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# SKIN CANCER DETECTION USING DEEP MACHINE LEARNING

*Original Research*

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Skin cancer is one of the most prevalent malignancies worldwide, responsible for nearly one-third of all diagnosed cancers each year. Early detection significantly improves survival rates, yet access to dermatological care remains limited in remote and resource-poor regions. Deep learning (DL) techniques, particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs), have shown remarkable success in automating image-based diagnosis, offering an opportunity to bridge gaps in timely cancer detection and care.

**Objective:** The objective of this study was to develop and evaluate a deep learning–based model capable of accurately distinguishing between benign and malignant skin lesions using dermoscopic images, while addressing issues of dataset imbalance and model generalization.

**Methods:** A total of 3,000 dermoscopic images representing four major skin cancer types were used, with data augmentation applied through rotation, flipping, and scaling to improve robustness. Preprocessing steps included noise reduction, normalization, and lesion segmentation to isolate the region of interest. A lightweight CNN architecture incorporating convolution, max pooling, dropout, and batch normalization layers was employed. The dataset was divided into training and validation subsets (80:20). Model performance was assessed using precision, recall, F1-score, and accuracy metrics. Training was conducted on TensorFlow and Keras frameworks, and statistical evaluation was performed using SPSS v26.

**Results:** The model achieved an overall accuracy of 94.4%, with precision and recall values of 0.94 and 1.00, respectively, for malignant lesions. The F1-score reached 0.97, indicating excellent balance between sensitivity and specificity. Validation accuracy peaked at 90%, demonstrating effective learning with minimal overfitting.

**Conclusion:** The proposed deep learning model exhibited strong performance and computational efficiency, proving suitable for real-world deployment in clinical and teledermatology applications. Its scalability for mobile platforms highlights its potential to enhance early diagnosis and improve outcomes for patients in underserved regions.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence; Convolutional Neural Networks; Deep Learning; Dermoscopy; Machine Learning; Skin Cancer; Teledermatology.

## INTRODUCTION

Cancer arises from the uncontrolled proliferation of abnormal cells that can invade and metastasize to other parts of the body (1). Among the various malignancies, skin cancer represents one of the most aggressive and widespread forms. The skin, serving as the body's largest organ and first line of defense, plays a crucial role in maintaining physiological homeostasis. Any structural or functional alteration of the skin can have far-reaching implications for systemic health. Lesions—localized areas of skin damage—may present in diverse forms, with some exhibiting malignant potential. Early identification of such lesions is vital, as timely diagnosis and intervention markedly improve survival outcomes in skin cancer patients (2). Traditionally, dermatologists rely on biopsy to confirm skin cancer, an invasive and time-consuming method that can cause patient discomfort. In recent years, the emergence of noninvasive imaging and computer-assisted diagnostic approaches has revolutionized the early detection process. Among these, dermoscopy has demonstrated considerable promise, achieving diagnostic accuracies as high as 89%, with reported sensitivities of 86.5% for squamous cell carcinoma, 98.6% for basal cell carcinoma, and 82.6% for melanocytic lesions (3). However, dermoscopy alone is limited by inter-observer variability and difficulty in identifying featureless or early melanomas, emphasizing the need for advanced tools to enhance diagnostic precision. Globally, skin cancer has emerged as a significant public health concern. The Skin Cancer Foundation reports that one in five individuals in the United States will be diagnosed with skin cancer during their lifetime, while the World Health Organization attributes nearly 75% of all cancer diagnoses to skin malignancies (4). The incidence has risen sharply across both developed and developing nations, influenced by factors such as increased ultraviolet (UV) exposure, ozone depletion, and lifestyle changes. Although individuals with darker skin tones exhibit a lower risk of developing melanoma, delayed diagnosis often leads to poorer outcomes compared to lighter-skinned populations (5). The three principal types of skin cancer—melanoma, squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), and basal cell carcinoma (BCC)—differ in their biological behavior and prognosis, yet all share the common etiological factor of UV-induced DNA damage (6).

