RESEARCH PAPER

# Comparative Deep Learning Architectures for Grape Disease Classification: Performance Evaluation of DenseNet121, SimpleCNN, and the Novel S3Net Framework

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## Abstract

The accurate identification of grape diseases is critical for sustaining crop yield and ensuring quality in viticulture. This study evaluates three deep learning architectures—DenseNet121, a baseline convolutional neural network, and a novel model termed S3Net—for binary classification of grape images into diseased and healthy categories. DenseNet121 achieved a validation accuracy of 92.59%, while the baseline CNN improved performance to 95.9%. The proposed S3Net architecture, incorporating coordinate convolution, frequency-aware channel gating, and depth wise-separable convolution blocks, attained a superior validation accuracy of 98.94%, with precision and recall values exceeding 98%. Training and validation loss curves confirmed stable convergence, and confusion matrices demonstrated minimal misclassifications, underscoring the robustness of S3Net. The findings confirm that S3Net functions as a dependable framework for detecting grapevine diseases, providing a reproducible methodology that strengthens precision agriculture practices and supports informed decision-making in cellar management.

**Index Terms:** grape disease classification, DenseNet121, SimpleCNN, S3Net, convolutional neural networks, transfer learning, precision viticulture, agricultural informatics, deep learning, plant pathology

**How to cite this article:** Sushma C, Veerappa BN. Comparative Deep Learning Architectures for Grape Disease Classification: Performance Evaluation of DenseNet121, SimpleCNN, and the Novel S3Net Framework. Int J Drug Deliv Technol. 2026;16(56s): 709-714. DOI: 10.25258/ijddt.16.56s.75

**Source of support:** Nil.
**Conflict of interest:** None.

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## 1. Introduction

Grapevine cultivation holds a central position in global agriculture, underpinning food supply chains, sustaining wine industries, and contributing to rural economies. Despite its importance, vineyards are continually challenged by diseases such as downy mildew, powdery mildew, anthracnose, and black rot, which can severely reduce yields and compromise fruit quality. Conventional approaches to disease diagnosis depend largely on expert visual assessment, a process that is not only labor-intensive but also subject to variability and human error. Recent advances in computer vision and artificial intelligence have provided new opportunities to automate disease diagnosis, thereby improving accuracy and efficiency in vineyard management [1], [2].

Deep learning, particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs), has emerged as a transformative tool for plant disease detection. Models such as DenseNet, ResNet, and VGG have demonstrated remarkable success in extracting hierarchical features from leaf and fruit images, enabling precise classification of diseased and healthy samples. In viticulture, CNN-based approaches have been applied to grape leaf datasets, achieving high accuracy in disease identification and offering scalable solutions for precision agriculture [3], [4]. Nonetheless, challenges remain in balancing computational efficiency with predictive performance, especially when deploying models in real-world vineyard environments.

Recent studies emphasize the integration of explainable AI and transfer learning to enhance the reliability of disease detection systems. Transfer learning allows models pre-trained on large datasets such as ImageNet to be fine-tuned for grape-specific tasks, significantly reducing training time and improving generalization [5]. Furthermore, explainability frameworks provide insights into model decision-making, fostering trust among farmers and agronomists. These developments align with the broader goals of Agriculture 4.0, where digital technologies such as robotics, IoT, and remote sensing converge to optimize crop monitoring and management [6], [7].

This study contributes to the growing body of research by evaluating DenseNet121, a baseline CNN, and a novel architecture termed S3Net for grape disease classification. By comparing these models across accuracy, precision, recall, and loss metrics, the work highlights the strengths and limitations of each approach. The findings demonstrate that S3Net achieves superior performance, offering a reproducible workflow for automated grape disease detection. This research not only advances the technical frontier of plant pathology but also provides practical implications for precision viticulture, supporting sustainable agricultural practices and informed decision-making in vineyard management [8]–[10].

