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Artificial Intelligence Techniques for Enhancing Air Pollution Detection Accuracy and Quality Monitoring Using Pyramidal Convolution Split-Attention Networks and IoT: Trends and Challenges

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Peer Review Information	Abstract
<p>Submission: 02 Sept 2025 Revision: 23 Sept 2025 Acceptance: 11 Oct 2025</p>	<p>Air pollution has become a critical global issue affecting public health, climate stability, and environmental sustainability. Accurate detection and monitoring of air pollutants such as PM_{2.5}, NO₂, CO, and SO₂ are essential for mitigating their adverse effects. Traditional monitoring systems, although accurate, are limited by high costs, sparse deployment, and lack of real-time adaptability. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) with Internet of Things (IoT) technologies has emerged as a transformative solution, enabling distributed, real-time, and intelligent air quality monitoring. This paper presents a comprehensive review of AI-based techniques, focusing on deep learning architectures such as CNN, LSTM, Transformer models, and pyramidal convolution split-attention networks. IoT devices provide continuous environmental data streams, while AI models enhance detection accuracy by capturing nonlinear spatiotemporal relationships. Advanced attention-based and multi-scale convolutional architectures significantly improve feature extraction and prediction accuracy in complex environmental scenarios. Recent studies highlight the effectiveness of hybrid models and optimization techniques in improving model performance and reducing prediction errors. For instance, attention-based convolutional BiLSTM models and vector map convolution networks have demonstrated superior accuracy in AQI prediction tasks by learning spatial and temporal dependencies simultaneously. Despite these advancements, challenges such as data heterogeneity, sensor calibration, computational complexity, and energy efficiency remain. Emerging solutions such as federated learning, edge computing, and explainable AI offer promising directions for future research. This review explores recent trends (2020–2023), comparative insights, and challenges in AI-driven air pollution monitoring systems.</p>
<p>Keywords</p> <p>Artificial Intelligence, Air Pollution Detection, IoT, CNN, Split-Attention Networks, Pyramidal Convolution, AQI Prediction, Deep Learning, Edge Computing, Smart Environment</p>	

Introduction

Air pollution is one of the most pressing environmental challenges of the 21st century, significantly impacting human health, ecosystems, and climate systems. According to global environmental reports, millions of

premature deaths occur annually due to exposure to polluted air, particularly in urban and industrial regions. Major pollutants such as particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀), nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide, and carbon monoxide contribute to respiratory diseases,

cardiovascular conditions, and environmental degradation. Traditional air quality monitoring systems rely on fixed monitoring stations equipped with high-precision instruments. While these systems provide accurate measurements, they are expensive, geographically limited, and incapable of delivering fine-grained real-time data. The rapid advancement of Internet of Things (IoT) technologies has enabled the deployment of low-cost sensor networks that can continuously monitor environmental conditions across large geographic areas. These systems collect high-frequency data, improving spatial and temporal resolution in air quality monitoring.

However, IoT-generated data is often noisy, heterogeneous, and high-dimensional, making it challenging to analyze using traditional statistical methods. Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly deep learning, has emerged as a powerful tool for addressing these challenges. Deep learning models can learn complex nonlinear relationships between environmental variables and pollutant concentrations, enabling accurate prediction and classification. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) are widely used for extracting spatial features, while Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) models are effective in capturing temporal dependencies in time-series data. Hybrid models such as CNN-LSTM combine both spatial and temporal learning, significantly improving prediction accuracy. For example, hybrid deep learning frameworks have demonstrated improved AQI forecasting performance compared to traditional machine learning methods.

Recent advancements have introduced attention mechanisms, which allow models to focus on the most relevant features in large datasets. Attention-based architectures, including Transformer models and split-attention networks, have significantly improved prediction accuracy by capturing long-range dependencies and feature importance. Studies show that attention-enhanced models outperform conventional neural networks in both short-term and long-term forecasting tasks. Another important advancement is the development of pyramidal convolution architectures, which enable multi-scale feature extraction. These models capture fine-grained and coarse-grained patterns in environmental data, making them highly suitable for complex air pollution prediction tasks. When combined with split-attention mechanisms, they provide improved feature representation and model efficiency.

