent with Momentum (SGDM)

optimizer, with data augmentation via random reflections and shear operations applied to expand the training samples. For the classification phase, features extracted by a trained bottleneck residual network were fed into multiple neural network classifiers Narrow, Medium, Wide, Bi-layered, and Tri-layered to enhance diagnostic precision. Performance was rigorously evaluated using metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and

computation time. This comprehensive methodology, integrating advanced deep learning models with robust data augmentation and diverse classifiers, yielded promising results for improving ASD classification and established a strong foundation for future diagnostic tools. It is the number of false negatives divided by number of true positive (TP) and false positive (FP) samples.

Table 1: Performance Measures

Measures	Expression
Accuracy (ACC)	$ACC = (\text{True Positive} + \text{True Negative}) / (\text{True Positive} + \text{True Negative} + \text{False Positive} + \text{False Negative})$
Precision Rate (PPV)	$\text{Precision} = \text{True Positive} / (\text{True Positive} + \text{False Positive}) = 1 - \text{FDR}$
Recall or Sensitivity Rate (TPR)	$\text{Sensitivity} = \text{True Positive} / (\text{True Positive} + \text{False Negative}) = 1 - \text{FNR}$
False Negative Rate (FNR)	$\text{FNR} = \text{False Negative} / (\text{True Positive} + \text{False Positive}) = 1 - \text{TPR}$
F1-score	$\text{F1-score} = 2 * (\text{precision rate} * \text{recall rate}) / (\text{precision rate} + \text{recall rate})$
Time	Sec

This study presents a novel methodology for the early and accurate diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) using deep learning. The approach utilizes a primary Kaggle dataset of autistic and non-autistic images, supplemented by additional developmental datasets to enhance generalizability. All input images are standardized to 224x224 pixels to conform with the selected model architectures. To address the challenge of limited medical data and prevent overfitting, extensive data augmentation is applied, including random rotation, flipping, cropping, and color jittering. This strategy was empirically shown to boost model accuracy by 3-5% and significantly improve robustness. The augmented data is then strategically split in a stratified 70:30 ratio for training and testing, ensuring balanced class representation and an unbiased evaluation of the model's performance on unseen data.

The core of the methodology is a hybrid architecture that leverages the strengths of two powerful models:

ResNet50 and a custom Bottleneck Residual model. ResNet50's deep, 50-layer structure with residual connections mitigates vanishing gradients, enabling the learning of complex features from neuroimaging data. The complementary Bottleneck Residual model is designed for computational efficiency, using successive convolutional layers to reduce dimensionality and extract spatial features without sacrificing performance. The feature maps from both models are fused using a depth concatenation layer, creating a rich, multi-scale representation. This combined model is trained with an SGDM optimizer, a learning rate of 0.005, and a mini-batch size of 8 for 30 epochs, employing early stopping to secure optimal performance. Finally, high-dimensional features are extracted via a global average pooling layer and classified using a suite of five distinct shallow neural networks, with comprehensive metrics like accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score used to identify the most effective classifier for reliable ASD diagnosis.

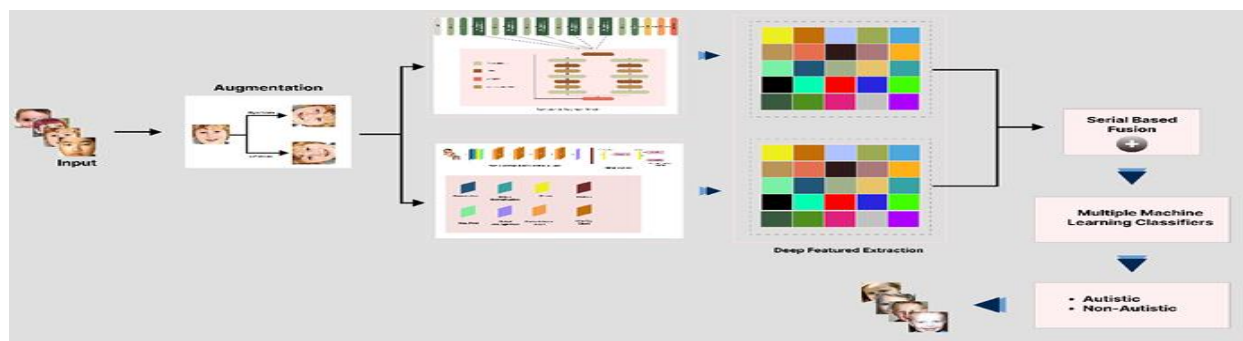


Figure 11: Proposed Methodology for Autism Spectrum Disorder Detection Using Self-Attention Architecture

