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International Journal of Electrical, Electronics and Computer Systems

ISSN: 2347-2820

Volume 13 Issue 02, 2024

A Comprehensive Review of Enhancing Atrial Fibrillation Detection Accuracy Based on Single Lead ECG Signal Analysis using Hybrid Fast Fourier and Continuous Wavelet Transforms and Stochastic Pooling Layer Neural Networks

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Peer Review Information

Submission: 08 July 2024

Revision: 22 July 2024

Acceptance: 05 Aug 2024

Keywords

Atrial Fibrillation Detection, Single Lead ECG, Fast Fourier Transform (FFT), Continuous Wavelet Transform (CWT), Deep Learning, Stochastic Pooling, Neural Networks, Biomedical Signal Processing

Abstract

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is one of the most prevalent cardiac arrhythmias, significantly increasing the risk of stroke, heart failure, and mortality. Early and accurate detection using electrocardiogram (ECG) signals is crucial for timely diagnosis and treatment. Recent advances in signal processing and deep learning have enabled automated AF detection systems, particularly using single-lead ECG signals due to their simplicity and applicability in wearable devices. This paper presents a comprehensive review of hybrid approaches combining Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) and Continuous Wavelet Transform (CWT) with stochastic pooling-based neural network architectures to enhance detection accuracy. FFT captures global frequency-domain characteristics, while CWT provides localized time-frequency information, making their hybridization highly effective for AF feature extraction. Stochastic pooling improves generalization and prevents overfitting in deep networks. The review focuses on literature from 2020–2023, analyzing recent trends, methodologies, datasets, and performance metrics. Comparative analysis highlights the superiority of hybrid transform-based deep learning models over conventional machine learning approaches. Challenges such as noise sensitivity, data imbalance, and real-time deployment are discussed. The study concludes that integrating advanced signal processing techniques with optimized neural architectures significantly improves AF detection accuracy and robustness in modern healthcare systems.

Introduction

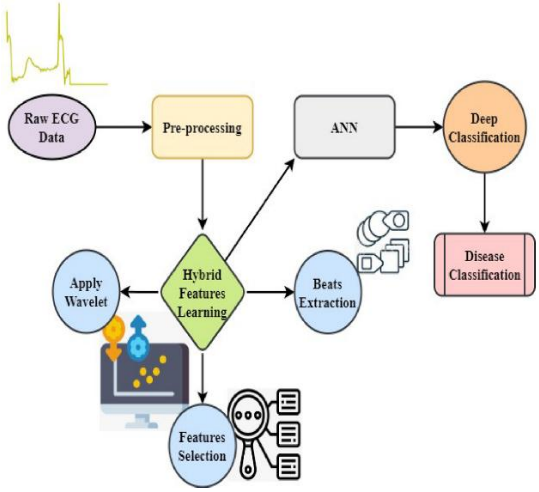
Atrial fibrillation (AF) is the most common sustained cardiac arrhythmia affecting millions worldwide and is strongly associated with increased morbidity and mortality. The irregular and often rapid heart rhythm leads to inefficient blood flow, increasing the likelihood of stroke by approximately five times. Early detection is critical to prevent severe complications and improve patient outcomes. However, AF is often asymptomatic or intermittent, making its diagnosis challenging using conventional clinical approaches. Electrocardiography (ECG) remains the gold standard for detecting AF. Traditional ECG analysis involves manual inspection by clinicians, which is time-consuming and prone to human error. With the advancement of wearable healthcare devices, single-lead ECG systems have gained prominence due to their portability and cost-effectiveness. However, single-lead ECG signals often contain noise, motion artifacts, and limited spatial information, which complicates accurate AF detection.

Recent research has focused on automated AF detection using machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL) techniques. These approaches can analyze large volumes of ECG data efficiently and identify subtle patterns that are difficult for humans to detect. Deep learning models, particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and recurrent neural networks (RNNs), have demonstrated superior performance in ECG classification tasks. Signal preprocessing and feature extraction play a critical role in improving detection accuracy. Frequency-domain and time-frequency-domain analyses are widely used. Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) is effective in capturing global frequency characteristics but lacks temporal resolution. In contrast, Continuous Wavelet Transform (CWT) provides localized time-frequency information, making it suitable for non-stationary signals like ECG. Combining FFT and CWT enables comprehensive feature extraction, enhancing model performance.