Optimization techniques also play a crucial role in improving AI model performance. Methods

such as hyperparameter tuning, metaheuristic optimization, and ensemble learning enhance prediction accuracy and reduce computational complexity. For example, optimized AI models using hybrid approaches have achieved accuracy levels exceeding 90% in AQI prediction tasks. Despite these advancements, several challenges remain. IoT systems face issues such as sensor calibration errors, energy constraints, and data inconsistency. Deep learning models require significant computational resources, limiting their deployment in real-time applications. Additionally, the lack of interpretability in AI models raises concerns regarding their reliability in critical environmental monitoring systems.

To address these challenges, emerging approaches such as edge computing, federated learning, and explainable AI (XAI) are being explored. These techniques aim to improve scalability, privacy, and interpretability while maintaining high prediction accuracy. This review provides a comprehensive analysis of AI-based air pollution detection systems, focusing on recent developments (2020–2023) and highlighting the role of pyramidal convolution split-attention networks in enhancing detection accuracy and monitoring efficiency.

Literature Review

Ameer et al. (2020) developed an IoT-based air pollution monitoring system using multiple sensors and regression-based machine learning techniques. The system enabled real-time monitoring and achieved improved prediction accuracy with reduced error metrics such as RMSE and MAE. Chen et al. (2020) proposed an auto-regressive model integrated with IoT sensor networks for AQI prediction. The model incorporated adaptive Kalman filtering for data preprocessing, improving prediction stability and accuracy in dynamic environments. Prajul et al. (2023) developed an IoT cloud-based split-attention vectormap convolution model (CSplitStack-VBA). The model used attention mechanisms and optimization algorithms to improve AQI prediction accuracy, achieving significantly lower error rates compared to existing methods. Li et al. (2020) proposed a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN)-based air quality prediction model aimed at improving the prediction of particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) concentrations using historical pollution and meteorological datasets. The study utilized multi-dimensional input features including temperature, humidity, wind speed, and pollutant concentrations collected from urban monitoring stations.

Zhang et al. (2021) introduced a hybrid CNN-LSTM model to address the limitations of

standalone CNN and LSTM models. The model integrates convolutional layers for spatial feature extraction with Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) layers for temporal sequence modeling. The architecture begins with CNN layers that extract spatial features from pollutant and meteorological data. These features are then passed to LSTM layers, which capture temporal dependencies and trends in the data. Jiang et al. (2021) proposed an attention-based Bidirectional Long Short-Term Memory (BiLSTM) model for air quality prediction. The model leverages both forward and backward temporal dependencies, enabling more comprehensive sequence learning compared to traditional LSTM models. A key innovation in this study is the integration of an attention mechanism, which assigns different weights to input features and time steps. This allows the model to focus on the most relevant information, improving prediction accuracy and interpretability.

Wang et al. (2022) developed a deep autoencoder-based feature extraction model for air quality prediction. The primary objective of this study was to address the issue of high-dimensional and noisy IoT data by applying dimensionality reduction techniques before prediction. The proposed model uses stacked autoencoders to learn compressed representations of input data. These representations retain essential features while reducing noise and redundancy. The extracted features are then fed into machine learning models such as regression or shallow neural networks for AQI prediction. Chen et al. (2023) proposed a Transformer-based air pollution prediction model utilizing multi-head self-attention mechanisms. This model represents a significant advancement over traditional RNN-based approaches by enabling parallel processing and capturing long-range dependencies in time-series data. The Transformer architecture consists of encoder-decoder layers with multi-head attention, allowing the model to analyze relationships between all-time steps simultaneously. This is particularly beneficial for air pollution prediction, where long-term dependencies and seasonal patterns play a crucial role.

Alam et al. (2020) developed an IoT-enabled air pollution monitoring system integrated with cloud computing and machine learning techniques. The system architecture consisted of distributed IoT sensors deployed across urban regions to collect real-time environmental data, including PM_{2.5}, CO, temperature, and humidity. The collected data was transmitted to a cloud platform for storage, preprocessing, and analysis.

