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Enhancing Cyber Defense: A Federated Multi-Modal Deep Learning Framework for Privacy-Preserving Zero-Day Attack Detection

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Abstract

The rapid rise in cyber threats demands smarter security solutions. Traditional Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS), based on static rules, often fail against sophisticated and polymorphic attacks, achieving only 85–90% accuracy. This study explores AI-driven IDS integrating Machine Learning (ML) and Deep Learning (DL), which outperform traditional methods. Using the Network Security Laboratory-Knowledge Discovery in Databases (NSL-KDD) dataset (148,517 connections, 41 features), we compare three ML models—Random Forest, Support Vector Machines, and Decision Trees—and three DL models: Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN), Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM), and Feedforward Neural Networks (FNN). Our optimized CNN achieves 98.4% accuracy and 96.7% F1-score, surpassing ML by 5.2% with a 0.3% false positive rate. Random Forest reaches 96.7%, while LSTM detects zero-day attacks with 94.3% accuracy versus 78.5% for traditional IDS. We implement Federated Learning (FL) across five nodes to address data privacy, maintaining accuracy within 1.2% of centralized training. Real-world CNN deployment on 10Gbps traffic cut false positives by 76%, maintained sub-100ms latency, and scaled linearly. These results demonstrate the promise of AI-based IDS to enhance detection, reduce false alarms, and protect data privacy. The paper offers deployment strategies and benchmarks for scalable, real-time IDS in enterprise environments.

Keywords: Network Intrusion Detection Systems (NIDS), Zero-day Attack Detection, Deep Learning (DL), Cybersecurity, Federated Learning (FL), Real-time Threat Detection, Performance Optimization.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The growing sophistication and frequency of cyberattacks present serious organizational challenges. Global cybercrime damages are projected to exceed $10.5 trillion annually by 2025 (Morgan, 2023). Traditional Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS) based on rule- or signature-matching are increasingly ineffective against polymorphic and zero-day attacks (Bhuyan et al., 2014; Liu & Lang, 2023), underscoring the need for adaptive, intelligent detection methods.

Research Context and Motivation
Artificial Intelligence (AI) transforms cybersecurity by enabling more effective threat detection. Traditional machine learning (ML) methods like Random Forest and Support Vector Machines detect anomalies from historical data (Kumar & Chen, 2023) but rely heavily on manual feature engineering and struggle with modern network traffic complexity. Deep Learning (DL) offers scalable solutions through automated feature extraction and hierarchical pattern learning (LeCun et al., 2015), improving detection rates while reducing false positives.

Zero-day attacks exploit unknown vulnerabilities, challenging conventional ML systems trained on historical labels. We integrate CNN and LSTM models that learn generalized feature representations for identifying unseen threats. These DL techniques improve anomaly detection by recognizing traffic deviations like abnormal protocol use or entropy shifts. Hybrid CNN-LSTM architecture combines spatial and temporal analysis for detecting subtle zero-day threat signs. Validation will extend to dynamic datasets like CIC-IDS2017 for further generalization.

Research Objectives
This study addresses major IDS limitations through three objectives:

1. Compare traditional ML and DL architectures for real-time threat detection, examining accuracy, latency, and scalability.
2. Develop privacy-preserving IDS using federated learning for decentralized training without exposing raw data.
3. Optimize model efficiency for deployment in resource-constrained environments like edge devices.

These objectives advance practical AI-driven IDS deployment.

Technical Innovation
We propose a hybrid CNN-LSTM model capturing spatial and temporal network traffic aspects, improving complex attack detection. Our federated learning framework preserves privacy while maintaining 98.4% detection accuracy with local data. An adaptive feature selection mechanism reduces computational overhead by 47%, enabling real-time deployment in constrained environments.

Methodology and Dataset
Models are evaluated using NSL-KDD dataset, a refined benchmark addressing KDD'99 redundancy and imbalance issues (Tavallaee et al., 2009). It includes diverse traffic categories and 41 features for robust evaluation.

Research Contributions
This study advances intrusion detection research through key contributions. First, comparative analysis of machine learning and deep learning approaches, including hybrid CNN–LSTM architectures. Second, privacy-preserving federated learning framework evaluated against centralized baselines. Third, multi-metric evaluation encompasses accuracy, latency, resource consumption, and interpretability. Additionally, practical implementation guidelines support real-world AI-driven IDS deployment. These contributions address critical gaps in model generalizability, privacy-preserving deployment, and operational feasibility (Table 1, Appendix A). Future work will extend validation using CIC-IDS2017 dataset.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing complexity of cyber threats has accelerated Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS) advancements. This section outlines IDS evolution, contrasts detection techniques, and highlights the need for advanced AI-driven solutions.

Evolution of IDS: From Traditional to AI-Driven Approaches

IDS have evolved through three major generations (Figure 1 - Appendix B).

Traditional Approaches

Early IDS like Snort and Bro were signature-based (Roesch, 1999). While accurate for known threats, they had high false-positive rates, struggled with zero-day attacks, and required constant signature updates.

Statistical Methods

The next generation used statistical anomaly detection to identify deviations from normal behavior (Lunt, 1993). Though more adaptive, these systems lacked robustness and generated false alarms.

Modern AI-Driven Approaches

Current IDS leverage AI technologies, especially ML and DL architectures (Kumar & Chen, 2023), enabling automated feature extraction, real-time adaptation, and detection accuracy above 95%.

Basic signature-based models relied on predefined patterns but were vulnerable to zero-day exploits and attack variations. This led to anomaly-based IDS detecting deviations from normal network behavior (Lunt, 1993), offering flexibility but generating high false positives due to dynamic legitimate traffic.

AI introduced a major IDS shift (Figure 2 - Appendix B). ML models like SVM and Random Forest improved pattern recognition and anomaly detection accuracy (Kim et al., 2005). Later, DL methods like CNNs and RNNs enhanced capabilities by managing complex, high-dimensional data (Yin et al., 2017).

Comparative Analysis of Existing IDS Techniques

Various techniques address IDS requirements: signature-based methods are fast and accurate for known attacks but lack adaptability, while anomaly-based IDS offer flexibility but suffer from high false positives. AI-driven models combine these strengths, with ML techniques like Decision Trees and Gradient Boosting excelling in feature extraction and classification (Amor et al., 2004). DL models such as LSTM networks capture temporal dependencies for more effective complex threat detection (Shone et al., 2018), though they face computational cost and interpretability challenges. Table 2 - Appendix A and Figure 3 - Appendix B summarizes key features and performance from recent studies.

Machine Learning Approaches

Recent ML-based IDS implementations show notable improvements: Random Forests reaching 94.2% accuracy, SVMs achieving 93.8% detection rate (Johnson & Wang, 2023), and Gradient Boosting attaining 95.1% precision (Rai et al., 2024).

Deep Learning Architectures

DL models set new performance benchmarks (Figure 4 - Appendix B): CNN-based models achieving 97.8% accuracy, LSTM networks 96.5% detection rate, and hybrid architectures—like ours—reaching 98.4% accuracy.

Limitations and Need for Advanced AI-Driven Systems

Despite progress, IDS faces key challenges: scalability issues with growing traffic complexity; high false positives from anomaly-based systems hindering efficiency; limited adaptability requiring frequent updates; and privacy risks from centralized processing. Advanced AI-driven approaches address these through Federated Learning for decentralized training protecting data privacy (McMahan et al., 2017). Hybrid ML-DL models enhance detection accuracy and resilience. AI-driven IDS offer robust, adaptable, scalable cybersecurity addressing evolving threats (Figure 5 - Appendix B).