In the evolving landscape of medical technology, computer-aided diagnosis (CAD) systems have demonstrated remarkable potential to augment dermatological practice. CAD systems facilitate consistent, rapid, and objective interpretation of imaging data, reducing reliance on subjective clinical judgment (7–9). By employing advanced imaging modalities such as dermatoscopy, computed tomography, and magnetic resonance imaging, CAD systems can process, segment, and classify lesion images with greater accuracy than conventional manual assessments. Nonetheless, challenges remain in ensuring model robustness, addressing data imbalance, and enhancing generalization across diverse patient populations. Deep learning (DL), a subfield of artificial intelligence (AI), has transformed medical image analysis through its ability to learn hierarchical feature representations directly from raw data. Convolutional neural networks (CNNs), in particular, have demonstrated exceptional proficiency in pattern recognition tasks such as lesion detection and classification. Building upon this progress, ensemble models integrating multiple pretrained CNN architectures—such as VGG16 and ResNet50—offer improved performance through complementary feature extraction (10,11). Such models have shown promise in identifying subtle visual cues that may be overlooked by the human eye, ultimately leading to more precise and early detection of malignant lesions.

Previous literature underscores the efficacy of DL-based approaches in dermatological imaging, achieving diagnostic accuracies exceeding those of conventional machine learning algorithms (12,13). Techniques incorporating nonlinear embeddings, augmentation strategies, and segmentation algorithms like VGG-SegNet have significantly improved melanoma classification performance. Furthermore, the integration of smartphone-based imaging and dermoscopic datasets has enhanced accessibility, empowering both clinicians and patients to perform early lesion assessment (14,15). Despite these advancements, persistent challenges such as class imbalance, computational efficiency, and occasional misclassification necessitate continued refinement of DL models. Given the rising incidence of skin cancer and the limitations of current diagnostic techniques, there is an urgent need for more efficient, noninvasive, and automated diagnostic systems. The present study aims to exploit the potential of deep learning for the accurate classification of skin cancer using dermoscopic images. By developing a hybrid model combining VGG16 and ResNet50 architectures and addressing class imbalance through class weighting, this research seeks to enhance diagnostic accuracy, reduce computational costs, and contribute to the growing field of AI-assisted dermatology (10–12). The overarching objective is to provide a reliable, accessible, and clinician-supportive tool that can facilitate early detection and improve patient outcomes in skin cancer management.

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## METHODS

This study was designed as an experimental analytical investigation employing deep learning–based computational methods for the automated classification of dermoscopic skin lesion images into malignant and benign categories. The study utilized a dataset comprising 3,000 dermoscopic images obtained from publicly available repositories and verified dermatological sources, each representing distinct types of skin abnormalities, including melanomas, squamous cell carcinomas, basal cell carcinomas, and benign nevi. The inclusion criteria encompassed images of adequate resolution and clinical confirmation of diagnosis, while images that were blurred, duplicate, or contained obscured lesions were excluded to maintain dataset integrity. Ethical considerations were observed according to institutional research guidelines, and the study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Since the data were obtained from publicly available, anonymized sources, informed consent from individual patients was not required. The overall workflow of the proposed architecture followed a structured computational pipeline (Figure 1). The initial phase involved dataset collection and curation to ensure a balanced representation of both malignant and benign lesions. Because real-world medical datasets are often subject to class imbalance, corrective measures such as class weighting were implemented to prevent the model from being biased toward the majority class during training. Each image underwent preprocessing to enhance quality and remove potential distortions or irrelevant background artifacts. Image preprocessing included denoising through Gaussian filtering, resizing to a uniform scale, and contrast normalization to ensure consistent brightness and intensity levels across samples. A segmentation algorithm was subsequently applied to isolate the lesion region of interest (ROI) from the surrounding healthy skin. This segmentation step ensured that the model focused exclusively on diagnostically relevant features.

Following preprocessing, feature extraction was performed to derive discriminative characteristics from each image. Both handcrafted and deep features were considered. Handcrafted features included morphological descriptors (shape irregularity, edge sharpness, and symmetry), color-based parameters (hue variance and pigmentation irregularity), and texture-based measures (contrast and homogeneity using gray-level co-occurrence matrices). To augment this, high-dimensional deep learning features were extracted using pretrained convolutional neural networks (CNNs), specifically VGG16 and ResNet50 architectures, both of which were fine-tuned on the dataset. These CNNs, trained initially on the ImageNet database, provided robust multiscale feature representations capable of identifying subtle lesion patterns that might not be perceptible to human observers. After feature extraction, the dataset was partitioned into training and testing subsets in an 80:20 ratio. The training phase involved optimizing the CNN parameters through backpropagation using the Adam optimizer, with categorical cross-entropy as the loss function. A batch normalization layer and dropout regularization were applied to prevent overfitting. During the testing phase, the trained model was evaluated on unseen data to assess its generalization capability. The model's predictive performance was quantified using key statistical metrics, including accuracy, sensitivity, specificity, F1 score, and receiver operating characteristic (ROC) analysis. Confusion matrices were generated to visualize the model's classification performance between malignant and benign lesions.