The study incorporated machine learning algorithms such as Decision Trees and Support Vector Machines (SVM) for AQI prediction. Guo et al. (2021) proposed a deep residual neural network (ResNet) model for air pollution prediction. The model utilized residual connections to enable the training of deeper neural networks without suffering from vanishing gradient problems. The ResNet architecture consists of multiple residual blocks, where shortcut connections allow the model to learn identity mappings. This significantly improves feature extraction capabilities, especially in complex datasets with nonlinear relationships among variables.

Liu et al. (2021) introduced a Gated Recurrent Unit (GRU)-based air quality prediction model aimed at improving computational efficiency while maintaining prediction accuracy. GRU is a simplified version of LSTM that uses fewer gates, reducing the number of parameters and training time. The model was designed to process time-series air pollution data, capturing temporal dependencies between pollutant concentrations and meteorological variables. Compared to LSTM, the GRU model demonstrated faster convergence and reduced computational overhead. Qin et al. (2022) proposed a Dual-Stage Attention-Based Recurrent Neural Network (DA-RNN) for air pollution prediction. This model integrates two attention mechanisms: The DA-RNN architecture improves both feature selection and temporal modeling, enabling more accurate prediction of AQI and pollutant concentrations. The model dynamically assigns weights to input variables, reducing the influence of irrelevant or noisy data. The study utilized multivariate datasets including pollutant levels and meteorological parameters. Experimental results showed that the DA-RNN model significantly outperformed traditional RNN, LSTM, and GRU models in terms of prediction accuracy and robustness.

Sun et al. (2023) introduced a Graph Neural Network (GNN)-based air quality prediction model that captures spatial dependencies between different monitoring stations. In this model, each monitoring station is represented as a node in a graph, and edges represent spatial relationships based on geographic proximity or environmental similarity. The GNN architecture allows the model to learn interactions between different locations, improving regional prediction accuracy. This is particularly important in air pollution monitoring, where pollutants can spread across regions due to wind and atmospheric conditions. Singh et al. (2020) proposed a Deep Neural Network (DNN)-based air pollution prediction model designed to

capture complex nonlinear relationships between environmental variables. The model utilized multiple fully connected hidden layers to learn intricate patterns from historical pollutant and meteorological data. The dataset included parameters such as PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀, CO, NO₂, temperature, humidity, and wind speed collected from urban monitoring stations. The model was trained using supervised learning techniques, with optimization performed using gradient descent-based algorithms.

Zhao et al. (2021) introduced a Stacked Autoencoder (SAE)-based deep learning model for feature extraction and air quality prediction. The primary goal of the study was to address the high dimensionality and noise present in IoT-generated environmental data. The SAE model consists of multiple encoding and decoding layers that learn compressed representations of input data. These representations retain essential information while removing redundant and noisy features. The compressed features are then used as input for prediction models. Zhou et al. (2022) proposed a Temporal Convolutional Network (TCN) for air pollution prediction. Unlike traditional recurrent models, TCN uses dilated causal convolutions to capture long-range temporal dependencies while enabling parallel computation. The architecture includes stacked convolutional layers with increasing dilation factors, allowing the model to learn both short-term and long-term temporal patterns. Residual connections were also incorporated to improve training stability and gradient flow.

Huang et al. (2022) developed a hybrid CNN-BiLSTM model integrated with an attention mechanism for air pollution prediction. The model combines convolutional layers for spatial feature extraction with Bidirectional LSTM layers for temporal modeling. The attention mechanism plays a critical role by assigning weights to different features and time steps, enabling the model to focus on the most relevant information. This improves both prediction accuracy and interpretability. The dataset used included multi-source environmental data, such as pollutant concentrations, meteorological parameters, and traffic-related information. Li et al. (2023) proposed a multi-head self-attention Transformer model for air pollution prediction. The model leverages the Transformer architecture to capture global dependencies across time-series data. The key component of this model is the multi-head attention mechanism, which allows the model to analyze relationships between all-time steps simultaneously. This enables the detection of long-term patterns and seasonal trends in air pollution data. The study used large-scale

datasets from multiple urban regions, including pollutant concentrations and meteorological variables.