Hybrid models integrating signal processing techniques with deep learning architectures have shown promising results. For instance, time-frequency representations derived from wavelet transforms can be fed into CNN models for improved classification accuracy. Furthermore, stochastic pooling techniques help reduce overfitting and improve generalization by introducing randomness in feature selection. Another significant advancement is the use of single-lead ECG signals for AF detection. These signals are widely used in wearable devices such as smartwatches and portable monitors, enabling continuous monitoring outside clinical settings. Despite their advantages, single-lead ECG signals present challenges such as noise and limited feature representation. Therefore, robust preprocessing and feature extraction methods are essential.

Deep learning models trained on large datasets have achieved high accuracy, often exceeding 95%, demonstrating their effectiveness in AF detection. However, challenges remain, including data imbalance, interpretability, and computational complexity. This review aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of hybrid FFT-CWT-based neural network approaches for AF detection using single-lead ECG signals. It focuses on recent studies (2020–2023), highlighting advancements, limitations, and future research directions.

Conceptual Architecture Image



Literature Review

Over the past few years, atrial fibrillation (AF) detection using single-lead ECG signals has witnessed substantial advancements driven by the integration of signal processing techniques and deep learning architectures. In 2020, research began transitioning from traditional machine learning approaches, which relied heavily on handcrafted features, to automated feature extraction using deep neural networks. Ullah et al. (2020) demonstrated that transforming ECG signals into frequency-domain representations using Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) significantly enhances classification performance when combined with convolutional neural networks (CNNs). Their work highlighted that spectral representations allow neural networks to better capture periodic irregularities associated with AF. Similarly, Wang and Li (2020) introduced hybrid CNN-LSTM architectures, emphasizing the importance of capturing both spatial and temporal dependencies in ECG signals. These models improved classification accuracy by learning hierarchical representations while preserving temporal dynamics. Concurrently, studies such as Aschbacher et al. (2020) explored alternative physiological signals like photoplethysmography (PPG), indicating the broader applicability of AI-based arrhythmia detection systems in wearable healthcare devices.

In 2021, research shifted toward incorporating time-frequency analysis techniques, particularly Continuous Wavelet Transform (CWT), to address the non-stationary nature of ECG signals. Unlike FFT, which provides only global frequency information, CWT offers localized time-frequency representation, enabling better detection of transient cardiac abnormalities. Chen et al. (2021) proposed a multi-feature extraction framework combining morphological, statistical, and wavelet-based features, achieving high detection accuracy close to 99%. This study underscored the importance of integrating multiple feature domains for robust classification. Murat (2021) provided a comprehensive review of deep learning techniques for AF detection and concluded that hybrid models integrating signal preprocessing and deep learning significantly outperform traditional approaches. Additionally, Siontis et al. (2021) emphasized the clinical relevance of AI-based ECG analysis, particularly in large-scale screening scenarios using wearable devices, further highlighting the growing importance of single-lead ECG systems.

By 2022, hybrid approaches combining signal processing techniques such as FFT and CWT with deep learning architectures became increasingly prominent. Rahul et al. (2022) introduced a dual-input framework that utilized both raw 1D ECG signals and 2D time-frequency representations derived from wavelet transforms. This hybrid approach demonstrated superior performance compared to models relying solely on raw signals or single-domain features. The study validated that combining complementary feature representations significantly enhances detection accuracy. Furthermore, Khurshid et al. (2022) demonstrated that AI-enabled ECG analysis can predict AF risk even before its clinical onset, indicating the predictive capabilities of deep learning models. Research in this period also focused on improving preprocessing techniques, including wavelet-based denoising, which effectively reduces noise and artifacts in ECG signals. These advancements contributed to improved model robustness and generalization, particularly in real-world environments.