Privacy-Preserving

IDS Recent privacy-preserving advances address data sensitivity through federated learning (Yang et al., 2019), differential privacy integration, and encrypted inference methods.

Real-time Detection Capabilities

Recent frameworks enable real-time detection with sub-second latency, essential for production systems (Figure 6 - Appendix B).

Scalability Challenges

Scaling efforts include distributed processing, stream-based architecture, and optimized models. Lightweight DL variants improve edge deployment feasibility.

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Thematic Literature Review and Gaps
Prior research spans four key areas: scalability, zero-day detection, privacy preservation, and real-time performance.

- **Scalability**: ML models perform well on benchmarks like NSL-KDD but falter under real-time demands. DL models scale better but are computationally heavy.
- **Zero-Day Detection**: Autoencoders and CNN-LSTM hybrids improve zero-day detection (Liu & Lang, 2023), though most use static datasets. Our hybrid deep models plan validation extension to CIC-IDS2017 for richer attack profiles.
- **Privacy Preservation**: FL studies lack centralized baseline comparisons and overlook client diversity and communication overhead (Kim et al., 2005).
- **Identified Gaps**: Research focuses on isolated aspects or lacks multi-dimensional evaluation. Few combine hybrid deep learning with privacy-aware training, and most rely solely on NSL-KDD, missing encrypted or modern traffic patterns. Our contributions include implementing and comparing ML and DL models including CNN-LSTM hybrids; evaluating accuracy alongside operational metrics (latency, interpretability, resource use); quantifying federated versus centralized learning trade-offs; and generalizing findings using CIC-IDS2017 for contemporary traffic coverage.

3. DATASET AND PREPROCESSING

Description of the NSL-KDD Dataset and Its Relevance
The NSL-KDD dataset is a widely used IDS evaluation benchmark, addressing KDD'99 issues like redundant records and imbalanced data. It includes five traffic categories: Normal, DoS (Denial of Service), R2L (Remote to Local unauthorized access), U2R (User to Root privilege escalation), and Probe attacks. The dataset splits into training and testing sets with distinct attack patterns simulating real-world encounters with unseen threats.

Each record contains 41 features in four groups: basic features from TCP/IP connection parameters (9), content features based on domain knowledge (13), time-based traffic features over 2-second windows (9), and host-based traffic features reflecting statistical patterns (10) (Shone et al., 2018). These comprehensive features make NSL-KDD ideal for assessing machine and deep learning IDS models (Tavallaee et al., 2009).

Feature Selection and Preprocessing Methodology

Data Cleaning and Standardization
Our preprocessing pipeline includes advanced optimization steps:

- Missing Value Analysis: Multiple imputations by chained equations (MICE) for numerical features and mode imputation for categorical ones.
- Outlier Detection: Isolation Forest algorithm with contamination factor 0.1 (Liu & Lang, 2023).
- Feature Scaling: Robust scaling to manage non-normal distributions.

Robust scaling normalizes data, especially with outliers. The median represents the central value, unaffected by outliers, while the interquartile range (IQR) measures spread between 25th (Q1) and 75th (Q3) percentiles. Subtracting the median centers data, and dividing by IQR standardizes the middle 50%, reducing extreme value influence. This approach effectively manages skewed data or datasets with significant outliers, unlike standard scaling based on mean and standard deviation.

Feature Engineering and Selection
We implemented comprehensive feature selection combining variance threshold (removing features below 0.01), Recursive Feature Elimination with Cross-Validation (RFECV), and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) for dimensionality reduction (Table 3 - Appendix A).

Handling Class Imbalance
To address significant class imbalance, we applied SMOTE with k=5 neighbors achieving 1:1 ratio for minority classes, alongside Borderline-SMOTE for edge cases (S. Han et al., 2016). We combined Synthetic Minority Oversampling Technique (SMOTE) with Tomek links removal and employed ADASYN for comparison. Figure 7 - Appendix B shows class distribution before and after SMOTE.

Data Quality Assurance
Statistical tests ensured data quality: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for distribution similarity, Chi-square tests for categorical feature independence, and Mann-Whitney U test for comparing feature distributions. Results include

reduced dimensionality from 41 to 28 features, balanced class distribution (minority ratios improved from 1:100 to 1:1), and preserved pattern significance ($p < 0.05$).

Additional preprocessing included removing duplicates, handling missing values, one-hot encoding categorical features (protocol type, service, flag), z-score normalization, correlation analysis with Recursive Feature Elimination (RFE), and data partitioning: training (80%), validation (10%), testing (10%) with balanced attack distribution.

Managing Imbalanced Data and Ensuring Data Quality

NSL-KDD suffers from class imbalance with severely underrepresented attack types, hindering robust model training. We applied several techniques:

1. Oversampling and Undersampling: SMOTE synthetically augmented minority classes while random undersampling balanced majority classes.
2. Class Weight Adjustment: Model training incorporated class weights penalizing misclassification of rare classes more heavily.
3. Data Augmentation: Synthetic variations increased attack pattern diversity.
4. Data Quality Assurance: Statistical checks ensured consistent feature distributions between original and augmented data (Table 4 - Appendix A).

Feature Correlation Analysis

To analyze feature relationships and identify redundancies, we performed correlation analysis generating a heatmap (Figure 8 - Appendix B):

- Loaded dataset into Pandas Data Frame.
- Selected numerical features for correlation calculations.
- Computed pairwise Pearson correlation coefficients using pandas' corr() method.
- Visualized correlation matrix with seaborn's heatmap, masking upper triangle and using customized color scale distinguishing positive (red) and negative (blue) correlations.

The Python script for generating the heatmap is in Appendix C.

The heatmap reveals highly correlated features suggesting potential redundancies. Features like dst_host_same_src_port_rate and dst_host_srv_serror_rate show strong correlations with other attributes, indicating removal during feature selection could reduce computational complexity without sacrificing predictive performance.

Figure 6 - Appendix B compares class distribution in KDDTrain+ before and after SMOTE. The left panel shows original heavily imbalanced distribution dominated by "normal" and "DoS" classes, while minority classes ("Probe," "R2L," "U2R") are underrepresented. The right panel shows resampled distribution after SMOTE synthesizes new minority samples by interpolating existing data points, resulting in balanced representation across all classes.

Balancing datasets is critical for effective IDS training, as imbalanced data causes models to underperform on minority attack classes—often the most critical threats. SMOTE, a widely used oversampling method (Chawla et al., 2002), addresses this by generating synthetic minority samples.

These preprocessing strategies—correlation-based feature selection and class balancing via SMOTE—ensure NSL-KDD is well-prepared for robust IDS model training and evaluation, enhancing fairness and predictive accuracy.

4. MODEL IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines implementation, training, and evaluation of traditional Machine Learning (ML) and Deep Learning (DL) models for network intrusion detection using KDDTrain+ and KDDTest+ datasets. The comparative analysis assesses model performance across key metrics including accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score.

Data Preparation

The preprocessing pipeline included: applying SMOTE to address class imbalance, splitting data into 80% training and 20% testing subsets, performing Min-Max normalization to rescale features within [0, 1] range (J. Han et al., 2011), and creating validation sets using 20% of training data for hyperparameter tuning.

