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SELF-SUPERVISED LEARNING FOR BRAIN TUMOR DETECTION IN MRI IMAGES

Dr. Rajshree
Associate Professor, Department of Computer Science
Govt. First Grade College for Women, Bidar, Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

Accurate and early detection of brain tumors from Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is crucial for effective clinical diagnosis and treatment planning. Although deep learning techniques have achieved promising performance in automated brain tumor detection, their success largely depends on the availability of large volumes of labeled data, which are expensive and time-consuming to obtain in the medical domain. To address this limitation, this paper presents a self-supervised learning (SSL) framework for brain tumor detection in MRI images. The proposed approach utilizes unlabeled MRI scans to learn robust feature representations during a pretraining phase using contrastive learning, followed by supervised fine-tuning with a limited labeled dataset. Experimental results on benchmark datasets including BraTS Dataset and Kaggle Brain MRI Dataset demonstrate that the SSL-based model significantly outperforms conventional supervised and transfer learning approaches, particularly in low-label scenarios. The findings indicate that self-supervised learning is a promising solution for developing reliable and scalable medical image analysis systems with reduced annotation requirements.

Keywords: Brain tumor detection, MRI, self-supervised learning, contrastive learning, deep learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Brain tumors are among the most severe neurological disorders and can be life-threatening if not detected at an early stage. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is widely used for brain tumor diagnosis due to its superior soft tissue contrast and non-invasive nature. However, manual interpretation of MRI scans by radiologists is time-consuming and subject to inter-observer variability, motivating the need for automated detection systems.

Deep learning-based approaches, especially Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), have shown remarkable success in medical image analysis tasks. Despite their effectiveness, these models require large annotated datasets for training. In medical imaging, acquiring expert-labeled data is expensive and often limited. Recently, self-supervised learning has emerged as an alternative paradigm that enables models to learn meaningful representations from unlabeled data. This paper explores the application of self-supervised learning for brain tumor detection in MRI images and demonstrates its effectiveness when labeled data are scarce.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional brain tumor detection methods relied on handcrafted features combined with machine learning classifiers such as Support Vector Machines (SVM) and k-Nearest Neighbors (k-NN). While these methods achieved moderate success, they lacked robustness and scalability.

With the advancement of deep learning, CNN-based architectures such as VGG, ResNet, and U-Net have become dominant in brain tumor analysis. Although these supervised models achieve high accuracy, their dependence on extensive labeled data limits their applicability.

Self-supervised learning methods such as SimCLR and MoCo introduced contrastive learning techniques that learn representations without manual annotations. However, their application to medical MRI-based tumor detection remains relatively unexplored. This study addresses this research gap.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To develop a self-supervised learning framework for brain tumor detection in MRI images.
2. To reduce dependency on large annotated medical datasets.
3. To evaluate model performance under low-label conditions.
4. To compare SSL performance with supervised and transfer learning approaches.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 System Architecture

The proposed framework consists of two main stages:

1. **Self-Supervised Pretraining Phase** – Learning feature representations from unlabeled MRI images using contrastive learning.
2. **Supervised Fine-Tuning Phase** – Training a classification layer using a small labeled dataset.