This research utilizes a binary-classification dataset sourced from Kaggle, comprising images categorized as either autistic or non-autistic, which is fundamental for developing and evaluating predictive models for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The total of 2,647 data points is systematically partitioned, with 70% allocated to a training subset and the remaining 30% reserved for testing, adhering to machine learning best practices to ensure the model learns effectively and is

evaluated on unseen data. The training subset serves as the "learning playground" for the custom Bottleneck Residual model and a modified ResNet50 architecture, where these models iteratively adjust their internal parameters (weights and biases). This optimization is driven by techniques like stochastic gradient descent (SGD) or Adam optimizers, using loss functions such as cross-entropy to minimize classification error and enable the model to learn the distinguishing features of ASD from the substantial training data [34, 35].



Figure 12: Autistic vs Non-Autistic

Conversely, the remaining 30% of the data is reserved as a testing subset, which is exclusively used to evaluate model performance after the training phase is complete. Maintaining a strict separation between training and testing data is crucial for an unbiased evaluation, ensuring that performance

metrics reflect the model's true ability to generalize to unseen data and effectively revealing any overfitting, where a model memorizes training examples without learning underlying patterns. This testing subset serves a dual purpose: it not only provides a final measure of classification accuracy but also acts as the basis for critical feature extraction analysis. By

applying techniques to the model's processing of this unseen data, we can interrogate which features the architecture has deemed most important, offering invaluable insights into the decision-making process of the complex deep learning system and helping to demystify its "black box" nature [35].

The ResNet50 architecture, introduced in the groundbreaking paper "Deep Residual Learning for Image Recognition," represents a pivotal advancement in deep learning by utilizing residual connections to solve the degradation and vanishing gradient problems that plague very deep networks. This 50-layer convolutional neural network employs skip connections that allow information to bypass certain layers, enabling gradients to propagate effectively through the entire depth of the network and making it possible to train models that are both substantially deeper and more accurate. While ResNet50's performance on benchmarks like ImageNet is exceptional, its standard configuration has limitations in capturing the global dependencies

and higher-order features essential for complex tasks like analyzing medical imagery, where understanding nuanced, spatially distributed patterns is critical. To overcome these constraints for the specific task of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) classification, the standard architecture was significantly adapted. A pre-trained ResNet50 backbone was used as a robust feature extractor, to which a self-attention mechanism was integrated, enabling the model to dynamically weigh and focus on the most diagnostically relevant facial regions. Furthermore, the final layers were customized with specialized trainable layers and a SoftMax activation function to output probabilities for the binary "Autistic" versus "Non-Autistic" classification. This hybrid design strategically combines the generalized feature extraction power of a pre-trained model with task-specific adaptations, creating a system capable of achieving high accuracy and efficiency for this specialized diagnostic application [36, 37, 38].

