

Classification of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Children Using the VGG19 CNN Model Based on Facial Landmarks of the Eye and Forehead Areas

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ABSTRACT

Early detection of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a crucial challenge in childhood developmental interventions. Conventional screening methods are often subjective and susceptible to assessor bias. This study proposes an objective solution for automated ASD classification using deep learning. The solution focuses exclusively on the eye and forehead regions. The main contribution of this research is a novel, focused-landmark visualization method that integrates Dlib 68 for adaptive cropping with MediaPipe Face Mesh's high-density topology. It isolates neurobiological biomarkers and eliminates non-contributory facial noise. These specific areas were selected based on the eye avoidance hypothesis, which states that they contain rich diagnostic information and behavioral biomarkers related to the ASD phenotype. In the preprocessing stage, the eye and forehead areas were isolated using Dlib 68 landmark detection. This eliminated background visual noise that could interfere with feature extraction. Next, detailed topological visualization was performed using MediaPipe Face Mesh with 478 landmark points. This served as the model's primary input. The implemented Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) architecture was a VGG19 model trained via transfer learning. Dropout layers were added to improve computational efficiency and prevent overfitting. The model was trained using a primary dataset of 1,238 images from children in Banda Aceh, collected under controlled conditions. The test results showed very promising performance with an overall accuracy of 94.35%. Specifically, the model achieved a recall (sensitivity) of 95.24%, a precision of 93.75%, and an AUC of 0.9831. These findings demonstrate that visualizing reference points in the eye and forehead areas, combined with the VGG19 model, is an effective, accurate, and practical method. This innovation has great potential as an economical and objective early screening tool for people with ASD in the future.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction, as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities [2]. These symptoms can manifest as significant challenges in learning, sensory processing, and emotional regulation, ultimately negatively impacting the quality of life of individuals and their families [3] [4] [5]. Given its increasing global prevalence [1] [2], early detection is crucial. Timely intervention has been shown to have a profound positive impact on developmental outcomes, particularly in improving adaptive and communication skills [6] [7]. However, the early diagnosis of ASD faces significant challenges due to the wide heterogeneity of symptoms. Each individual with ASD displays a unique phenotypic profile. For example, while some children exhibit marked

verbal delays, others may have proficient speech skills but fail to interpret non-verbal cues such as eye contact [8] [9]. This variability complicates conventional screening methods, which largely rely on clinical observations and questionnaires, which are often subjective, time-consuming, and prone to rater bias [10] [11] [12] [13]. Rapid advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly Deep Learning (DL), have revolutionized medical data analysis and offer objective solutions to these diagnostic challenges [14] [15] [16] [17] [18]. Transfer Learning techniques, which leverage pre-trained models trained on large datasets, have become a standard approach to addressing the limitations of medical data [19] [20] [21]. In particular, DL-based facial image analysis has emerged as a promising non-invasive method, given that faces contain important biomarker information related to neurodevelopmental disorders [11] [22] [23].

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Several recent studies have evaluated the effectiveness of Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) in detecting ASD. Previous research has shown that the VGG19 architecture often outperforms other models, including InceptionV3 and DenseNet201 [24]. Specifically, VGG19 achieved 85% accuracy on a child face dataset. Another study by [25] reported that the VGG-19 architecture achieved 96.47% accuracy in classifying facial features in autistic

craniofacial characteristics in ASD, such as intercanthal distance, have been highlighted in medical research [22] [23]. In addition, the confirmation of the “eye aversion” hypothesis regarding amygdala activity further supports treating the eye area as the most informative Region of Interest (ROI) in the diagnostic process [8].

Based on these research gaps, the main contribution of this study is the application of a modified VGG19 CNN architecture to classify ASD using facial landmark visualizations focused exclusively on the eyes and forehead. The selection of VGG19 was based on its robust architecture, which has been shown to outperform more complex models across various medical and non-medical classification tasks [24] [29] [30]. As illustrated in Fig. 1, raw facial images were processed to isolate the eye and forehead ROIs, then transformed into landmark visual representations using MediaPipe, and finally used as model input. Specifically, this study aims to:

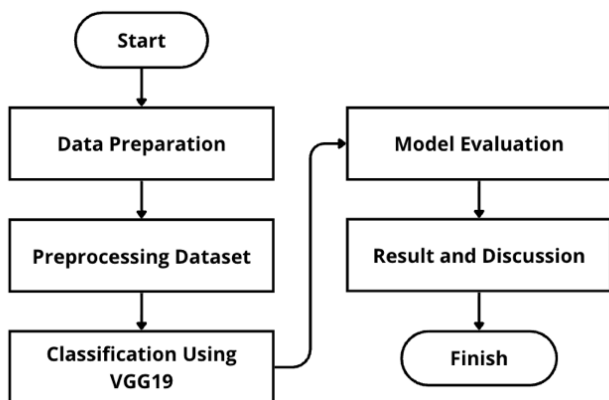


Fig. 1. Workflow of This Study.

children, demonstrating that CNNs are highly effective at recognizing subtle differences that are difficult to distinguish by ordinary visual inspection. To overcome these limitations, geometric feature-based approaches or facial landmarks offer a more targeted analysis. In support of this, previous research has shown that marker feature fusion consistently improves accuracy by combining discriminative geometric information [26]. However, using landmark coordinates alone sometimes fails to capture the richness of visual features compared to image-based methods [27] [28]. To address this gap, a hybrid approach that visualizes landmarks into overlay images of key diagnostic areas is a potential strategy. Biologically, this focus is well-founded because specific

- Design and implement a hybrid method with a modified VGG19 architecture
- to address the challenge of detecting ASD using focused landmark visualization data.
- Assess the model's performance using comprehensive metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and AUC score, to validate the superiority of this focused approach over conventional full-face methods.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

A. Dataset

This study used an independently curated primary dataset consisting of 1,238 facial images from 60 child participants (30 with ASD, 30 neurotypical) aged 5–15 years. Subjects were recruited from Special Elementary Schools (SLB) and Public Elementary Schools in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Each participant contributed approximately 20 images across three expressions (neutral, smiling, sad), yielding a class-balanced dataset



Fig. 2. Controlled environment setup for facial image acquisition.

of 619 ASD and 619 normal images. This balanced distribution is crucial for mitigating prediction bias and ensuring the stability of model evaluation metrics [31] [32]. Data collection was conducted in a controlled environment, with the experimental protocol illustrated in Fig. 2. The acquisition room measured 7m x 7m, with a specific imaging area of 2m x 2m. To ensure consistent image quality, environmental parameters were maintained at 25-27°C and 40–45% humidity, with 30-watt ambient ceiling lighting. Acquisition sessions began at 09:00 and concluded by 12:00, with each participant undergoing a 10–15-minute acclimatization phase to reduce sensory anxiety [6].

The technical setup involved a Canon EOS M-100 camera placed on a tripod at a distance of 1 m from the subject. A 17-inch LCD screen was used to display visual stimuli to elicit the desired facial expressions, while a black curtain was installed to block external light interference. This strict protocol aimed to minimize environmental noise that could distort the feature extraction process [25]. This study has obtained official ethical approval (Ethics Code: 036/EA/FK/2025) and written informed consent from the parents/guardians of the students in accordance with medical data integrity standards [11]. Exclusion criteria were strictly applied to eliminate subjects with acute illnesses or comorbid disorders such as intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome. For ASD participants, all images were captured immediately before the start of their scheduled therapeutic intervention sessions to ensure an authentic baseline phenotype.

B. Dlib 68 Face Landmark Detection

At the outset of each image processing session, the Dlib library is used to implement an Ensemble of Regression Trees algorithm. This method was chosen due to its proven ability to perform fast and robust facial pose estimation [33]. In the proposed system architecture,

Dlib's landmark detection is applied early in the session as a spatial localization mechanism to precisely determine anatomical Regions of Interest (ROIs), rather than as a direct feature extractor for classification. The algorithm maps 68 fiducial points on the face, with vector coordinates for eyebrow landmarks (points 17–26) extracted as geometric anchors for adaptive cropping. This cropping isolates the eyes and forehead, removing lower-face artifacts and irrelevant background. Such noise elimination reflects a data-centric approach that values clean input data to enhance diagnostic model performance [34]. Restricting the ROI to the upper face has strong neurobiological support. This approach aligns with the “eye avoidance” hypothesis, linked to amygdala responses in individuals with ASD [8]. Additionally, recent morphological studies highlight significant physical biomarkers in the upper ocular and craniofacial areas, such as variations in intercanthal distance [22] and optic nerve morphometric features [35], both of which are strongly correlated with ASD diagnosis.