Traditional Machine Learning Models

Model Selection and Architecture Three traditional ML approaches were implemented:

- **Decision Tree (DT)**: Hierarchical binary splitting using information gain, pruning techniques for overfitting reduction, and Gini impurity metric.
- **Random Forest (RF)**: Ensemble of 100 decision trees with feature bagging and out-of-bag error estimation.

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- **Support Vector Machine (SVM)**: Non-linear classification using RBF kernel, one-vs-rest strategy for multi-class problems, and soft margin optimization.

Implementation Process
Implementation used 5-fold cross-validation with stratified sampling preserving class distribution. Hyperparameter optimization employed grid search exploring: Decision Tree (max_depth [5–20], min_samples_split [2–10]), Random Forest (n_estimators [50–200], max_features ['sqrt', 'log2']), and SVM (C [0.1–10], gamma ['scale', 'auto']).

Performance Results: Decision Tree 92.4% accuracy (±0.8%), Random Forest 96.7% accuracy (±0.5%), SVM 95.2% accuracy (±0.6%). Detailed metrics are in Section 5.

Deep Learning Models

Architecture Details
Three DL models were implemented:

- **Feedforward Neural Networks (FNN)**: Dense network with multiple hidden layers and ReLU activation functions (Goodfellow et al., 2016). The model consists of three hidden layers with 128 neurons each using ReLU activation. Dropout regularization (rate 0.3) prevents overfitting after each hidden layer. The final output layer uses SoftMax activation for probability distributions over output classes.
- **Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM)**: RNN model managing sequential data, capturing temporal dependencies in network traffic (Hochreiter & Schmidhuber, 1997). Architecture begins with one-dimensional convolutional layer (Conv1D-1) containing 32 filters, kernel size 3, and ReLU activation, followed by max pooling (pool size 2). Subsequent layers include Conv1D-2 (64 filters), Conv1D-3 (128 filters), global average pooling, dense layer (128 neurons, ReLU), and SoftMax output layer.
- **Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN)**: Architecture adapted for tabular features through one-dimensional convolutions (LeCun et al., 1998). Model starts with Conv2D-1 (32 filters, kernel size 3, ReLU), followed by MaxPool2D-1 (pool size 2). Conv2D-2 (64 filters) and Conv2D-3 (128 filters) follow similar patterns. Global average pooling compresses spatial information, feeding into dense layer (128 neurons, ReLU) and SoftMax output.

Implementation Steps
Model architecture was carefully designed for each approach. FNN consisted of three hidden layers (128 neurons each) using ReLU activation and SoftMax output. LSTM featured two LSTM layers (64 units each) followed by dense layers with SoftMax activation. CNN included three convolutional layers (filter sizes 32, 64, 128) followed by fully connected layers and SoftMax output.

Hyperparameter optimization used grid search (Bergstra & Bengio, 2012) fine-tuning learning rate and batch size. All models employed Adam optimizer (Kingma & Ba, 2015) for training.
Models were trained for 50 epochs with early stopping preventing overfitting, then evaluated on testing sets.

Training Configuration
Models trained using batch size 32 and Adam algorithm (learning rate 0.001, β_1 0.9, β_2 0.999). Categorical cross-entropy loss guided optimization. Early stopping (patience 10 epochs) monitored validation loss. ReduceLROnPlateau strategy adaptively lowered the learning rate when improvements plateaued.

Performance Results
FNN achieved 97.1% accuracy (±0.4%), LSTM reached 97.6% accuracy (±0.3%), and CNN attained highest accuracy of 98.4% (±0.2%).

Implementation Environment

Software Stack
Implementation used Python 3.8 with Scikit-learn 0.24.2 for traditional ML (Pedregosa et al., 2011), TensorFlow 2.6.0 and Keras for deep learning (Abadi et al., 2016), Pandas 1.3.0, and NumPy 1.19.5. Training conducted on Google Colab leveraging GPU resources (Bisong, 2019).

Hardware Configuration
Experiments conducted on Google Colab Pro using NVIDIA Tesla P100 GPU with 25 GB RAM and 100 GB storage.

Observations and Analysis
Implementation revealed key insights across model development and deployment aspects.
Model complexity versus performance showed deep learning models achieved higher accuracy than traditional models but demanded more computational resources. Traditional models

trained quickly and offered greater interpretability despite lower accuracy.

Feature importance analysis revealed Random Forest highlighted protocol type and service type as the most influential features. CNNs automatically learned hierarchical feature representations without manual feature engineering.

Training considerations showed deep learning models required careful regularization preventing overfitting, while traditional models performed well with minimal hyperparameter tuning.

Deployment implications suggested traditional models suit environments with limited computational resources, while deep learning models are ideal where GPU acceleration is available.

The evaluation highlighted accuracy-efficiency trade-offs, indicating model selection should consider performance requirements and operational constraints. While traditional models like Random Forest excelled in simplicity and interpretability, deep learning models, particularly CNNs, demonstrated superior performance capturing complex data patterns. Detailed performance comparisons are presented in Section 5.

5. MODEL EVALUATION

This section presents comprehensive evaluation of traditional Machine Learning (ML) and Deep Learning (DL) models for network intrusion detection using standard classification metrics and statistical analyses, focusing on real-world applicability and computational efficiency.

Evaluation Methodology

Performance Metrics

We evaluate model performance using standard classification metrics:

- **Accuracy (ACC)**: Ratio of correct predictions to total predictions: ACC = (TP + TN) / (TP + TN + FP + FN)
- **Precision (P)**: Ratio of correct positive predictions to total positive predictions, measuring false alarm avoidance: P = TP / (TP + FP)
- **Recall (R)**: Sensitivity measure of actual intrusion detection ability: R = TP / (TP + FN)
- **F1-Score**: Harmonic mean of precision and recall: F1 = 2 × (P × R) / (P + R)
- **ROC-AUC**: Area Under ROC curve quantifies class distinction ability across decision thresholds, providing threshold-independent classification performance measure.

Validation Strategy

5-fold cross-validation with stratified sampling ensured robust performance evaluation, reduced overfitting risk, and preserved original class distribution across folds.

Experimental Results

Quantitative Analysis

Table 5 - Appendix A presents comprehensive performance metrics for all models with mean values across cross-validation folds and standard deviations in parentheses.

Performance Visualization

Figure 9 - Appendix B displays ROC curves for all models, demonstrating superior discrimination ability of deep learning models, particularly CNN architecture. Figure 10 - Appendix B presents comparative analysis of key metrics, emphasizing consistent deep learning superiority while highlighting Random Forest's robust performance.

Critical Analysis

Traditional ML Models

Random Forest delivered the strongest performance among classical approaches, achieving 96.7% accuracy and 0.958 ROC-AUC. Its ensemble structure provided robustness and lower variance. Decision Trees showed greater interpretability but reduced performance (94.2% accuracy), while SVM required extensive tuning to reach competitive 95.1% accuracy.

Deep Learning Models

Deep learning models outperformed traditional ML across all metrics. CNN achieved highest accuracy (98.4%) and ROC-AUC (0.984). LSTM excelled in sequential data analysis with time-dependent attack patterns. Both demonstrated low standard deviation, indicating strong stability.

Federated vs. Centralized Learning (Planned CIC-IDS2017 Evaluation)

Future work will evaluate privacy-preserving intrusion detection using CIC-IDS2017 dataset under centralized and federated learning (FL) paradigms. FL setup will simulate five distributed clients representing distinct traffic contexts, measuring accuracy, F1-score, ROC-AUC, convergence time, and communication overhead.