Kim et al. (2020) proposed a Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL)-based framework for optimizing air pollution prediction models. Unlike traditional supervised learning approaches, DRL enables the model to learn optimal strategies through interaction with the environment by maximizing cumulative rewards. In this study, DRL was used to dynamically adjust model parameters and improve prediction accuracy under changing environmental conditions. The system continuously updated its policy based on incoming IoT sensor data, allowing it to adapt to sudden changes in pollutant levels. Zhang and Wang (2021) developed a hybrid GRU-CNN model for air quality prediction, aiming to balance computational efficiency and prediction accuracy. The model combines convolutional layers for spatial feature extraction with Gated Recurrent Unit (GRU) layers for temporal modeling. Compared to LSTM-based models, GRU has fewer parameters, resulting in faster training and reduced computational overhead. The CNN layers extract spatial relationships among pollutants, while GRU captures temporal dependencies in time-series data.

Patel et al. (2022) proposed an IoT-based air quality monitoring system integrated with edge computing and deep learning models. The system architecture included IoT sensors for data collection, edge devices for local processing, and cloud servers for long-term storage and analysis. The key innovation of this study is the use of edge computing, which allows data processing to occur closer to the source, reducing latency and bandwidth usage. Chen et al. (2022) introduced a multi-task deep learning (MTL) model for simultaneous prediction of multiple air pollutants, including PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀, NO₂, and CO. The model uses shared layers to learn common features across tasks, followed by task-specific layers for individual predictions. The MTL approach improves model efficiency by reducing redundancy in feature extraction and leveraging correlations between different pollutants. For example, relationships between PM_{2.5} and NO₂ can be exploited to improve prediction accuracy. Xu et al. (2023) developed an ensemble deep learning framework combining CNN, LSTM, and Transformer models for air pollution prediction. The ensemble approach aggregates predictions from multiple models to improve robustness and accuracy. The ensemble model uses weighted averaging or stacking techniques to combine outputs from individual models. The study demonstrated that this approach significantly reduces prediction errors and improves stability

across different datasets. Alazab et al. (2020) proposed a deep learning-based anomaly detection system for air pollution monitoring using IoT sensor data. The primary objective of this study was to identify abnormal pollution events such as sudden spikes in PM2.5 or toxic gas levels. The model utilized Deep Neural Networks (DNNs) trained on historical air quality data to learn normal pollution patterns. Once trained, the system could detect deviations from these patterns, enabling early warning alerts. This is particularly useful for identifying hazardous conditions in urban environments. Zhou and Feng (2021) introduced a Deep Forest (gcForest) model for air quality prediction. Unlike traditional deep neural networks, gcForest uses a cascade of decision tree ensembles to perform hierarchical feature learning. The model consists of multiple layers of random forests, where each layer processes input features and passes enhanced representations to the next layer. This approach eliminates the need for backpropagation and reduces training complexity. Rahman et al. (2022) proposed a federated learning-based air quality monitoring system using distributed IoT devices. The primary goal was to address privacy

and data-sharing concerns in large-scale environmental monitoring systems. In this framework, individual IoT devices train local models using their own data and share only model updates (not raw data) with a central server. The server aggregates these updates to create a global model.

Tang et al. (2022) developed a Spatiotemporal Graph Attention Network (ST-GAT) for air pollution prediction. This model combines Graph Neural Networks (GNNs) with attention mechanisms to capture both spatial and temporal dependencies. The dataset included multi-location air quality data with spatial and temporal attributes. Results showed that ST-GAT outperformed traditional models and standard GNNs. Huang et al. (2023) proposed a Pyramidal Convolution Split-Attention Network for enhancing air pollution detection accuracy. This model represents one of the most advanced architectures in recent research. The study used heterogeneous IoT datasets containing pollutant concentrations, meteorological variables, and spatial data. Experimental results showed that this model achieved state-of-the-art performance, outperforming CNN, LSTM, and Transformer-based models.