C. MediaPipe Face Mesh

After the ROI isolation stage, the cropped image is then transformed using the MediaPipe Face Mesh module. Unlike conventional face detection methods that rely on only a few points, MediaPipe offers high topological resolution by detecting 478 3D landmark points. This point density captures important microexpression details and subtle curvatures in the periorbital area, an advantage validated in comparative feature extraction studies [28]. At this stage, the raw photographic image is combined with the original image. This creates a visual representation of the feature as a geometric map. The process overlays P marker points and their connectivity on the original image. A consistent semantic coloring scheme is used: (1) Green for facial surface tessellation, (2) Blue and Red for eyebrow and eye contours, and (3) Highlighter Green for the iris area. This visualization strategy is based on previous research. Such research

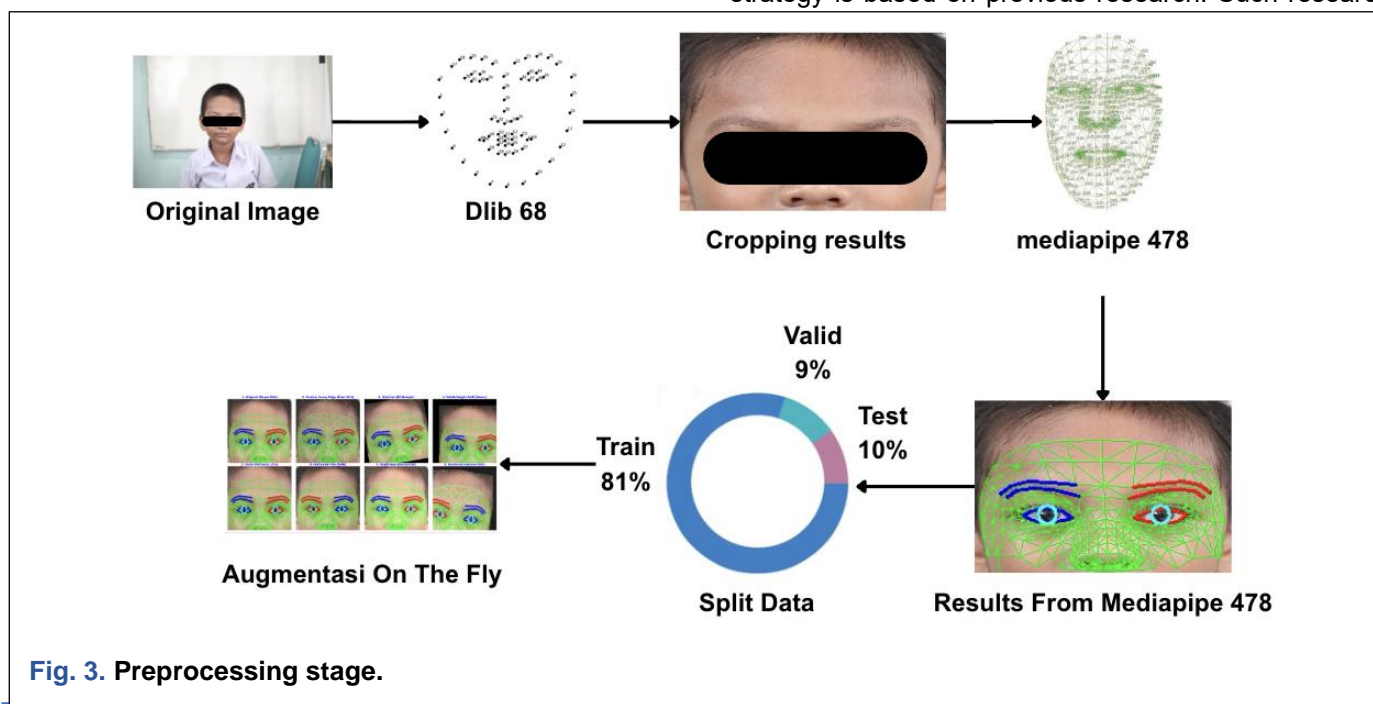


Fig. 3. Preprocessing stage.

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shows that combining visual landmark features produces a more discriminative spatial representation CNN architecture than using numerical coordinates alone [26].