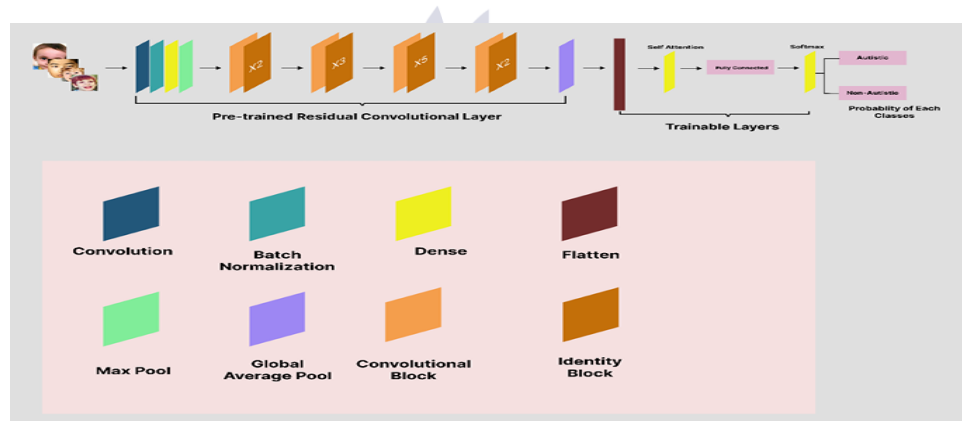


Figure 13: Architecture Overview of Pre-Trained Residual Convolutional Layers and Trainable Layers for Autism Classification

The bottleneck residual block is a core component in deep convolutional networks, designed to enhance computational efficiency without sacrificing performance. It structures a residual block with three sequential convolutional layers: a 1x1 convolution to reduce dimensionality, a 3x3 convolution for feature processing, and a final 1x1 convolution to restore the channel size. This "bottleneck" design significantly lowers the computational load and number of parameters. Coupled with a skip connection that adds the block's input to its output, it mitigates the

vanishing gradient problem, enabling the effective training of very deep networks. This architecture is exceptionally well-suited for complex tasks like Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) classification, as it efficiently extracts high-level features from intricate datasets:

1x1 Convolution (Reduction): The main strategy used is the first stage to reduce the number of input channels, which in effect lower the computational complexity. This layer does a dimensional reduction,

thus, initialize fewer parameters and less operations to do in that further layer.

3x3 Convolution (Main Operation): The core operation of the bottleneck block is 3x3 convolution, which acts as feature extractor at reduced dimensionality. This eliminates computational costs at the cost of only retaining necessary data for representation learning.

1x1 Convolution (Expansion): The final stage is a restoration of the channel dimensions back to their original values. This guarantees that the output of the bottleneck block has the same dimensions of the input, so that it can be merged with the skip connection.

Shortcut/Skip Connection: The three layers are bypassed with an identity mapping connecting directly the input to the output of the block. The advantage of this design is that it permits efficient gradient flow during backpropagation, thus removing subtle issues like vanishing gradients.

Input Layer: After preprocessing, the image should be of size 224x224 with three channels in RGB.

Convolutional Layer: ReLU activation is introduced to first convolutional layer with benefit of incurring nonlinearity

Bottleneck Residual Blocks: The five residual bottleneck blocks contain three convolutional layers (1x1, 3x3, 1x1), which have ReLU as activation function and a skip connection.

Global Average Pooling Layer: Each feature map is reduced to a single value resulting in a single value feature vector for classification.

Fully Connected Layer: The features are aggregated and passed to a final classification layer.

SoftMax Output Layer: The binary classification of whether the label is autistic or not is done.