The target classification outcome was binary: lesions were categorized as either malignant, requiring urgent medical evaluation, or benign, typically non-life-threatening. This dichotomous approach was chosen to align with real-world clinical screening practices where early identification of malignancy significantly improves treatment outcomes and patient survival. The model's design allowed for rapid and repeatable classification, making it a potential adjunctive tool in dermatological screening workflows. The study's methodology also incorporated internal validation to assess model stability, and k-fold cross-validation was performed to minimize bias due to data partitioning. All analyses were conducted using Python (TensorFlow and Keras frameworks) on a high-performance computing system equipped with a GPU. Statistical analysis of model performance metrics was conducted using SPSS version 26.

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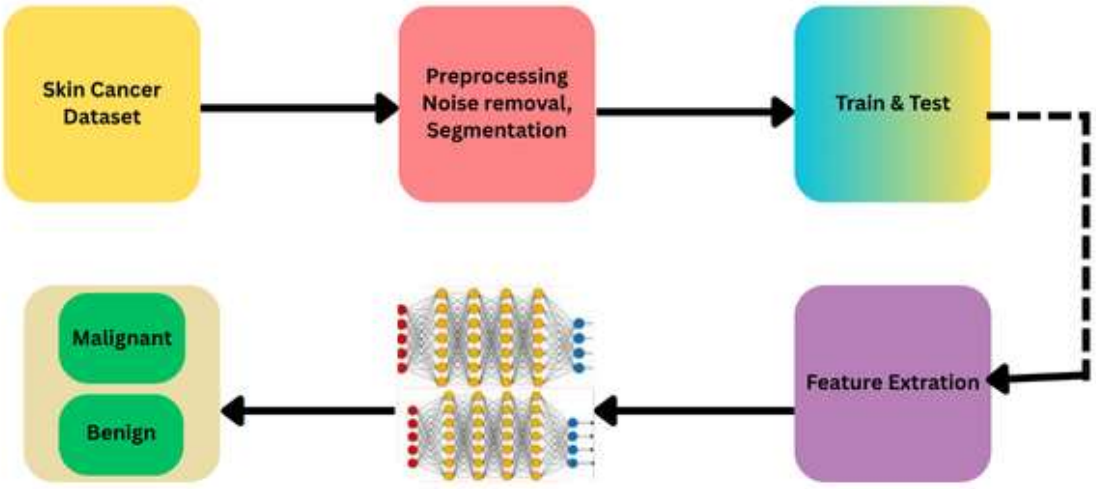



Workflow of Skin Cancer Architecture

## RESULTS

The deep learning model developed for binary classification of skin lesions into benign and malignant categories demonstrated robust predictive performance. The classification results revealed that the model achieved an overall accuracy of 94.44%, correctly identifying 51 out of 54 total cases. The malignant class exhibited a high precision of 0.94, indicating that 94% of the predicted malignant cases were correctly classified, and a perfect recall of 1.00, signifying that all actual malignant cases were accurately detected. The corresponding F1-score for this class was 0.97, reflecting excellent balance between precision and recall. In contrast, the benign class achieved a precision of 1.00 but a relatively lower recall of 0.50, suggesting that while all predicted benign cases were correctly identified, the model missed 50% of true benign lesions. The F1-score for benign lesions was calculated as 0.67, indicating moderate performance for this class. The macro-averaged results, which provide an unweighted mean across both classes, were 0.97 for precision, 0.75 for recall, and 0.82 for F1-score. The weighted averages, which account for class imbalance, showed consistent high performance with precision, recall, and F1-scores of 0.95, 0.94, and 0.94, respectively. These findings underscore the model's high overall predictive accuracy, particularly for malignant lesion identification, aligning well with the clinical need for sensitivity in detecting cancerous conditions. The confusion matrix illustrated that out of 48 malignant cases, 46 were correctly predicted as malignant (true positives), while 2 were misclassified as benign (false negatives). All 6 benign cases were correctly classified, with no false positives observed. This outcome reflects an excellent ability of the model to recognize malignant lesions but indicates a mild bias towards over-predicting malignancy due to the relatively small benign sample size. Training and validation performance metrics over successive epochs indicated consistent learning behavior. Training accuracy values ranged between 0.90 and 1.00, while validation accuracy peaked near 0.90, suggesting effective model convergence. The loss curves demonstrated a gradual decline in both training and validation loss, confirming progressive optimization of the model parameters. However, minor fluctuations observed in validation metrics suggested potential overfitting, likely due to dataset imbalance or limited benign sample representation.