This mapping process is carried out by transforming normalized coordinates $P(x_{Norm}, y_{Norm})$ from MediaPipe into the image pixel coordinates $P(X_{px}, Y_{px})$ via the function Eq. 1 :

$$X_{px} = x_{norm} \cdot w, Y_{px} = y_{norm} \quad (1)$$

Where w and h are the width and height of the input image I , respectively. To emphasize the iris area, the algorithm calculates the iris center point (C_{iris}) based on the average position of N iris marker points via Eq. 2:

$$C(x, y) = \left(\frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N X_i, \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N Y_i \right) \quad (2)$$

The iris radius (R) is determined dynamically by averaging the Euclidean distance between (C_{iris}) and all detected iris marker points via Eq. 3:

$$R = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \sqrt{(X_i - C_x)^2 + (Y_i - C_y)^2} \quad (3)$$

In cases where iris detection fails or is unstable ($R \leq 2$), the system applies a fallback protocol by estimating the iris radius as 25% of the eye bounding box width (W_{eye}), which is defined as $R_{est} = 0.25 \times W_{eye}$. via Eq. 4:

$$R_{est} = 0.25 \times W_{eye} \quad (4)$$

This approach ensures consistency of visual features across datasets despite variations in pose or closed-eye conditions, as well as serving as an implicit normalization method to suppress unwanted intra-class variability, such as differences in skin color or lighting [20] [36]. Fig. 3 illustrates the complete data transformation from raw images to geometric maps.

D. Split Data Strategy

In the final preprocessing stage, the dataset is partitioned into three mutually exclusive subsets. The total dataset, consisting of 1,278 images, was divided into an 81:9:10 ratio, namely: 81% for training (1,002 images), 9% for validation (112 images), and 10% for testing (124 images). Formally, if D represents the total dataset, then this division satisfies the condition $D = D_{train} \cup D_{val} \cup D_{test}$ with $D_{train} \cap D_{val} \cap D_{test} = 0$. This strategy adopts a dominant allocation scheme for training data to maximize the model's ability to learn complex hierarchical features from visual landmark representations. [25] [30]. Before division, image files in each class are randomly shuffled using a permutation algorithm to ensure a uniform distribution of variability. The test dataset (124 images) is treated as a completely isolated hold-out set (I). This data is never involved in weight training or hyperparameter tuning. This physical isolation of the data folder is intended to mitigate the risk of data leakage, ensuring that the final performance metrics truly reflect the model's generalization to real world data that has never been seen before [36]. To validate this experimental design and objectively evaluate model performance, an average metric was calculated from the confusion matrix. The mathematical formulas for calculating overall accuracy (Acc) and sensitivity (Recall) are explicitly defined in Eq. 12 and Eq. 14, respectively,

in the metrics evaluation section. The use of this protocol, combined with validation set monitoring, effectively reduces the risk of overfitting and guarantees the reliability of experimental results [19].

E. On-the-Fly Data Augmentation

Given the scarcity of data in medical image analysis [18] [37], we implemented a direct data augmentation technique using a dynamic generator. This method stochastically manipulates input images within each training batch without increasing physical storage requirements. The transformations performed include rotation (10°), translation (10%), zoom (10%), horizontal flip, and brightness adjustment to enrich photometric variability. This approach strategically increases the model's invariance to facial pose variations and lighting fluctuations, effectively preventing overfitting by encouraging the learning of persistent structural features. The effectiveness of augmentation techniques in improving the accuracy and robustness of models for ASD diagnosis, particularly in capturing differences in facial features that are difficult to distinguish by simple visual inspection, has been empirically validated in previous research [34] and in a recent comparative study of CNN architectures [25].

F. Classification Using VGG19 Architecture

This study applies VGG19, a pre-trained Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) architecture, on the ImageNet dataset for landmark visualization image classification. VGG19 was chosen for its deep architecture with 19 layers and its robust, consistent performance in medical image recognition tasks [24] [38] [30]. Fig.3 presents the modified model architecture. The network processes an input image I (224×224 pixels, RGB) using a sequence of convolutional blocks. The fundamental operation in this layer is 2D convolution, where a kernel w of size 3×3 is shifted over the input I with a stride of 1 pixel. This design allows for the capture of fine geometric details such as eyebrow curvature and eye shape. The convolution output at position (i, j) is defined as Eq.5.

$$y_{i,j}^{(k)} = \sigma \left(\sum_m \sum_n w_{m,n}^{(k)} \cdot I_i + m, j + n + b^{(k)} \right) \quad (5)$$

Where $b^{(k)}$ is the bias and σ is the ReLU activation function ($f(x) = \max(0, x)$). This design allows for the capture of fine geometric details, such as eyebrow curvature and eye shape, while preserving hierarchical spatial information from low to high levels [32]. After passing through five convolutional blocks, a Max Pooling operation is performed to reduce the spatial dimensions while preserving the dominant features, as in Eq.6.