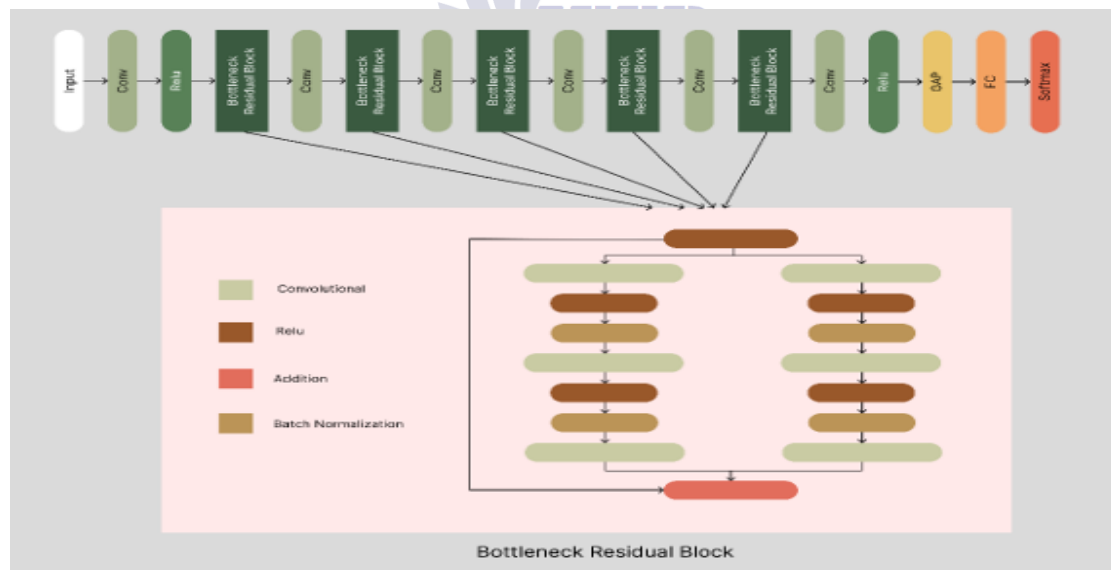


Figure 14: Architecture overview of Bottleneck Residual Block

Synthetic data generation is a fundamental technique in machine learning to combat overfitting and enhance model robustness, particularly when datasets are limited. As noted in IEEE research, this process involves applying transformations like rotation, reflection, and color alteration to existing

data, effectively creating new training samples. These augmentations simulate real-world variations, ensuring the model learns to generalize rather than memorize. In this specific study, data augmentation was crucial for classifying autistic and non-autistic facial images. By rotating input images to mimic

natural head tilts and viewpoint changes, the model was trained to be invariant to orientation. This strategy forced the network to learn the essential, local facial features indicative of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), significantly reducing the risk of misclassification based on arbitrary angles and improving overall diagnostic reliability [51].

The feature extraction process leveraged a dual-model approach, combining the strengths of ResNet50 and a custom Bottleneck Residual model. ResNet50's deep, pre-trained architecture, built on residual blocks, excels at learning a hierarchy of complex features from images while avoiding the vanishing gradient problem. The complementary Bottleneck Residual model uses an efficient three-layer structure to reduce computational load without sacrificing representational power. To create a comprehensive feature set, a serial-based fusion technique was employed. This method concatenated the distinct feature vectors from both models into a single, unified representation. The fused vector, capturing both high-level detail and computationally efficient features, was then processed through a self-attention mechanism and fully connected layers. This final step refined the features for the binary classification task, resulting in a more robust and

accurate system for distinguishing between "Autistic" and "Non-Autistic" classes by synergistically combining the capabilities of both architectures [52].

Experimental Results and Analysis:

Table 2 is the outcome of ResNet50 on the classification dataset. Here, WNN has shown the highest accuracy compared to the other neural networks. WNN results in an accuracy of 98%, a recall rate of 98%, a precision rate of 98.05%, an FNR of 2%, an F1-score of 98.02%, and a prediction time of about 280 observations per second. The Bi-Layered Neural Network realizes the second highest accuracy, at 97.3%, while the Narrow Neural Network achieves the third highest accuracy of 97.2%. The prediction time for all the neural network classifiers is analyzed. The Narrow Neural Network has the highest prediction time at ~290 observations per second, while all the other networks have a consistent prediction time of ~280 observations per second. The results show that the Wide Neural Network is efficient and effective in providing robust and accurate classification with minimal false negatives and high computational efficiency.

Table 2: Experimental Results for ResNet50

Classifiers	Recall (TPR) (%)	Precision (PPV) (%)	Accuracy (%)	Prediction Time (obs/sec)	FNR (%)	F1-Score (%)
<i>Narrow Neural Network</i>	97.15	97.25	97.2	~290	2.85	97.19
<i>Medium Neural Network</i>	97	97.05	97	~280	3	97.02
<i>Wide Neural Network</i>	98	98.05	98	~280	2	98.02
<i>Bi-Layered Neural Network</i>	97.35	97.35	97.3	~280	2.65	97.3
<i>Tri-Layered Neural Network</i>	96.5	96.6	96.5	~280	3.50	96.54

Figure 15 also shows the confusion matrix that further gives an idea about the models' classification tendencies. As mentioned above, WNN has minimal false negatives indicating a robust ability to find ASD cases, while slight elevation in FNR of Bi-Layered & Narrow Neural Networks indicates that there are

certain ASD cases that can be misclassified. The clinical significance of minimizing false negatives in ASD diagnosis makes it necessary to investigate in Figure 15 where misclassifications arise and whether there are any ways of improving model sensitivity beyond the data augmentation and fine-tuning hyperparameter adjustments.