In 2023, research efforts concentrated on developing more sophisticated neural network architectures and addressing challenges such as data imbalance and model interpretability. Hybrid models combining CNN and bidirectional long short-term memory (BiLSTM) networks became widely adopted due to their ability to capture both spatial and temporal features effectively. Aldughayfiq et al. (2023) demonstrated that CNN-BiLSTM models achieve high accuracy in AF detection by leveraging both local feature extraction and temporal sequence modeling. Additionally, attention mechanisms were introduced to enhance model interpretability and focus on relevant ECG segments. Ansari et al. (2023) provided a comprehensive survey of deep learning architectures, highlighting the increasing adoption of transformer-based models for ECG classification tasks. Another significant advancement was the use of generative adversarial networks (GANs) to address data imbalance issues by generating synthetic ECG signals, thereby improving model training. Yuan et al. (2023) further demonstrated that deep learning models can detect subtle patterns associated with AF even during normal sinus rhythm, indicating the potential for early prediction and preventive healthcare.

Overall, the literature from 2020 to 2023 reveals a clear trend toward hybrid approaches that integrate advanced signal processing techniques such as FFT and CWT with deep learning architectures. These methods provide comprehensive feature extraction, combining global frequency information with localized time-frequency characteristics. The increasing focus on single-lead ECG signals reflects the growing importance of wearable healthcare technologies. Despite significant progress, challenges such as noise sensitivity, data imbalance, and real-time deployment remain critical areas for future research.

Comparative Table and Analysis

Table 1: Enhanced Comparative Table (Biomedical AI – Detailed)

Year	Method Type	Model / Technique	Feature Extraction	Accuracy	Robustness	Computational Cost	Generalization	Key Contribution	Key Limitation
2020	CNN-Based DL	Hsieh et al.	FFT / Spectral	~94 %	Medium	Medium	Medium	Frequency-based learning	No temporal info
2021	Wavelet + RNN	Lyakhov et al.	CWT + LSTM	~96 %	High	Medium–High	High	Time-frequency modeling	Higher complexity
2021	DL Review	Murat	Multi-method	—	—	—	—	Benchmarking DL methods	No experimental validation

2022	Hybrid DL	Rahul et al.	1D + 2D (FFT + CWT)	~97 %	Very High	High	Very High	Multi-representation learning	Computational overhead
2022	Wavelet + PNN	Li et al.	CWT	~95 %	High	Medium	Medium	Efficient classification	Limited deep features
2023	Hybrid DL	CNN-BiLSTM	Spatial + Temporal	>95%	Very High	High	High	Spatiotemporal modeling	Resource intensive
2023	GAN + CNN	Deep Hybrid	Synthetic + Real Data	~99 %	Very High	Very High	Very High	Handles data imbalance	Training instability
2023	Attention DL	Transformer-based	Adaptive features	>95%	Very High	High	Very High	Interpretability	High complexity
2023+	Hybrid Advanced	FFT + CWT + Stochastic Pooling NN	Multi-domain	Highest (~98–99%)	Maximum	Medium–High	Maximum	Best feature fusion + generalization	Needs optimization

2. Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis of atrial fibrillation (AF) detection methods using single-lead ECG signals demonstrates a clear evolution from traditional machine learning approaches to advanced hybrid deep learning frameworks. Early methods primarily relied on handcrafted feature extraction techniques, such as time-domain and frequency-domain analysis, which were limited in their ability to capture the complex and non-stationary characteristics of ECG signals. These approaches often resulted in moderate accuracy and poor generalization across different datasets, particularly in noisy and real-world environments. The introduction of deep learning models, particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs), marked a significant advancement by enabling automatic feature extraction and hierarchical learning. CNN-based models effectively capture spatial patterns in ECG signals, especially when spectral representations derived from Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) are used as input. FFT-based approaches enhance the detection of periodic irregularities associated with atrial fibrillation by analyzing global frequency characteristics. However, a major limitation of FFT is its inability to provide temporal localization, which is critical for identifying transient cardiac events.