$$y_{i,j} = \max_{(m,n) \in R_{i,j}} (x_{m,n}) \quad (6)$$

After going through five convolution blocks, the $7 \times 7 \times 512$ feature map is transformed into a 1D vector using a Global Max Pooling layer [39]. The main modification in this study lies in the classification section (Custom Head), which replaces the original fully connected layer for computational efficiency. The feature vector is processed by two Dense layers (128 and 256 neurons, respectively). To mitigate overfitting, a Dropout



Fig. 4. VGG19 model training: (a) Accuracy curve, (b) Loss curve.

mechanism is applied after each Dense layer with a probability of $P = 0.45$, which effectively overcomes the limitations of limited medical datasets [36] [39]. This operation is modeled by Eq. 7.

$$\hat{y} = r \cdot y, \quad r \sim \text{Bernouli}(P) \quad (7)$$

The final output layer consists of one neuron with a Sigmoid activation function to produce a binary classification probability P as Eq. 8.

$$S(z) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-z}} \quad (8)$$

The training procedure uses transfer learning by leveraging the weights of the pre-trained VGG19 model trained on the ImageNet dataset. Formally, the model parameters θ are divided into two parts: θ_{base} , which represents the backbone layer (feature extraction), and θ_{head} , which represents the custom classification layer (Custom Head). In this study, a layer-freezing mechanism is applied to the backbone layer to preserve the learned visual features. This is expressed mathematically by keeping the weights of θ_{base} constant during the training phase (Eq. 9).

$$\Delta\theta_{base} = 0 \quad (9)$$

The weight update is only performed on the θ_{head} parameter through an optimization process. To minimize prediction error, the Binary Crossentropy (L) loss function is used, which measures the difference between the predicted probability P and the actual label y for each input I , as defined in Eq. 10.

$$L = -\frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N [y_i \log(P_i) + (1 - y_i) \log(1 - P_i)] \quad (10)$$

The optimization process to minimize L is performed using the Adam optimizer. The weight update at each iteration t is defined as Eq. 11.

$$\theta_{t+1} = \theta_t - \eta \cdot \frac{\tilde{m}_t}{\sqrt{\tilde{v}_t + \epsilon}} \quad (11)$$

Here, η is the learning rate set to 0.0001, and \tilde{m}_t and \tilde{v}_t are estimates of the first (mean) and second (unbiased variance) moments of the gradient, using momentum hyperparameters $\beta_1 = 0.9$ and $\beta_2 = 0.999$. This approach allows the model to adapt the high level feature mapping

of input I into class probabilities P while preserving the established spatial feature representation. [15] [37] [40]. To ensure stable training results over 150 epochs, the convergence criteria were closely monitored. Mathematically, the model is considered to have reached convergence when the gradient of the loss function with respect to the weight parameter θ approaches zero, as expressed in Eq. 12:

$$\frac{\partial L}{\partial \theta} \quad (12)$$

This condition indicates that the model has reached a local minimum point on the loss surface, where further weight updates no longer provide a significant reduction in loss. In this study, convergence is ensured through observing the training and validation loss curves. If the validation loss does not decrease significantly over a specified number of epochs (early stopping criteria), the model is declared to have converged. This ensures that the resulting model is stable and has optimal generalization capabilities for input data [19] [25].

G. Evaluation of Metrics

Model performance is evaluated using confusion matrices and derived metrics on test data. This 2 x 2 table summarizes the predictions for the Autistic and Normal classes by categorizing the results into four fundamental components: true positives, true negatives, false positives, and false negatives. [24]:

- True Positives (TP): Images of children with ASD correctly identified as Autistic.
- True Negatives (TN): Number of normal child images correctly identified as the Normal class.
- False Positives (FP): Normal child images incorrectly classified as Autistic (false alarms).
- False Negative (FN): Images of children with ASD are incorrectly classified as Normal (missed detections).