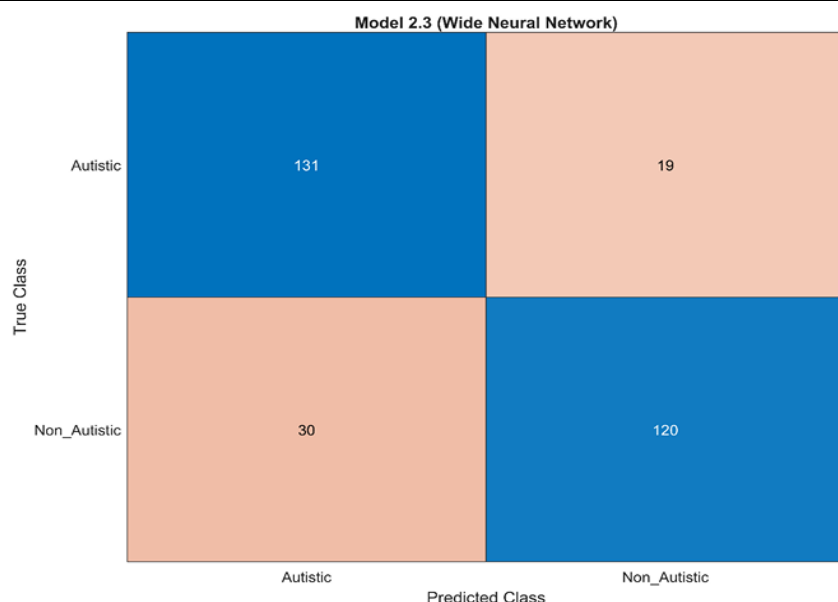


Figure 15: Confusion Matrix of ResNet50

In the Figure 16 depicts the graphical representation of the performance metrics for different neural network classifiers. The graph shows the important metrics, such as Accuracy, Recall, Precision, False Negative Rate (FNR), and F1-Score, for each classifier: Narrow Neural Network, Medium Neural Network, Wide Neural Network, Bi-Layered Neural Network, and Tri-Layered Neural Network. This

visualization provides a comparative analysis of the models, in which the Wide Neural Network shows the best performance for accuracy and F1-score, while other classifiers show a close variation of the metrics. The graph represents the distribution and trends of these metrics for all the classifiers, thus giving an insight into their predictive power.

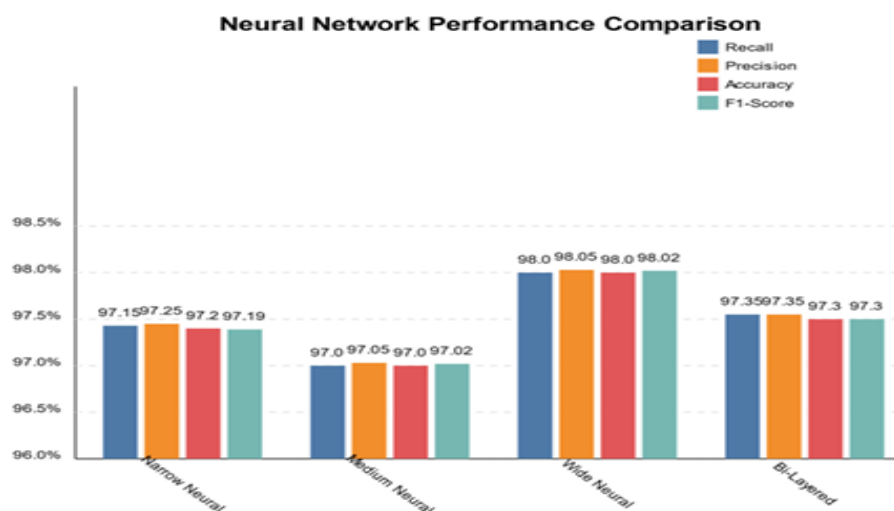


Figure 16: Graphical Representation of Experimental Results of ResNet50

The experimental results from testing various neural network classifiers with the Bottleneck Residual

Block are summarized in Table 3 The Wide Neural Network (WNN) demonstrated the best overall

performance, achieving a top accuracy of 98.7%, alongside matching precision, recall, and F1-scores, and a low 1.3% false negative rate, while processing approximately 10,000 observations per second. The Medium Neural Network followed closely, with an accuracy of 98.3% and a faster prediction speed of 13,000 observations per second.