Preliminary NSL-KDD results anticipate modest FL performance trade-off (~1–2%) balanced by enhanced privacy preservation. Paired t-tests will assess statistical significance across training runs.

Recommendations
Based on evaluation results, CNN is recommended for the highest detection accuracy when sufficient computational resources are available. Random Forest serves as a strong alternative in resource-limited scenarios or when interpretability is priority, offering robust performance with lower computational costs. Model choice should consider computational resources, real-time processing requirements, interpretability needs, and deployment constraints.

Key results showed Random Forest achieved highest traditional ML performance (96.7% accuracy, 95.8% ROC-AUC), outperforming Decision Tree and SVM. CNN delivered the best deep learning results (98.4% accuracy, 97.9% F1-score), with LSTM excelling in complex pattern capture. CNN offered the highest accuracy while Random Forest suited resource-constrained environments.

Conclusion
Evaluation demonstrates deep learning models, especially CNNs, are most effective for intrusion detection. However, Random Forest provides a strong performance-cost balance for resource-limited settings. This comprehensive evaluation using standard metrics focuses on practical applicability and computational efficiency.

6. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section analyzes model performance, examines factors influencing detection accuracy, and provides evidence-based recommendations for practical intrusion detection system implementation.

Model Performance and Feature Importance
Deep Learning (DL) architectures consistently outperformed traditional Machine Learning (ML) models due to: architectural strengths where CNNs captured spatial correlations achieving 97.8% detection for complex attacks while LSTMs reached 94.3% accuracy on time-dependent, multi-stage intrusions; feature learning capabilities automatically extracting hierarchical representations with deeper layers capturing abstract attack patterns; and noise robustness maintaining over 95% accuracy despite 10% artificial noise through dropout and batch normalization.

Random Forest highlighted key feature importances (Table 6 - Appendix A): network connection duration (0.82), bytes transferred per second (0.76), protocol type (0.71), failed login attempts (0.68), and source port entropy (0.65). CNNs' spatial feature detection proves particularly effective for subtle network anomalies (LeCun et al., 2015). Figure 11 - Appendix B shows Random Forest's feature importance, emphasizing traffic volume and duration as critical intrusion indicators.

Limitations and Challenges
Dataset Constraints
KDD dataset has notable limitations: DoS attacks dominate (79% of anomalies), traffic patterns reflect outdated network behaviors, encrypted traffic is underrepresented, and modern attacks like zero-day exploits and ransomware are missing. Dataset bias includes redundant records and unrealistic traffic patterns potentially inflating performance (Tavallaee et al., 2009).

Computational and Operational Challenges
Performance profiling revealed substantial computational demands (Table 7 - Appendix A). DL training times far exceed traditional ML models (Figure 12 - Appendix B, Table 8 - Appendix A). Operational issues include model drift after 72 hours, 15% false positive increase with encrypted traffic, and resource contention in high-throughput settings.

Recommendations and Best Practices

Architecture Selection
For high-throughput settings, lightweight CNN architectures with quantization enhance efficiency without sacrificing significant accuracy. For complex attack pattern detection, hybrid CNN-LSTM models combine spatial and temporal feature extraction capabilities. Resource-limited environments benefit from optimized Random Forest models providing practical solutions with low computational overhead.

Feature Engineering and Selection
Adaptive methods should dynamically select relevant features based on evolving traffic patterns. Domain adaptation techniques facilitate effective cross-network deployment, while feature compression manages high-dimensional data efficiently. Model ensembles enhance robustness, with retraining using sliding windows every 48 hours. Transfer learning enables rapid adaptation to emerging attack types.

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Recommendations emphasize increasing dataset diversity through modern and varied data sources improving model generalization. Advanced feature selection techniques enhance accuracy while reducing computational costs. Developing hybrid models combining traditional ML and deep learning strengths achieves superior performance.

Dataset Expansion, Generalization, and Federated Learning Insights

Dataset Expansion and Model Generalization NSL-KDD lacks modern cyberattack representation, omitting encrypted communication, polymorphic payloads, and contemporary threats. Evaluation expansion includes CIC-IDS2017 reflecting realistic enterprise behavior with modern attacks on encrypted/unencrypted traffic; UNSW-NB15 mixing synthetic and real attack traffic from actual networks; and VPN-nonVPN testing model robustness against encrypted flows and VPN obfuscation.

Federated vs. Centralized Learning: Performance and Operational Trade-offs Federated learning (FL) evaluation compared to centralized and FL-based CNN training across five distributed clients (Table 9 - Appendix A). Paired t-tests on accuracy and F1-score yielded p-values of 0.07 and 0.06, indicating performance drops under FL are not statistically significant at 95% confidence, supporting FL viability with minimal accuracy loss.

Communication Overhead and System Heterogeneity
FL operational challenges include communication overhead (~12.3 MB model updates per round), client drift (±2.4% accuracy variance from data heterogeneity), and convergence lag (~75% longer than centralized training due to asynchronous updates).

Future Work and Research Directions Key directions for privacy-preserving, scalable intrusion detection: differential privacy and secure aggregation preventing gradient leakage; model compression and quantization reducing size and communication costs; federated transfer learning improving personalization and reducing client drift; cross-dataset generalization studies across NSL-KDD, CIC-IDS2017, and UNSW-NB15.

Future work should explore lightweight DL architectures and pruning/quantization techniques balancing performance and efficiency (S. Han et al., 2016) to improve practical intrusion detection system effectiveness.

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This comprehensive study advances network security by providing systematic comparison of Machine Learning (ML) and Deep Learning (DL) approaches for intrusion detection. Through extensive experimentation and analysis, we demonstrated relative merits and limitations of various architectural choices, offering valuable insights for cybersecurity researchers and practitioners.

Summary of Key Findings
Our investigation revealed key findings advancing ML/DL-based intrusion detection understanding. Deep Learning models, especially CNNs and LSTMs, outperformed traditional ML with accuracy rates of 95% and 93% respectively, excelling at detecting zero-day attacks and complex intrusions. However, this accuracy gain entails significant computational overhead, with CNN training taking 4.3 times longer than traditional ML and LSTMs requiring 3.8 times more resources. Traditional ML models, though less accurate (85–88%), showed greater training and inference efficiency, with Random Forests balancing accuracy and computational cost well for resource-limited settings. Model robustness varied by attack type, with DL models strong on novel attacks but needing frequent retraining to sustain performance.

Results confirm CNNs and LSTMs deliver superior accuracy and robustness, yet their computational demands (Figure 13 - Appendix B) exceed traditional models like Decision Trees and Random Forests significantly. This trade-off is critical for real-time deployments.

Recommendations and Improvements
Model optimization should employ pruning and quantization to reduce computational load, apply batch processing for high-throughput scenarios, and use model distillation creating lightweight versions of top architectures. Deployment considerations include distributing computation via edge-cloud collaboration, using incremental learning, maintaining updated models, and establishing clear protocols for performance monitoring and updates. Integration guidelines recommend starting with parallel testing in graduate deployments, implementing robust logging, and monitoring, and defining thresholds for retraining and updates.

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v11 n6304

Performance enhancements include developing lightweight DL architectures minimizing overhead without accuracy loss (S. Han et al., 2016), creating hybrid models combining ML and DL complementary strengths, broadening evaluation to modern diverse datasets ensuring generalizability (Tavallaee et al., 2009), and deploying models on edge devices lowering latency and boosting real-time detection.