Five evaluation metrics are derived from the confusion matrix to comprehensively assess model performance:

- a) Accuracy measures how well the model classifies cases by dividing the number of correctly identified

ASD and Normal instances by the total number of cases [Eq. \(13\)](#):

$$Accuracy = \frac{TP+TN}{TP+TN+FN+FP} \times 100 \quad (13)$$

- b) Precision measures the proportion of ASD predictions that are correct, minimizing false positives and increasing diagnostic confidence [Eq. \(14\)](#):

$$Precision = \frac{TP}{TP+FP} \times 100 \quad (14)$$

- c) Recall, or sensitivity, measures a model's ability to correctly identify all ASD cases in a dataset, which is crucial in a medical context for minimizing the risk of missing positive cases [Eq. \(15\)](#):

$$Recall = \frac{TP}{TP+FN} \times 100 \quad (15)$$

- d) The F1 Score is the harmonic mean of Recall and Precision, balancing these metrics. It gives a more objective evaluation than accuracy, especially when precision and sensitivity are imbalanced [Eq. \(16\)](#):

$$F1\ Score = 2 \times \frac{Recall \times Precision}{Recall + Precision} \quad (16)$$

- e) The Area Under the Receiver Operating Characteristic Curve (AUC-ROC) is evaluated by plotting the True Positive Rate (TPR) against the False Positive Rate (FPR) at various decision thresholds. TPR is defined as the true positive ratio (the same as Recall), while FPR is the false positive ratio calculated as $FP / (FP + TN)$. The AUC value represents the probability P of the model in separating classes accurately, which is mathematically calculated through the integral [\[41\] \[24\]](#), as formulated in [Eq. \(17\)](#):

$$AUC = \int_0^1 TPR(FPR) d(TPR) \quad (17)$$

H. Statistical Analysis

To ensure the reliability of the experimental results, formal statistical tests were carried out. The validity of the model accuracy is measured using a 95% Confidence Interval (CI) with a normal approximation method based on the number of input samples ($N = 124$), such as [Eq. 18](#):

$$CI = P \pm Z \sqrt{\frac{P(1-P)}{N}} \quad (18)$$

Where P is the accuracy value, and Z is the standard score (1.96). In addition, hypothesis testing is carried out to calculate the P value to determine whether the model performance is statistically significant compared to random classification ($p=0.5$), such as [Eq. 19](#):

$$P(k; N, p) = \binom{N}{k} p^k (1-p)^{N-k} \quad (19)$$

Where k is the number of correct predictions, results were considered significant if the P value < 0.05 , and a bootstrapping technique with 1,000 iterations was also applied to produce metric estimates that were stable against data variance [\[41\] \[45\]](#).

I. Statistical Analysis

To provide clinical transparency, this study applied the Gradient-weighted Class Activation Mapping (Grad-CAM) method. This method visualizes the spatial features at input I that most contribute to the model's classification decision through computing gradients in the last convolutional layer. The neuron importance weight σ_k^c is calculated based on the average gradient of class scores over the feature map, as formulated in [Eq.20](#).

$$\sigma_k^c = \frac{1}{Z} \sum_i \sum_j \frac{\partial y^c}{\partial A_{i,j}^k} \quad (20)$$

Where y^c is the score for class c , A^k is the k feature map, and Z is the number of pixels in the feature map. The weights σ_k^c are then multiplied by the feature map A^k and passed through the ReLU activation function to produce the final Grad-CAM map, $L_{Grad-cam}^c$ as in [Eq. 21](#):

$$L_{Grad-cam}^c = ReLU(\sum_k \sigma_k^c A^k) \quad (21)$$

This visualization ensures that the model consistently pays attention to key biomarker areas of ASD in children [\[46\] \[47\]](#)

3. RESULTS

A. Model Training Dynamics

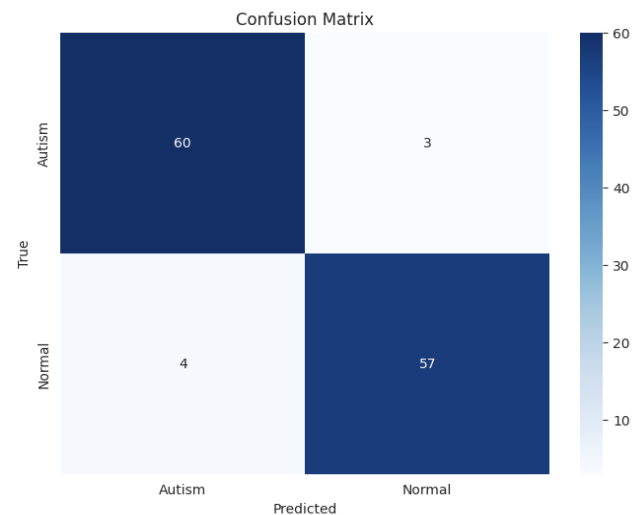


Fig. 5. Confusion Matrix on Test Data for Learning Rate 0.0001.