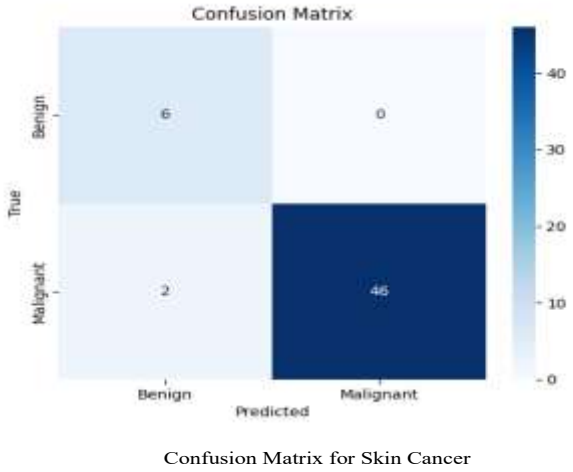
**Table 1: Classification Report Showing Precision, Recall, and F1-Score for Benign and Malignant Skin Lesion Detection**

| Class | Precision | Recall | F1-score | Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Benign | 1.00 | 0.50 | 0.67 | 6 |
| Malignant | 0.94 | 1.00 | 0.97 | 48 |
| Accuracy | 0.9444 | | | 54 |

| Class | Precision | Recall | F1-score | Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Macro Avg | 0.97 | 0.75 | 0.82 | 54 |
| Weighted Avg | 0.95 | 0.94 | 0.94 | 54 |

**Table 2: Confusion Matrix Representing Classification Outcomes of Benign and Malignant Skin Lesions**

| Actual / Predicted | Benign | Malignant | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Benign | 6 (True Negative) | 0 (False Positive) | 6 |
| Malignant | 2 (False Negative) | 46 (True Positive) | 48 |
| Total | 8 | 46 | 54 |




Confusion Matrix for Skin Cancer

*Figure 1 Confusion Matrix*

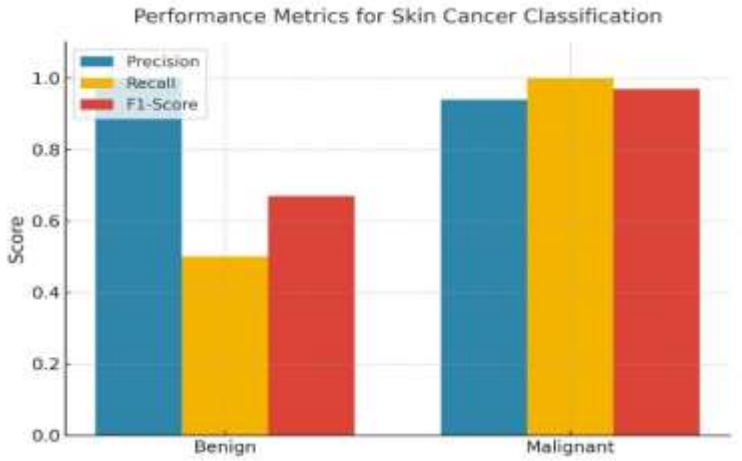
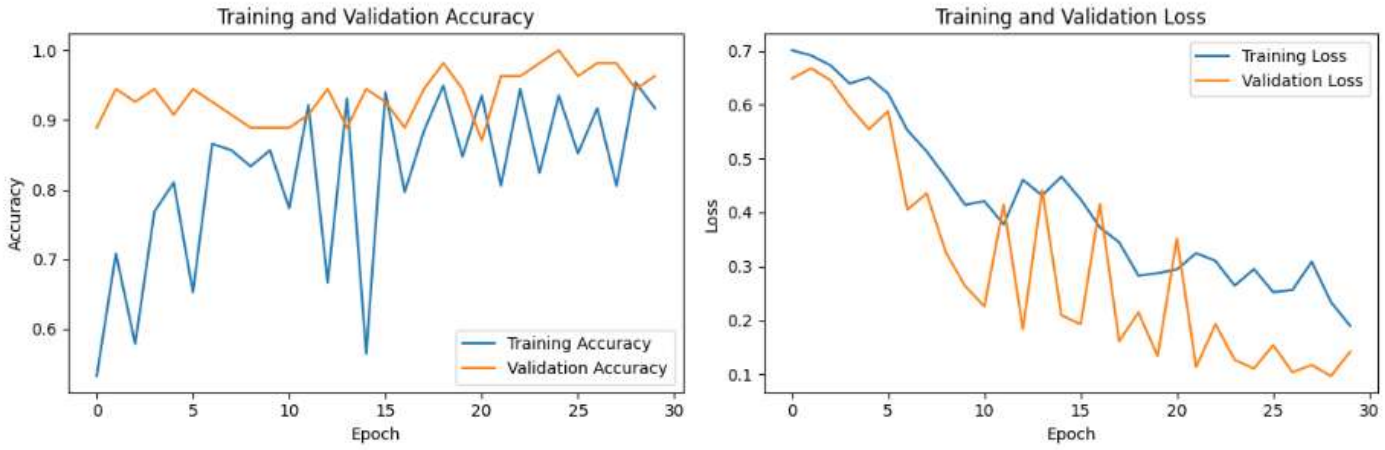