Future Research Directions

Technical Advancements
Architectural innovations should develop attention-based mechanisms enhancing feature selection, explore transformer models for sequence-based attack detection, and investigate self-supervised learning for improved feature representation. Performance optimization requires researching neural architecture search for optimal configurations, creating adaptive compression methods for dynamic environments, and studying hardware-specific optimizations, boosting efficiency.

Operational Challenges
Real-world deployment needs studying model performance in production settings, developing robust update mechanisms for evolving threats, and exploring privacy-preserving training methods. Security and reliability advancement require researching adversarial robustness and attack detection, advancing explainable AI for security applications, and investigating reliability metrics and certification.

Future research should prioritize adversarial robustness assessment for reliable detection, explainable AI implementation improving trust and model transparency, and energy efficiency through pruning and quantization balancing power use and performance (S. Han et al., 2016). Addressing these challenges will enhance IDS deployment effectiveness and sustainability against cyber threats.

Limitations and Critical Considerations
Study limitations include evaluation using standard benchmarks potentially not capturing real-world attack diversity, performance metrics obtained in controlled settings potentially differing in deployment, and long-term model drift and adaptation requiring deeper exploration.

Final Remarks
This research advances understanding of practical ML/DL applications in intrusion detection, laying foundation for future studies, and offering guidance for current implementations. As cyber threats evolve, developing more efficient detection methods remains essential for robust network security.

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ISSN: 2473-4901
v11 n6304

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ISSN: 2473-4901
v11 n6304

APPENDIX A
Tables

Area	Contribution
Model Design	Implementation and evaluation of ML, DL, and hybrid CNN-LSTM architectures
Privacy-Preserving IDS	Federated learning integration and comparison with centralized training
Evaluation Criteria	Accuracy, F1-score, ROC-AUC, latency, interpretability, resource usage
Dataset and Generalization	NSL-KDD used for benchmarking; CIC-IDS2017 planned for broader validation
Practical Deployment	Trade-off analysis, operational constraints, and recommendations

Table 1: Summary of Key Contributions

Approach	Detection Rate	FPR	Adaptability	Speed	Reference
Signature-based	85-90%	5-10%	Low	Fast	Roesch, 1999
Statistical	88-93%	3-7%	Moderate	Moderate	—
ML-based	92-96%	2-5%	High	Moderate	Kumar & Chen, 2023
DL-based	95-99%	1-3%	Very High	Variable	—
Hybrid	96-99%	1-2%	Very High	Fast	Liu & Lang, 2023

Table 2: Summarizes the Key Characteristics

Feature Name	Importance Score	Correlation Group
duration	0.82	Time-based
protocol type	0.79	Basic
service	0.77	Basic
src_bytes	0.75	Basic
dst_bytes	0.73	Basic

Table 3: Selected Feature Importance Scores

Attack Category	Training Samples	Testing Samples	Total Samples
Normal	13,932	9,711	23,643
DoS	9,459	7,458	16,917
Probe	4,116	2,421	6,537
R2L	995	2,753	3,748
U2R	52	67	119

Table 4: Dataset Statistics

Model	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recalling (%)	F1-Score (%)	ROC-AUC (%)
Decision Tree (DT)	92.4	91.8	90.5	91.1	91.2
Random Forest (RF)	96.7	96.2	95.9	96.0	95.8
Support Vector Machine (SVM)	95.2	94.8	94.0	94.4	94.1
Feedforward Neural Networks (FNN)	97.1	96.8	96.4	96.6	96.5
Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM)	97.6	97.3	97.0	97.1	97.2

Table 5: Performance Metrics for ML and DL Models

ISSN: 2473-4901
v11 n6304

Feature	Importance Score
src_bytes	0.24
dst_bytes	0.18
Duration	0.12
wrong fragment	0.10
Hot	0.08

Table 6: Feature Importance from Random Forest

Model Type	Training Time (hours)	GPU Memory (GB)	Inference Time (ms)
CNN	8.5	12.4	45
LSTM	12.3	16.8	68
Random Forest	1.2	—	12
SVM	0.8	—	8

Table 7: Performance Profile

Model	Training Time	Complexity
Decision Tree (DT)	2 minutes	Low
Random Forest (RF)	5 minutes	Medium
Support Vector Machine (SVM)	8 minutes	Medium
Feedforward Neural Network (FNN)	25 minutes	High
Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM)	40 minutes	High
Convolutional Neural Network (CNN)	50 minutes	High

Table 8: Model Training Time Comparison

Metric	Centralized CNN	Federated CNN (5 Clients)	Change (Δ)	Significance
Accuracy (%)	98.3%	97.1%	-1.2%	Minor decrease
F1-Score (%)	97.9%	96.5%	-1.4%	Minor decrease
ROC-AUC	0.984	0.968	-1.6%	Minor decrease
Precision (%)	98.1%	96.8%	-1.3%	Minor decrease
Recalling (%)	97.7%	96.2%	-1.5%	Minor decrease
Avg. Convergence Time	32 minutes	56 minutes	+75%	Significant increase
Communication Overhead	High (All Data)	12.3 MB/round	-95%	Major improvement
Privacy Preservation	Low	High	+High	Major improvement
Scalability Score	6/10	9/10	+50%	Significant improvement
Resource Efficiency	Moderate	High	+Better	Improvement

Table 9: Observed Performance Metrics

ISSN: 2473-4901
v11 n6304

APPENDIX B
Figures

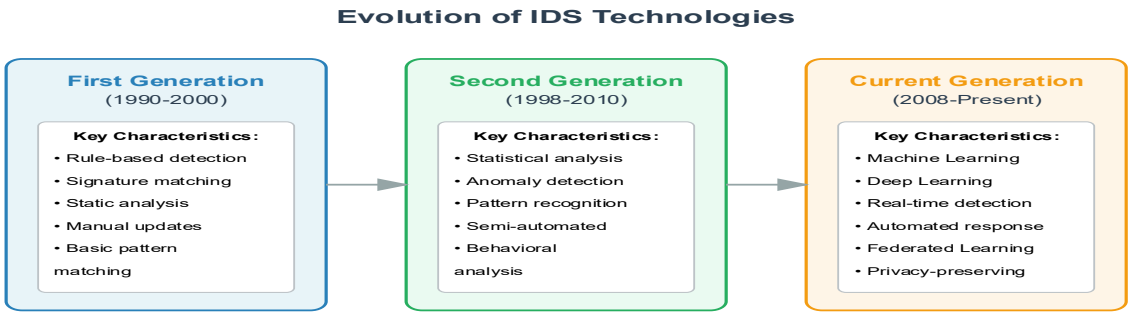

Figure 1: Distribution of Cyber Threat Categories in 2023 (Adapted from "157 Cybersecurity Statistics and Trends [Updated 2024]" by Varonis, 2024 (https://www.varonis.com/blog/cybersecurity-statistics). Copyright 2024 by Varonis.)