Model training was carried out for 150 epochs using the Adam optimizer and an initial learning rate of 1×10^{-4} . Learning stability and convergence were closely monitored throughout training. Accuracy and loss curves during training and validation are shown in [Fig. 4](#). Analysis of [Fig. 4\(a\)](#) shows that the validation accuracy (red line) increases exponentially over the first 15 epochs, then reaches a stable plateau of 93%-95%. This phenomenon is linearly correlated with a drastic decrease in the loss curve in [Fig. 4\(b\)](#), which reaches a minimum below 0.20. The very narrow gap between the training and validation curves indicates that the model has robust generalization capabilities and successfully mitigates the risk of overfitting, an achievement

supported by the implementation of the Dropout strategy and effective data augmentation [36] [39].

B. Classification Performance Analysis

To objectively validate the model's reliability, evaluation was performed on a test data set consisting of 124 previously unseen images. The distribution of predicted results against ground truth labels is shown in the Confusion Matrix in Fig. 5. Based on Fig. 5, the model demonstrates superior discriminatory performance. Of the total 63 samples in the 'Autistic' class, the model correctly identified 60 (True Positive), leaving only 3 errors (False Negative). Meanwhile, in the 'Normal' class, the model correctly identified 57 of 61 samples (True Negatives). This low false-negative rate is crucial in the context of medical applications, as it ensures the sensitivity of screening tools in detecting positive cases [24] [30]. A quantitative summary of the performance metrics is presented in detail in Table 1. The proposed model achieves an overall accuracy of 94.35%. To ensure the reliability of these results, formal statistical tests were carried out. Based on the test data sample size ($N=124$), the model produces a 95% Confidence Interval (CI) between 90.29% and 98.41% (Eq. 17). Hypothesis testing against random chance yields a P value < 0.001 (5.55×10^{-26}) (Eq. 18), confirming that the model performance is statistically significant and not the result of chance

Furthermore, the model's stability was validated using a bootstrapping technique with 1,000 resampling iterations. The bootstrapping results show a consistent average accuracy of 94.34% with a 95% CI range between 90.32% (lower limit) to 98.39% (upper limit). This consistency proves that the model has robust generalization capabilities over input sample variations and effectively reduces the risk of overfitting [41] [45]. Recall (Sensitivity) was 95.24%. The model showed a very high ability to identify subjects with ASD. Precision was 93.75%, reflecting high confidence in positive predictions. [42] [43].

Table 1. Summary of Model Performance Evaluation Metrics

Metric Parameter	Value (%)
Accuracy	94.35
Recall	95.24
Precision	93.75
F1-Score	94.49
AUC Score	98.31

To complement the threshold-based metrics, the separability of the model was further validated using the Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve in Fig. 6. The area under the curve (AUC) reached 0.9831, a value close to 1.0, confirming that the landmark based VGG19 model has a very high probability of distinguishing between the autistic and normal classes at various decision thresholds [41] [44]. Finally, to provide deep

clinical transparency, Grad-CAM visualization was implemented to identify marker feature areas that most influence classification results. Results in Fig. 6 consistently show that the VGG19 model assigns the highest gradient weights to the periorbital (eyes and eyebrows) and forehead areas. These gradient based computations prove that the model's classification decisions are based on neurobiologically relevant facial landmark biomarkers, not on background artifacts. This consistency of spatial focus in input area I strengthens clinical confidence in the reliability of the proposed model [41] [46].

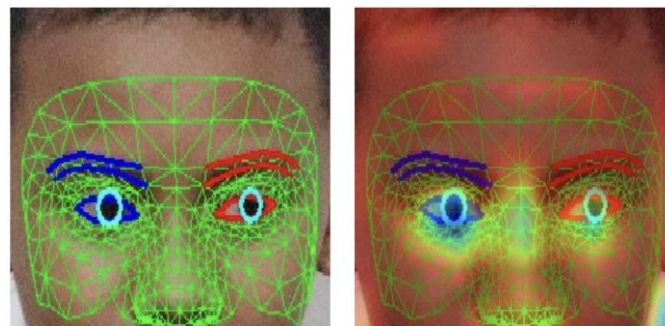


Fig. 6. Visualizing Model Interpretability Using Grad-CAM.

C. ROC and AUC Analysis

In addition to threshold based metrics, the model's separability was validated using the Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve shown in Fig. 7. The area under the curve (AUC) was 0.9831. This value, which is close to the ideal 1.0, indicates that the VGG19 model trained on eye and forehead landmarks has a very high probability of accurately distinguishing between the autistic and normal classes across a wide range of decision thresholds. This result confirms the model's stability and reliability, compared with methods with lower AUCs [41] [44].