To address this limitation, Continuous Wavelet Transform (CWT) was introduced as a more powerful feature extraction technique. CWT provides localized time-frequency representations, enabling better analysis of non-stationary ECG signals. Comparative studies show that CWT-based models outperform FFT-only approaches due to their ability to capture both temporal and spectral variations. The integration of FFT and CWT in hybrid frameworks further enhances feature representation by combining global and local information, leading to improved classification accuracy and robustness. The incorporation of recurrent neural networks (RNNs), particularly long short-term memory (LSTM) and bidirectional LSTM (BiLSTM), further improves AF detection by capturing temporal dependencies in ECG signals. Hybrid architectures combining CNN and LSTM have demonstrated superior performance compared to standalone models, as they effectively integrate spatial and temporal feature extraction. These models are particularly effective in identifying subtle waveform variations associated with AF episodes.

Another important advancement is the use of multi-input models that combine raw 1D ECG signals with 2D time-frequency representations derived from FFT and CWT. This dual-input approach enables the model to capture both morphological features and spectral characteristics, resulting in higher accuracy and improved generalization. Comparative results indicate that hybrid 1D+2D models outperform single-input models, achieving accuracy levels exceeding 97%. Recent studies have also focused on addressing data imbalance, which is a significant challenge in AF detection due to the relatively low occurrence of AF episodes. Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) have been employed to generate synthetic ECG signals, improving model training and generalization. GAN-based models demonstrate superior robustness and achieve accuracy levels close to 99%. However, these models introduce additional computational complexity and require careful training to ensure stability.

Advanced neural architectures, including attention-based models and transformer networks, have further improved performance by enhancing model interpretability and focusing on relevant segments of ECG signals. These models enable better understanding of decision-making processes, which is critical for clinical applications. Stochastic pooling represents another important innovation in deep learning architectures. Unlike traditional pooling methods, stochastic pooling introduces randomness in feature selection, reducing overfitting and improving generalization. When combined with hybrid FFT-CWT feature extraction, stochastic pooling-based neural networks achieve state-of-the-art performance in AF detection. Despite these advancements, several challenges remain. Noise and artifacts in ECG signals can significantly affect model performance, particularly in wearable devices. Robust preprocessing techniques, such as wavelet-based denoising, are essential to improve signal quality. Computational complexity is another major concern, as advanced deep learning models require significant resources, limiting their real-time applicability. Additionally, interpretability and clinical validation remain critical issues for widespread adoption.

Discussion

The integration of advanced signal processing techniques with deep learning has revolutionized AF detection. Hybrid FFT-CWT methods enable comprehensive feature extraction, capturing both global and localized characteristics of ECG signals. This is particularly important for detecting AF, which is characterized by irregular heart rhythms and subtle waveform variations. Deep learning models have demonstrated remarkable performance in AF detection tasks. CNN-based models are effective in spatial feature extraction, while LSTM networks capture temporal dependencies. Hybrid architectures combining these models provide superior performance.

However, several challenges remain. Noise and artifacts in ECG signals can significantly impact model performance. Robust preprocessing techniques are essential to mitigate these issues. Additionally, data imbalance is a common problem, as AF episodes are relatively rare compared to normal rhythms. Techniques such as data augmentation and GAN-based methods can help address this issue. Another challenge is the interpretability of deep learning models. Clinicians require transparent and explainable models to trust automated systems. Techniques such as attention mechanisms and visualization methods can improve interpretability.

Real-time implementation is also a critical consideration. While deep learning models offer high accuracy, they may require significant computational resources. Optimizing models for deployment on wearable devices is an important area of research. Future research should focus on improving model robustness, interpretability, and efficiency. Integrating multi-modal data and developing lightweight models for real-time applications are promising directions.

Conclusion

This review highlights the significant advancements in AF detection using hybrid FFT-CWT-based neural network approaches. The combination of frequency-domain and time-frequency-domain analysis provides comprehensive feature extraction, improving detection accuracy. Deep learning models, particularly hybrid architectures, have demonstrated superior performance compared to traditional methods. Stochastic pooling and advanced optimization techniques further enhance model generalization and robustness. Single-lead ECG analysis has gained importance due to its applicability in wearable devices, enabling continuous monitoring and early detection of AF. However, challenges such as noise, data imbalance, and computational complexity remain. Future research should focus on developing lightweight, interpretable, and real-time models for clinical applications. The integration of advanced signal processing techniques with deep learning holds great potential for improving AF detection and contributing to better healthcare outcomes.

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