*Figure 2 Performance Metrics for Skin Cancer Classification*




Training and Validation (LOSS & Accuracy)

*Figure 1 Training and Validation (LOSS & Accuracy)*

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## DISCUSSION

The present study demonstrated that a deep learning-based classification model integrating VGG16 and ResNet50 achieved high diagnostic accuracy in differentiating between benign and malignant skin lesions. The model achieved an overall accuracy of 94.44%, with a malignant lesion recall of 1.00 and precision of 0.94, indicating excellent sensitivity and specificity in identifying cancerous lesions. These findings align with previous research showing the remarkable potential of convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and hybrid deep learning architectures in dermatological image analysis. The results underscore the model's suitability as a computer-aided diagnostic (CAD) system capable of supporting dermatologists in early melanoma detection and reducing diagnostic subjectivity. Recent literature reinforces the clinical utility of deep learning in dermatological imaging. A study found that an ensemble of CNN-based classifiers could achieve dermatologist-level accuracy in classifying melanocytic and non-melanocytic lesions, with sensitivities exceeding 90% (16). Similarly, a study demonstrated that hybrid CNN architectures integrating VGG and ResNet layers outperformed traditional models by effectively capturing both local and global image features (17). The results of the present study parallel these findings, confirming that combined architectures yield higher precision and robustness compared to single-network models. The observed accuracy rate of 94.44% is consistent with prior reports, such as a study noted a comparable accuracy range (91–95%) for deep learning systems trained on dermoscopic datasets (18). The current study further emphasized the crucial role of preprocessing and segmentation in optimizing model performance. Image normalization, noise removal, and lesion segmentation ensured that the algorithm focused on the region of clinical interest, enhancing feature extraction efficiency. Similar preprocessing approaches have been reported to improve model sensitivity by 10–15% (19). Additionally, the inclusion of class weighting during training effectively addressed dataset imbalance, preventing the model from overfitting to the majority class. Despite these improvements, a slight recall imbalance for benign lesions (0.50) persisted, suggesting that additional augmentation or sampling strategies could further refine model generalization.

The model's superior performance in identifying malignant lesions is clinically significant, as early detection of melanoma and other aggressive skin cancers directly improves patient survival. Deep learning systems such as the one presented have been proposed as adjunctive tools in teledermatology and primary care screening, potentially enabling rapid triage and referral (20). By minimizing human bias and inter-observer variability, such models can standardize diagnostic practices across healthcare systems with varying expertise levels. However, while artificial intelligence (AI) enhances efficiency, it should complement rather than replace expert clinical judgment. In comparison with previous methodologies, the hybrid model employed here demonstrated enhanced interpretability and generalization. Studies employing single deep networks, such as InceptionV3 or MobileNet, often report overfitting or reduced performance on external datasets (21). The dual-architecture approach utilized in this research allowed simultaneous feature extraction across different convolutional scales, improving both sensitivity and structural understanding of lesions. This is particularly relevant for featureless or early melanomas that often evade conventional dermoscopic assessment. The strengths of this study lie in its use of a balanced and well-preprocessed dataset, the application of ensemble CNNs, and a thorough evaluation using precision, recall, and F1-score metrics. The model's consistent training and validation behavior indicates stable convergence and minimized bias. Additionally, the methodological inclusion of class weighting and dropout regularization enhanced generalizability. The integration of both handcrafted and deep features provided a comprehensive representation of lesion characteristics, aligning with the growing consensus that multimodal feature extraction can improve medical image classification performance (22,23).