Comparative Table

No.	Model	Key Strength	Limitation
1	IoT + ML	Real-time monitoring	Sensor noise
2	Auto-regressive	Stability	Limited adaptability
3	CNN-LSTM	Spatial + temporal	Complex
4	BiLSTM + Attention	High accuracy	Computational cost
5	Split-Attention CNN	Best performance	Very complex
6	CNN	Spatial learning	No temporal
7	CNN-LSTM	Balanced	Resource heavy
8	BiLSTM	Temporal + attention	Complex
9	Autoencoder	Feature reduction	Info loss
10	Transformer	Long dependencies	Expensive
11	IoT + Cloud	Scalable	Latency
12	ResNet	Deep features	Heavy
13	GRU	Efficient	Limited long-term
14	DA-RNN	Dual attention	Complex

15	GNN	Spatial modeling	Graph complexity
16	DNN	Nonlinear modeling	Overfitting
17	SAE	Dimensionality reduction	Info loss
18	TCN	Fast	Limited flexibility
19	CNN-BiLSTM	Hybrid accuracy	Complex
20	Transformer	Best temporal	High cost
21	DRL	Adaptive	Instability
22	GRU-CNN	Efficient	Moderate accuracy
23	IoT + Edge	Low latency	Resource limits
24	Multi-task DL	Multi-output	Task interference
25	Ensemble DL	Robust	Very complex
26	DNN anomaly	Early detection	False positives
27	Deep Forest	Low cost	Not scalable
28	Federated	Privacy	Communication overhead
29	ST-GAT	Spatial + temporal	Complex
30	Pyramidal Split-Attention	Highest accuracy	Very high complexity

Comparative Analysis

The comparative evaluation of all 30 studies reveals a clear technological evolution in air pollution detection systems. Early approaches (2020) primarily relied on IoT-based monitoring and basic machine learning models, focusing on real-time data collection and system scalability. However, these models struggled with noise, limited feature extraction, and low prediction accuracy. From 2021 onwards, hybrid deep learning models such as CNN-LSTM and GRU-based architectures emerged, addressing the limitations of standalone models. These approaches significantly improved prediction accuracy by capturing both spatial and temporal dependencies. Attention mechanisms further enhanced model performance by enabling selective feature learning.

In 2022, advanced architectures such as TCN, DA-RNN, and multi-task learning models introduced improved efficiency, scalability, and multi-variable prediction capabilities. Graph-based models like GNN and ST-GAT enabled effective spatial modeling, which is critical for regional pollution prediction. By 2023, Transformer-based models and ensemble approaches became

dominant due to their ability to capture long-range dependencies and improve robustness. Among all approaches, the pyramidal convolution split-attention network stands out as the most advanced, offering superior feature extraction and prediction accuracy. Despite these advancements, challenges such as computational complexity, energy consumption, and lack of interpretability remain. Future research should focus on lightweight, explainable, and energy-efficient models.

Discussion

The integration of AI and IoT has significantly transformed air pollution monitoring systems by enabling real-time, scalable, and accurate prediction capabilities. Deep learning models such as CNN, LSTM, and Transformer architectures have improved the ability to model complex environmental relationships. Hybrid and attention-based models have further enhanced performance by capturing both spatial and temporal dependencies. IoT systems play a crucial role in providing continuous environmental data, while edge computing reduces latency and improves system

responsiveness. Federated learning introduces privacy-preserving solutions, making it suitable for distributed monitoring systems.

However, challenges such as sensor calibration, data heterogeneity, and computational complexity persist. Advanced models like Transformers and split-attention networks require significant computational resources, limiting their deployment in real-time systems. Additionally, the lack of interpretability in AI models remains a critical concern. Future research should focus on developing lightweight and explainable AI models, improving energy efficiency, and integrating domain knowledge for better decision-making.

Conclusion

Air pollution monitoring has evolved significantly with the integration of AI and IoT technologies. This review analyzed recent advancements from 2020 to 2023, highlighting the progression from traditional machine learning models to advanced deep learning architectures. Early systems focused on IoT-based monitoring and basic predictive models, which provided real-time data but lacked accuracy. The introduction of deep learning models such as CNN, LSTM, and GRU improved prediction capabilities by capturing complex relationships in environmental data.

Hybrid models and attention-based architectures further enhanced performance by integrating spatial and temporal learning. Recent advancements, including Transformer models and graph neural networks, have improved scalability and accuracy in large-scale systems. Among all approaches, pyramidal convolution split-attention networks represent the most advanced solution, offering multi-scale feature extraction and improved prediction accuracy. However, challenges such as computational complexity, energy consumption, and lack of interpretability remain. Future research should focus on developing efficient, scalable, and explainable models to ensure practical deployment in real-world applications.

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