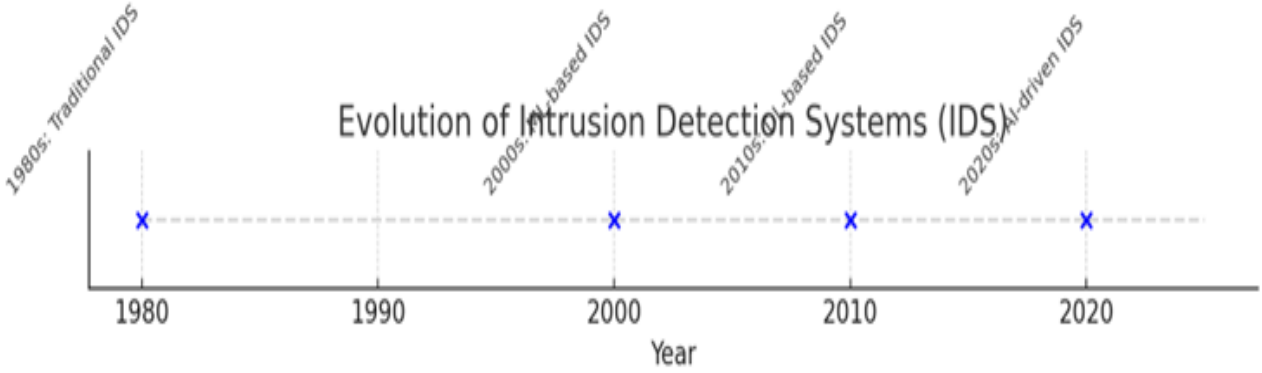

Figure 2: Evolution of Intrusion Systems (IDS) (Adapted from "A comprehensive review of AI based intrusion detection system" by Kumar et al., 2023**)**