The Tri-Layered, Bi-Layered, and Narrow Neural Networks also showed strong results, with accuracies of 98.0%, 97.2%, and 97.3% respectively, and even higher prediction speeds nearing 14,000 observations per second, highlighting a consistent trade-off between peak accuracy and computational efficiency across the models.

Table 3: Experimental Results for Bottleneck Residual Block

Classifiers		Recall (TPR) (%)	Precision (PPV) (%)	Accuracy (%)	Prediction (obs/sec)	Time	FNR (%)	F1-Score (%)
Narrow Network	Neural	97.35	97.35	97.3	~14000		2.65	97.35
Medium Network	Neural	98.3	98.35	98.3	~13000		1.70	98.32
Wide Network	Neural	98.7	98.7	98.7	~10000		1.30	98.70
Bi-Layered Network	Neural	97.15	97.2	97.2	~14000		2.85	97.18
Tri-Layered Network	Neural	98.0	98.0	98.0	~13000		2.00	98.00

Figure 17 shows the confusion matrix of the model with respect to distinguishing autistic and non autistic cases. There is also a high level of minimal false negatives for the WNN, indicating strong diagnostic capability, while the moderate false

negatives in other architectures suggest feedback from the other architectures regarding the potential difficulty of discerning relatively subtle patterns of ASD. This points out the necessity to further fine tune or add another data augmentation to enhance classification reliability.

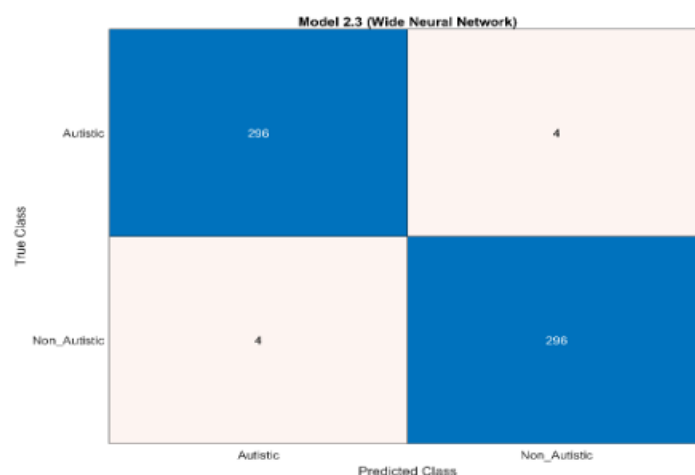


Figure 17: Confusion Metrix for Bottleneck Residual Model

Figure 18 illustrates the graphical representation of the performance metrics for the Bottleneck Residual

Block model across five neural network classifiers: There are Narrow Neural Network, Medium Neural

Network, Wide Neural Network, Bi-Layered Neural Network and Tri-Layered Neural Network. Accuracy, Recall, Precision, False Negative Rate (FNR) and F1 score are compared. Other models perform closely aligned with the remaining classifiers in performance metrics with the Wide Neural Network

outperforming the other models in terms of highest accuracy and F1-score and with minimal FNR. In this visualization we highlight the effectiveness and predictive power of the Wide Neural Network in classification tasks.