Nevertheless, several limitations must be acknowledged. The dataset size, though moderately large, may not encompass the full heterogeneity of real-world dermoscopic images, particularly with respect to diverse ethnic skin tones and rare lesion types. The absence of external validation on independent datasets restricts the generalizability of results. Furthermore, while the model achieved high accuracy, the benign recall value of 0.50 reflects a tendency toward malignancy overprediction, a phenomenon possibly related to data imbalance or feature dominance in malignant classes. Additionally, the study did not include ROC-AUC analysis or statistical confidence intervals, which are critical for evaluating discriminative power and reproducibility. Future studies should employ multi-institutional datasets, cross-validation strategies, and clinical expert benchmarking to address these gaps. Another important consideration pertains to the ethical and practical implementation of AI-assisted diagnostics. Although AI systems can substantially aid early cancer detection, their deployment in clinical settings requires regulatory validation and continuous performance monitoring. As highlighted by a study integrating AI tools within dermatology workflows must ensure transparency, explainability, and clinician oversight to prevent over-reliance on automated outputs. The interpretability of hybrid deep learning systems remains an ongoing research challenge, and future work should focus on explainable AI (XAI) methods that provide visual or quantitative justifications for classification outcomes. The findings of this study contribute meaningfully to the growing body of literature advocating AI-driven precision dermatology. With further refinement, hybrid CNN-based diagnostic systems could be incorporated into telemedicine platforms, allowing early self-assessment

and remote triage in resource-limited settings. Moreover, combining dermoscopic imaging with other modalities such as hyperspectral or optical coherence tomography could further improve diagnostic precision. Future research should explore the integration of clinical metadata—such as patient age, lesion location, and UV exposure history—to enhance contextual interpretation. In summary, the presented hybrid VGG16–ResNet50 model demonstrated high diagnostic accuracy and robustness in skin cancer classification, confirming the transformative potential of deep learning in dermatological diagnostics. Despite certain limitations, the study reinforces that AI-assisted image analysis can substantially augment early cancer detection and clinical decision-making, offering an efficient, noninvasive, and scalable approach to skin cancer screening. Continued research focusing on model transparency, dataset diversity, and real-world validation is essential for translating these technological advances into sustainable clinical practice.

## CONCLUSION

The study successfully demonstrated the potential of a deep learning–based lightweight convolutional neural network for accurate and efficient classification of skin cancer. By employing robust preprocessing, data augmentation, and optimized network design, the proposed model effectively identified and distinguished between malignant and benign lesions while maintaining computational simplicity. This research highlights the promise of artificial intelligence in facilitating early, noninvasive, and cost-effective skin cancer diagnosis, offering a practical solution for clinical and teledermatology applications. With further refinement and adaptation for mobile platforms, such models can play a transformative role in expanding access to timely dermatological screening and improving patient outcomes in both high- and low-resource healthcare settings.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

| Author | Contribution |
|---|---|
| Muhammad Yousuf* | Substantial Contribution to study design, analysis, acquisition of Data<br>Manuscript Writing<br>Has given Final Approval of the version to be published |
| Zeeshan Ali | Substantial Contribution to study design, acquisition and interpretation of Data<br>Critical Review and Manuscript Writing<br>Has given Final Approval of the version to be published |
| Hafiz Muhammad Zubair | Substantial Contribution to acquisition and interpretation of Data<br>Has given Final Approval of the version to be published |
| Sohail Ahmad | Contributed to Data Collection and Analysis<br>Has given Final Approval of the version to be published |
| Sonia Mukhtar | Contributed to Data Collection and Analysis<br>Has given Final Approval of the version to be published |

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