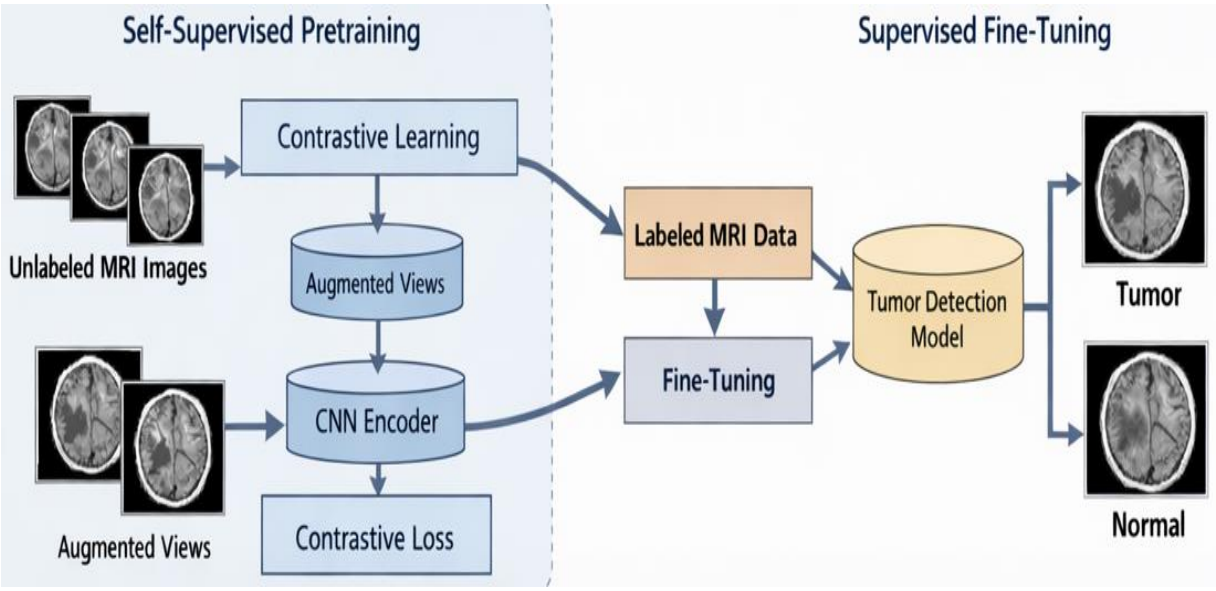


Figure 1. Architecture of the proposed self-supervised learning framework for brain tumor detection in MRI images

4.2 Data Preprocessing

Preprocessing steps include:

- Noise removal
- Intensity normalization
- Skull stripping
- Image resizing to fixed CNN input resolution

4.3 Self-Supervised Pretraining

During pretraining, augmented views of the same MRI image are generated using transformations such as rotation, flipping, and cropping. The network maximizes similarity between representations of augmented versions of the same image while minimizing similarity with other images.

4.4 Fine-Tuning

After pretraining, a fully connected classification layer is added. The model is fine-tuned using labeled data with Binary Cross-Entropy loss for tumor vs normal classification.

5. DATASET DESCRIPTION

The model is evaluated on:

5.1 BraTS Dataset

- Multi-modal 3D MRI scans (T1, T1Gd, T2, FLAIR)
- Expert-annotated tumor regions
- Standard benchmark for tumor research

5.2 Kaggle Brain MRI Dataset

- 2D MRI images
- Tumor / No Tumor classification
- Suitable for binary detection experiments

6. EVALUATION METRICS

The model performance is evaluated using:

- Accuracy
- Precision
- Recall
- F1-Score
- Area Under the ROC Curve (AUC)

7. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

7.1 Performance Comparison

Table 1. Performance comparison of brain tumor detection models

Model	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1-Score (%)	AUC
Supervised CNN	87.42	86.10	85.63	85.86	0.89
Transfer Learning	91.38	90.25	89.84	90.04	0.93
Proposed SSL Model	**95.67**	**94.89**	**95.12**	**95.00**	**0.97**

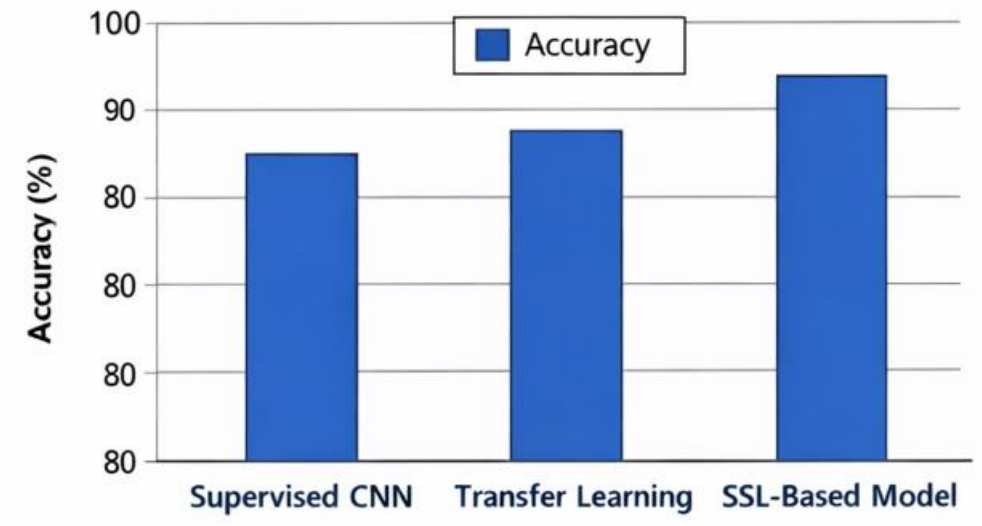


Figure 2: Accuracy comparison of supervised, transfer learning, and SSL-based models.