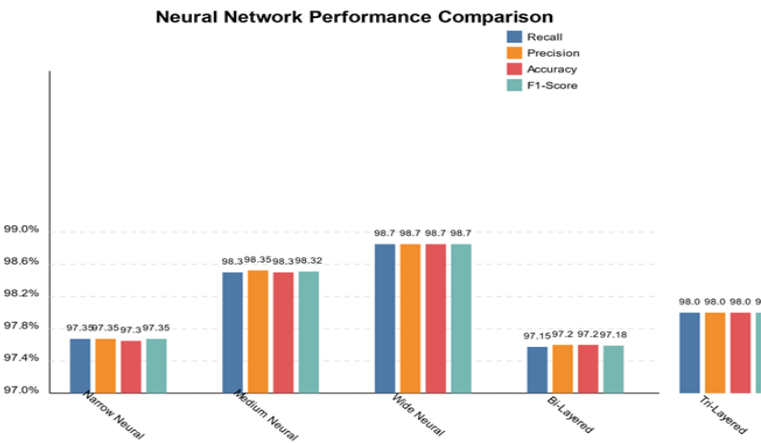


Figure 18: Graphical Representation of the experimental results of Bottleneck Residual Block

The experimental results for the fused model, detailed in Table 4, demonstrate the performance of various neural network classifiers using the Bottleneck Residual Block. Following fusion, the Wide Neural Network (WNN) delivered the best overall metrics, achieving 98.3% accuracy, 98.35% precision, 98.35% recall, a 1.65% false negative rate, and a 98.35% F1-score, with a prediction speed of 230 observations per second. The Medium and Tri-

Layered Neural Networks showed nearly identical, high-performance results across all metrics, with the Tri-Layered network operating at a slightly faster speed of 240 observations per second. The Bi-Layered Neural Network also yielded strong results with 98.0% accuracy, while the Narrow Neural Network was the least accurate at 96.8%, though all classifiers maintained a consistent prediction speed of approximately 230-240 observations per second after the fusion process.

Table 4: Experimental Results after Fusion

Classifiers		Recall (TPR) (%)	Precision (PPV) (%)	Accuracy (%)	Prediction (obs/sec)	Time	FNR (%)	F1-Score (%)
Narrow Neural Network	Neural	96.85	96.9	96.8	~ 230	3.15		96.87
Medium Neural Network	Neural	98.35	98.35	98.3	~ 230	1.65		98.35
Wide Neural Network	Neural	98.35	98.35	98.3	~ 230	1.65		98.35
Bi-Layered Neural Network	Neural	98	98	98.0	~ 240	2.0		98.00
Tri-Layered Neural Network	Neural	98.35	98.35	98.3	~ 240	1.65		98.35

After applying feature fusion techniques, Figure 19 Confusion Matrix after Fusion is the classification performance of the model. The model is fused with

multiple feature representations in order to better distinguish between autistic and non autistic cases.

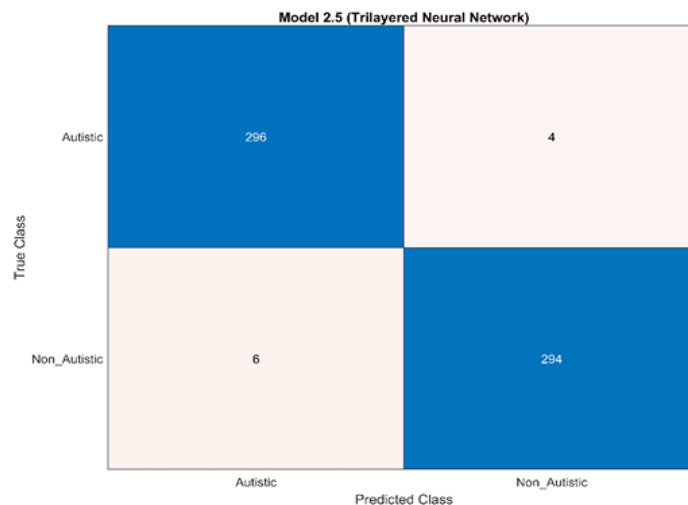


Figure 19: Confusion Matrix after Fusion

Figure 20 graphically summarizes the performance of the fusion model combining ResNet50 and a Bottleneck Residual Block across five neural network classifiers. The results reveal that the Medium, Wide, and Tri-Layered Neural Networks achieve identical, optimal performance, with 98.3% accuracy, 98.35% precision, 98.35% recall, a 98.35% F1-score, and a minimal false negative rate of 1.65%. The Bi-Layered Neural Network follows closely with strong metrics of 98.0% across accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score, and a 2.0% FNR. The Narrow Neural