4. DISCUSSION

A. Training Dynamics and Stability

As visualized in Fig. 4, the model training dynamics provide comprehensive insights into the learning stability of the modified VGG19 architecture. The training accuracy curve (blue line) shows a sharp logarithmic increase in the early phase, reaching a plateau above 90%, indicating that the model backbone effectively extracts discriminative features from visual landmark representations. The most important indicator is the behavior of the validation curve (red line), which moves synchronously with the training curve, maintaining a very narrow generalization gap. This simultaneous convergence, accompanied by a low loss value ($L < 0.20$), indicates that the model successfully learns common geometric facial patterns rather than simply memorizing the training data. This stability of the training process is mathematically confirmed by the convergence criterion defined in Eq. 12, where the gradient of the loss function with respect to the weight parameter θ approaches zero, indicating that the model has reached

an optimal local minimum. This confirms the success of the regularization strategy via Dropout layers (0.45) and dynamic data augmentation in reducing the risk of overfitting.

B. Limitations and Future Works

Final validation on unseen data confirms the model's reliability. As illustrated in the confusion matrix (Fig. 5), the model achieved 94.35% accuracy, with a very low misclassification rate of 7 errors out of 124 images. The statistical significance of this performance is validated by a 95% Confidence Interval (CI) of 90.29% to 98.41% (Equation 18) and a P-value < 0.001 (Equation 19), confirming that the results were not due to random chance. Clinically, the most prominent metric was Recall (Sensitivity) at 95.24%. In the development of clinical decision support systems (CDS), sensitivity is a priority parameter because failure to detect false negatives can delay early intervention, which is crucial for child development. The AUC score of 0.9831 (Fig. 7) further supports these findings, demonstrating superior and consistent class separation. In addition, the Grad-CAM implementation in Figure 6 provides in-depth clinical transparency by identifying that the highest gradient weights are assigned to the periorbital and forehead areas, as mathematically formulated in Eq. 20 and Eq. 21.

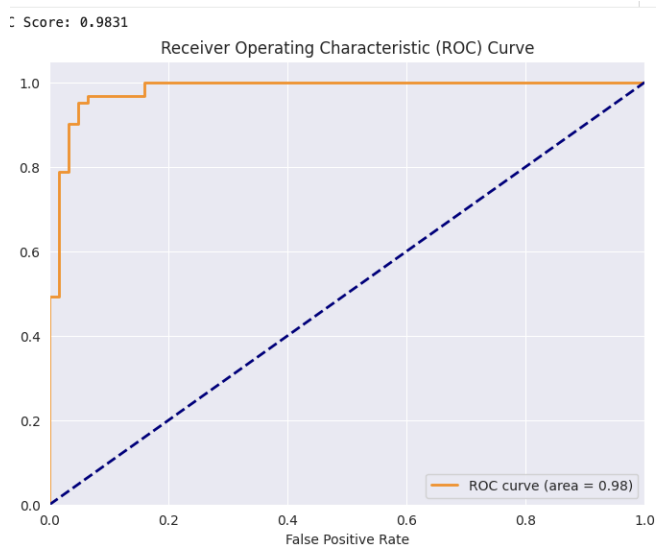


Fig. 7. ROC curve

5. CONCLUSION

This research aims to design and implement a hybrid method using a modified VGG19 architecture to detect ASD through landmark visualizations focused on the eye and forehead areas, and to evaluate the superiority of this approach over conventional full-face methods. The results indicate that this innovative early-detection system successfully integrates the VGG19 CNN model with MediaPipe facial landmark visualization to eliminate visual noise, achieving 94.35% accuracy and an AUC score of 0.9831. The most significant clinical finding is the achieved sensitivity (recall) of 95.24%,

demonstrating the system's reliability in minimizing the risk of false-negative detections. The robustness of these results is further supported by formal statistical validation, which yielded a significant P-value and stable confidence intervals, and by Grad-CAM analysis, which confirmed that the model consistently focused on relevant periorbital biomarkers. This implementation validates that focusing on the eye and forehead areas is a robust biomarker approach for objective automated classification. In the future, research and development can focus on using purely numerical coordinate data to develop a more lightweight model and integrate it into a mobile application, so that the results of this study can be transformed into a practical, easily accessible, non-invasive screening tool for the wider community to support more effective early intervention.

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