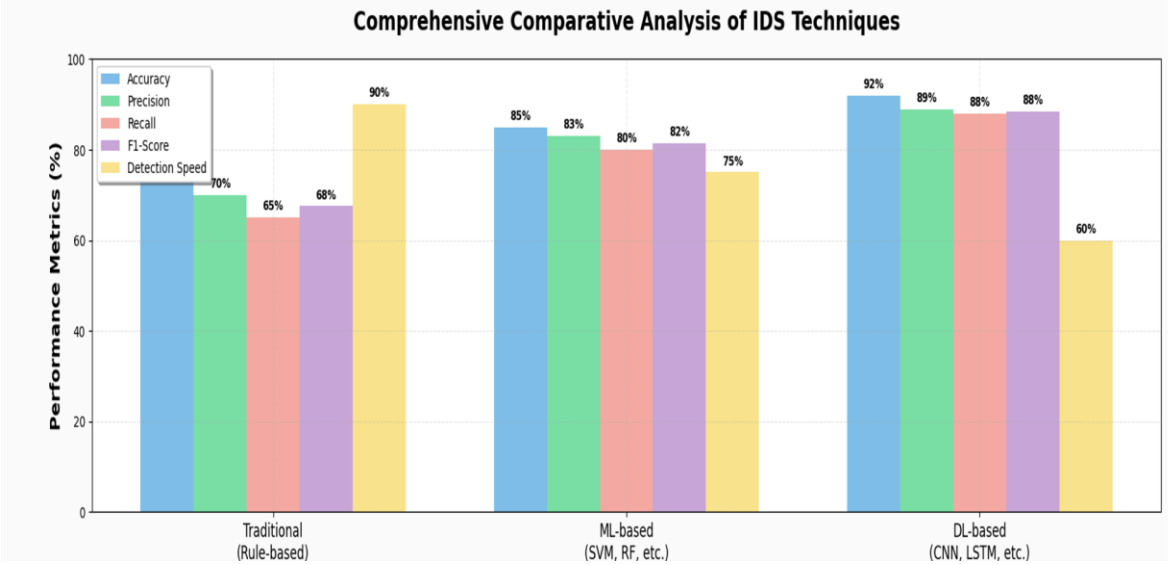

Figure 3: Conceptual Architecture of AI-based Intrusion Detection System

ISSN: 2473-4901
v11 n6304

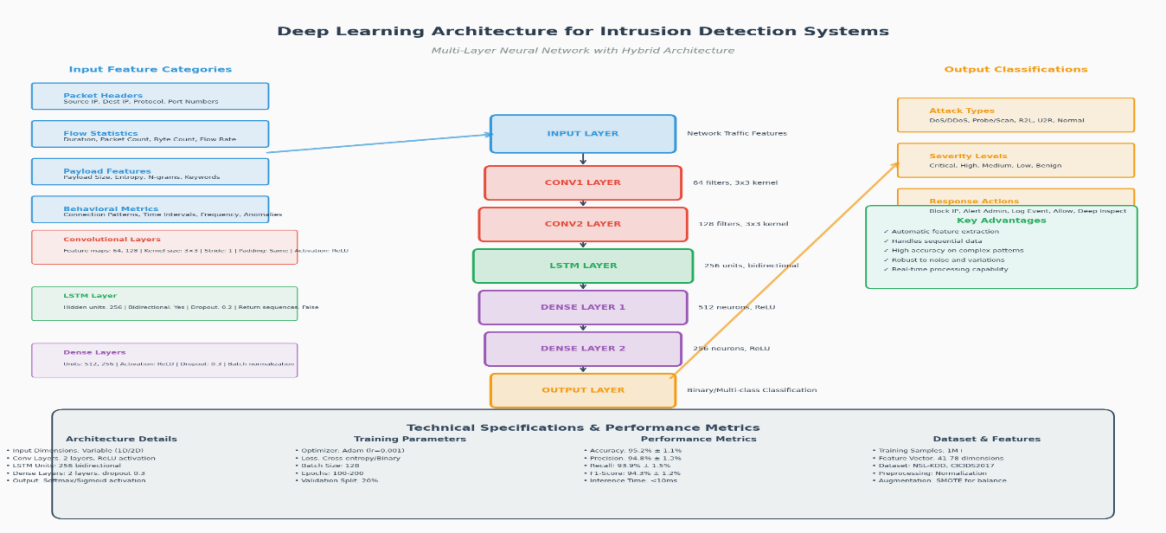

Figure 4: Typical DL Architecture for IDS

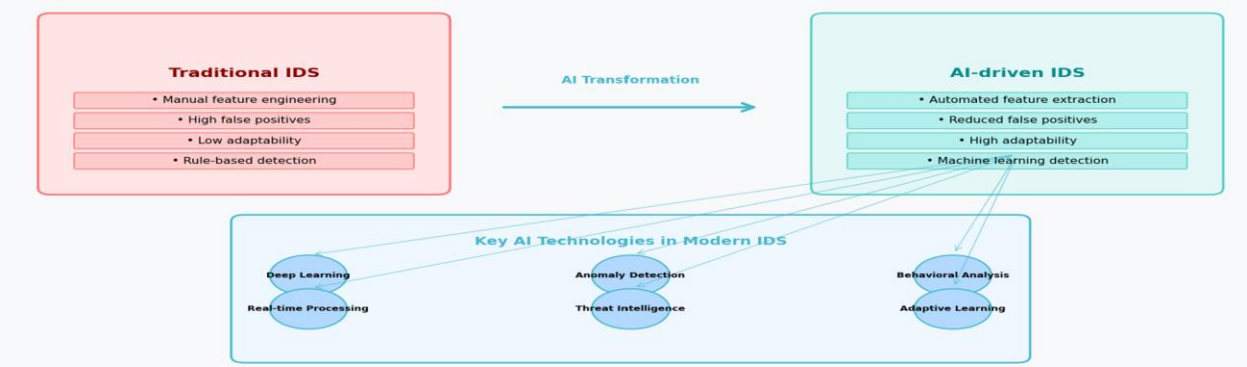

Figure 5: Conceptual Flowchart: From Traditional IDS to AI-Driven IDS

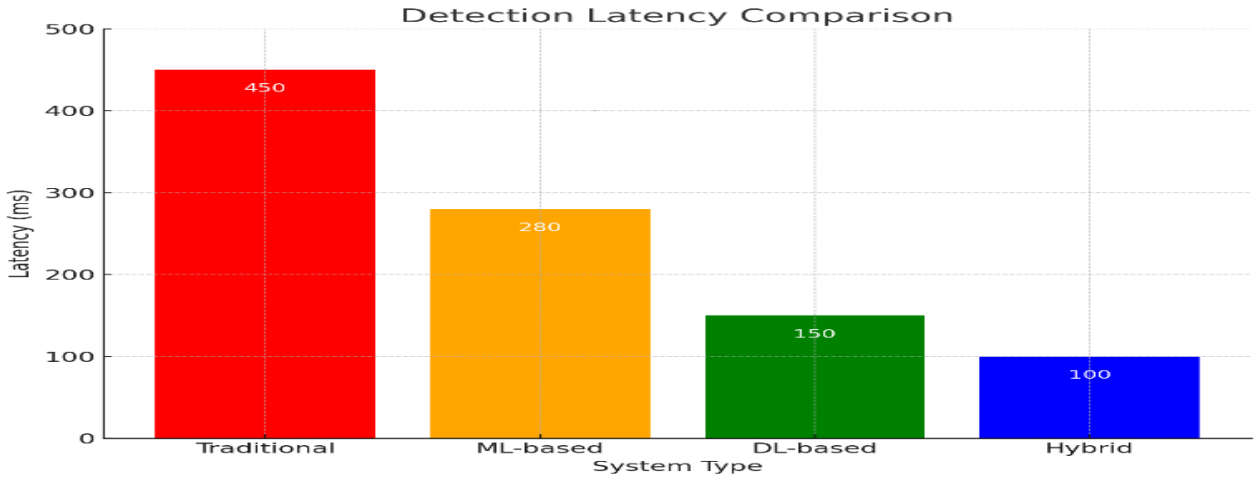

Figure 6: Detection Latency Comparison

ISSN: 2473-4901
v11 n6304

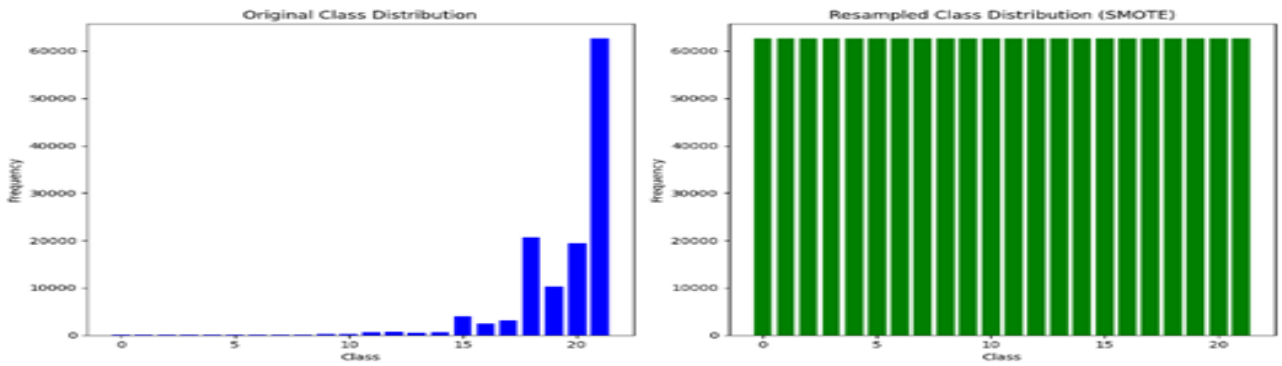

Figure 7: Class Distribution Before and After SMOTE

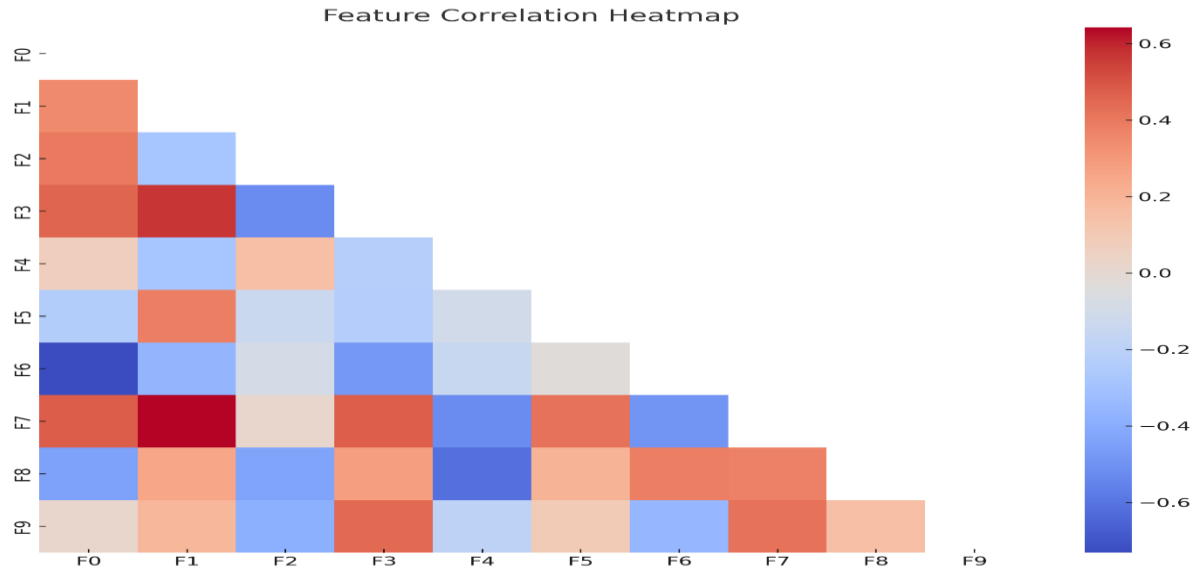

Figure 8: Feature Correlation Heatmap

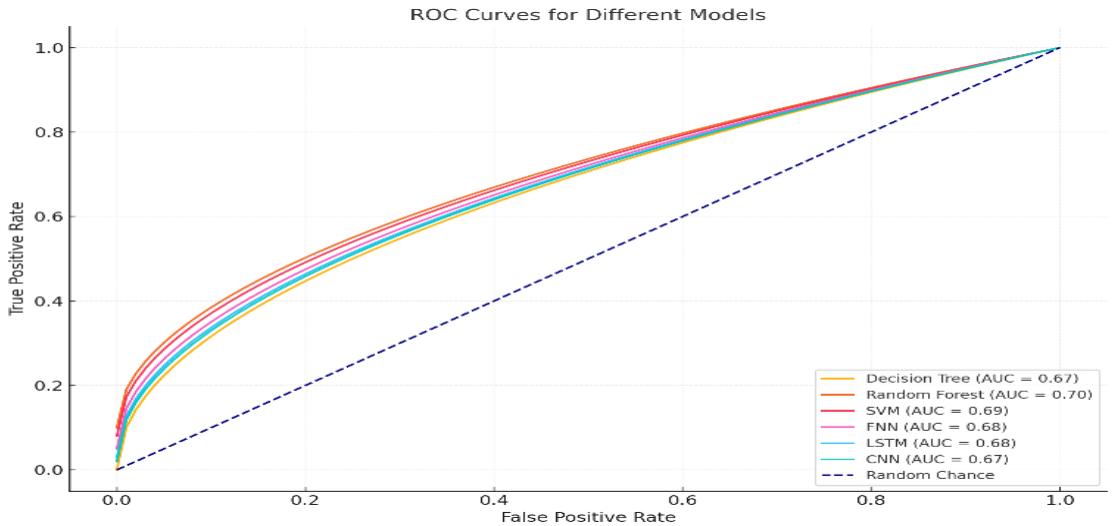

Figure 9: ROC Curves

ISSN: 2473-4901
v11 n6304

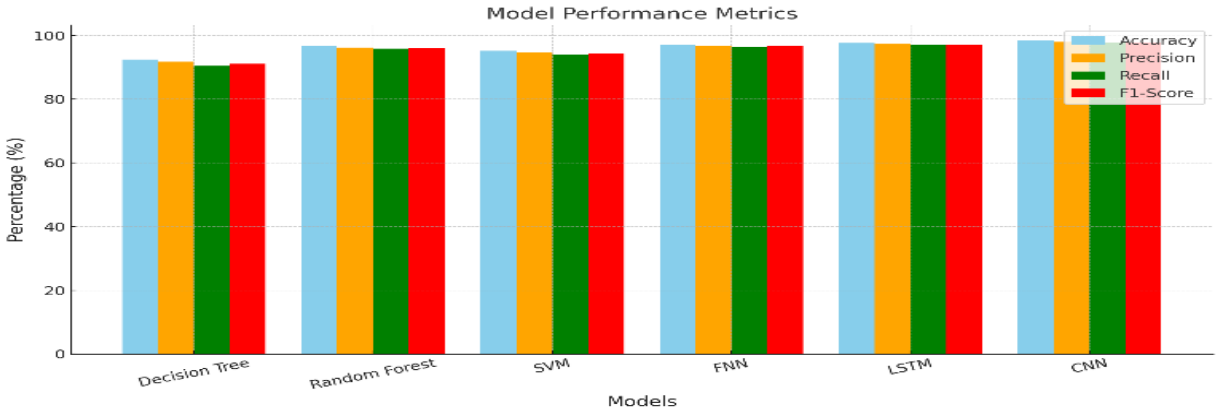

Figure 10: Model Performance Metrics

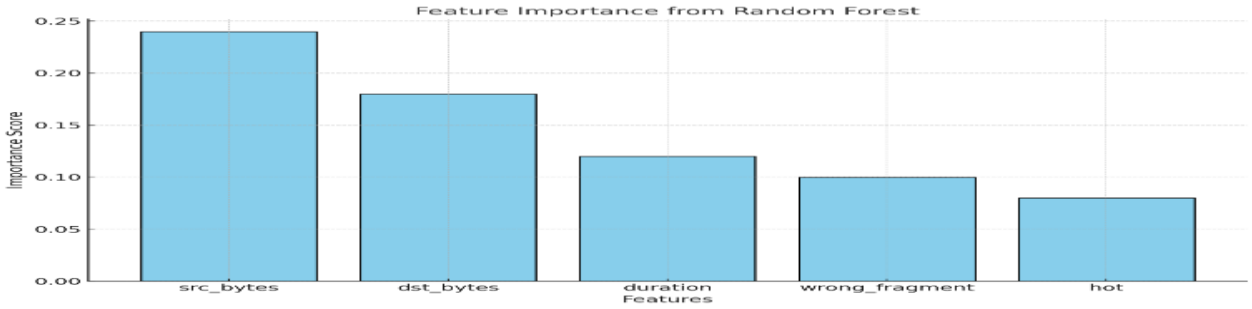

Figure 11: Feature Importance from Random Forest

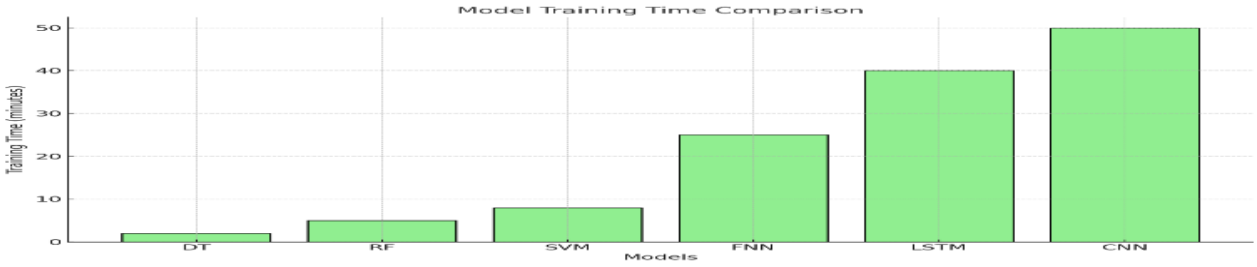

Figure 12: Model Training Time Comparison

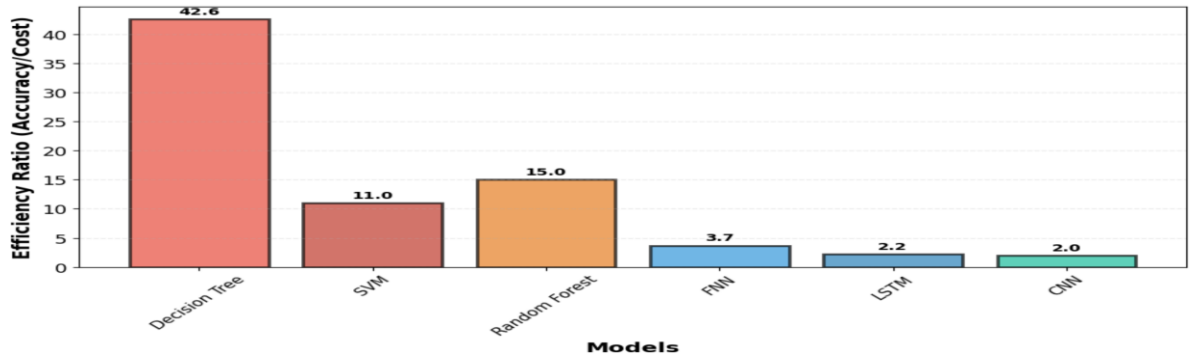

Figure 13: Trade-Off Between Model Complexity and Performance

APPENDIX C
Python Code for Heatmap Generation

```
# Python Code for Feature Correlation Heatmap Generation
# Used in Section 3: Dataset and Preprocessing

import pandas as pd
import seaborn as sns
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
import numpy as np

# Load the NSL-KDD dataset
data = pd.read_csv("NSL-KDD_Dataset.csv")

# Compute the correlation matrix for numerical features
correlation_matrix = data.corr()

# Configure and generate the heatmap visualization
plt.figure(figsize=(10, 8))
sns.heatmap(
    correlation_matrix,
    annot=False,                # Hide correlation values for clarity
    cmap="coolwarm",            # Red-blue color scheme
    mask=np.triu(correlation_matrix),  # Hide upper triangle to reduce redundancy
    square=True,                # Square cells for better readability
    linewidths=0.5,             # Add gridlines
    cbar_kws={"shrink": 0.8}    # Adjust colorbar size )

# Add title and labels
plt.title("Feature Correlation Heatmap - NSL-KDD Dataset",
          fontsize=14, fontweight='bold')
plt.xlabel("Features", fontsize=12)
plt.ylabel("Features", fontsize=12)

# Optimize layout and display
plt.tight_layout()
plt.show()

# Optional: Save the figure
# plt.savefig('correlation_heatmap.png', dpi=300, bbox_inches='tight')
```