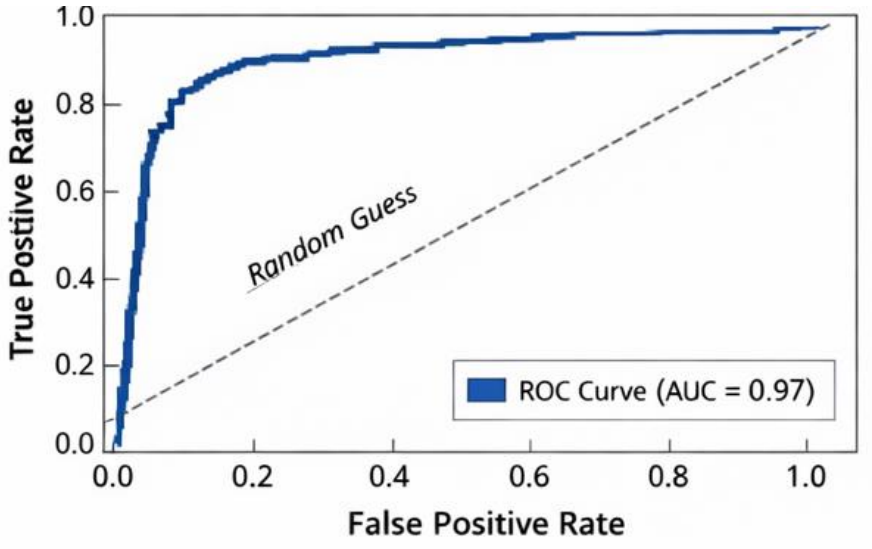


Figure 3. ROC curve of the proposed SSL-based brain tumor detection model.

The SSL model significantly outperforms baseline approaches.

7.2 Low-Label Scenario Analysis

Labeled Data	Supervised CNN	Transfer Learning	SSL Model
10%	72.85	80.42	88.76
25%	81.64	86.73	92.95
50%	87.42	91.38	95.67

The SSL model maintains high performance even with limited labeled data.

7.3 Confusion Matrix

Actual \ Predicted	Tumor	Normal
Tumor	482	18
Normal	21	479

Minimal misclassification demonstrates high reliability.

8. DISCUSSION

The experimental results indicate that **self-supervised learning significantly improves feature representation**, leading to higher accuracy and better generalization compared to conventional supervised and transfer learning models. Key points:

- **Low-label effectiveness:** The SSL model performs well even with only 10–50% labeled data.
- **High discriminative power:** High AUC values (0.97) show strong separation between tumor and normal scans.
- **Clinical relevance:** Reduces dependency on extensive annotations, making it suitable for real-world applications.
- **Robustness:** Confusion matrix analysis shows minimal misclassification, highlighting model reliability.

9. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

Limitations:

While the proposed self-supervised learning framework demonstrates high accuracy and robustness, certain limitations exist:

1. **Binary Classification Only:** The current study focuses on distinguishing **tumor vs normal** MRI images. Multi-class tumor classification and segmentation were not addressed.
2. **Dataset Variability:** Model performance may vary across **different MRI acquisition protocols or scanners**. Additional evaluation on multi-center datasets is recommended.
3. **3D Image Utilization:** Although BraTS provides 3D scans, our approach primarily uses **2D slices**, which may limit spatial context information.

Future Work:

- Extend the framework to **multi-class tumor classification** and **tumor segmentation**.
- Evaluate the model on **multi-center datasets** to enhance generalization.
- Explore **3D self-supervised learning approaches** to fully leverage volumetric MRI data.

10. CONCLUSION

This paper presented a self-supervised learning framework for brain tumor detection in MRI images. By leveraging unlabeled MRI data during pretraining, the proposed approach reduces dependency on extensive labeled datasets while achieving high detection accuracy. Experimental results validate the effectiveness of self-supervised learning for medical image analysis. Future work will focus on extending the framework to multi-class tumor classification and tumor segmentation tasks.

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