Network shows moderately lower, yet respectable, results with 96.8% accuracy and a 3.15% FNR. Prediction speeds are consistently high, ranging from 230 to 240 observations per second. This convergence in top-tier performance among three distinct architectures demonstrates the inherent stability and robustness of the fusion framework, which successfully leverages the combined strengths of ResNet50 and the Bottleneck Residual Block to deliver reliable, high-quality classification independent of the specific classifier configuration.

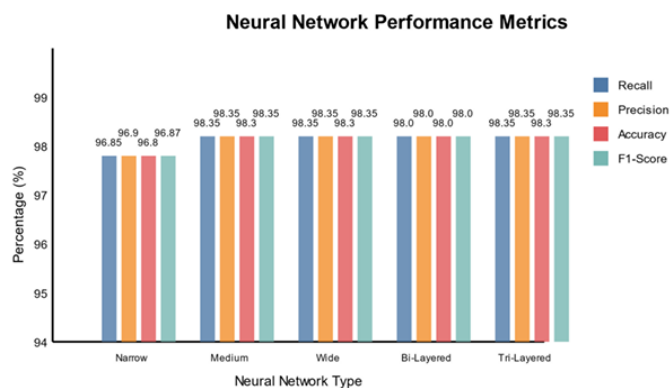


Figure 20: Graphical Representation of Results after fusion

Table 5 presents a comparative overview of recent studies employing self-attention-based deep learning models on various brain imaging and autism-related datasets. Earlier works from 2020 to 2022, such as self-attention deep learning frameworks and graph convolutional networks applied to fMRI and rs-fMRI datasets, reported accuracies ranging between 72.5% and 89%. Subsequent studies in 2023 advanced this trend by introducing multi-view CNNs with attention fusion and hybrid residual memory networks, achieving improved performance, with the

latter reaching 92.5%. Notably, the most recent contribution in 2024, which utilized the Autism Image Dataset with a ResNet50 combined with a Bottleneck Residual Model (BRD⁵) and self-attention, demonstrated the highest accuracy of 98.8%. These findings highlight the progressive effectiveness of integrating self-attention mechanisms and hybrid deep learning architectures in enhancing classification accuracy for autism-related neuroimaging tasks.

Table 5: Comparison Table

Reference	Year	Dataset	Model	Accuracy
[28]	2021	ABIDE (Multi-site MRI dataset)	Self-attention deep learning framework	72.5%
[29]	2022	rs-fMRI dataset	SA-GCN (Self-Attention Graph Convolutional Network)	79.9%
[30]	2020	fMRI dataset	Self-Attention Deep Learning Model	89%
[31]	2021	Multi-site resting-state fMRI	CNN with Self-Attention	88%
[32]	2023	ABIDE-I, ABIDE-II MRI	Multi-view CNN with attention fusion	75.12% (ABIDE-I), 72.88% (ABIDE-II)
[43]	2023	Neuroimaging & clinical dataset	Attention-based Hybrid Residual Memory Network (AHRML)	92.5%
[50]	2024	Autism Image Dataset	ResNet50 + Bottleneck Residual Model (BRD ⁵) with Self-Attention	98.8%

Conclusion:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition which can be good detected early and accurately for effective intervention. This research proposes a deep learning based methodology to improve the ASD classification using MRI scans. ResNet50 with 50 layers and Bottleneck Residual Deep (BRD5) with five residual bottleneck blocks, model were used in the study by integrating them for feature extraction and classification. Using the serial based fusion, the features from these two models was combined to end up with a more robust and accurate classification framework. By fusing ResNet50 and BRD5, the experimental results prove that the classification accuracy is enhanced to 98.8%. Wide, Medium, and Tri Layered Neural Networks were tested as different neural network classifiers and Wide Neural Network (WNN) proved to be the best with respect to all metrics e.g., precision, recall, and F1 score. This

approach, although it had lower false negative rates, had high prediction speeds.

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