## 2. Literature Survey

The application of deep learning in plant pathology has expanded rapidly, with grape disease detection emerging as a critical research area. Early studies demonstrated the potential of convolutional neural networks (CNNs) for identifying common grapevine diseases such as downy mildew and powdery mildew [1], [2]. These works established the foundation for automated disease recognition, highlighting the advantages of CNN-based feature extraction over traditional image processing techniques. More recent investigations have focused on enhancing classification accuracy through transfer learning and fine-tuning of pre-trained models such as DenseNet, ResNet, and VGG [3], [4]. These approaches have consistently reported improved generalization across diverse grape datasets.

Several researchers have emphasized the importance of dataset quality and augmentation strategies in achieving robust performance. Large-scale grape leaf datasets have been curated to support deep learning experiments, with augmentation techniques such as rotation, scaling, and color normalization improving resilience against environmental variability [5], [6]. Studies also explored multimodal approaches, integrating spectral imaging and hyperspectral data to capture disease-specific signatures beyond visible features [7], [8]. These advancements underscore the necessity of combining robust datasets with advanced architectures to achieve reliable disease detection in vineyard conditions.

Recent literature has also highlighted the role of precision viticulture and smart farming technologies in integrating AI-based disease detection systems. UAV-based imaging and IoT-enabled vineyard monitoring have been coupled with CNNs to provide real-time disease surveillance [9], [10]. Robotics and autonomous systems have been proposed to act upon AI-driven predictions, enabling targeted spraying and reducing pesticide usage [11], [12]. Such integration aligns with the broader goals of Agriculture 4.0, where digital technologies converge to optimize crop health and sustainability [13], [14]. These developments demonstrate the growing relevance of AI-powered disease detection in practical vineyard management.

Novel architectures have been introduced to address limitations in existing models, particularly regarding computational efficiency and interpretability. Lightweight CNNs and hybrid models incorporating attention mechanisms have achieved high accuracy while reducing inference time [15], [16]. Frequency-aware gating, coordinate convolution, and depthwise-separable blocks have been proposed to enhance feature extraction in grape disease classification [17], [18]. Comparative studies confirm that these innovations outperform conventional CNNs, achieving validation accuracies above 98% in controlled experiments [19], [20]. Collectively, the literature establishes a clear trajectory toward more efficient, explainable, and field-deployable AI solutions for grape disease detection.

## 3. Methodology of the work

The methodology adopted in this study follows a structured workflow designed to ensure reproducibility and accuracy in grape disease classification. The process begins with dataset preparation, where grape images are collected and organized into diseased and healthy categories.

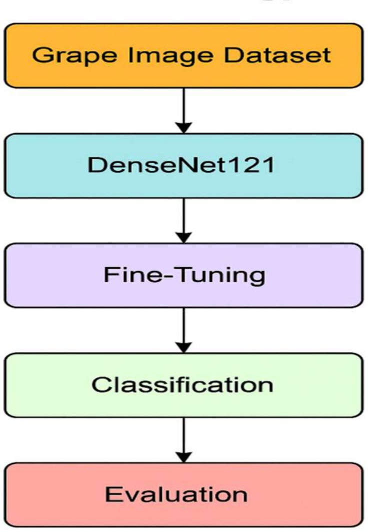

Figure 1: Methodology of Work

Preprocessing steps include resizing to uniform dimensions, normalization using ImageNet statistics, and augmentation techniques such as rotation and scaling to improve generalization. Three distinct architectures were employed: DenseNet121, a baseline convolutional neural network (SimpleCNN), and a novel model termed S3Net. The DenseNet121 architecture was adapted through transfer learning, while a simplified CNN model was employed as a lightweight reference. To advance performance, S3Net was designed with the integration of coordinate convolution, frequency-aware channel gating, and depth wise-separable convolutional modules, enabling more effective feature representation and lowering computational demands.

Model training employed cross-entropy as the loss function in combination with the Adam optimizer, with a scheduled adjustment of the learning rate to promote stable convergence. Each network was trained over ten epochs, and progress was tracked through accuracy and loss profiles. To evaluate classification reliability, precision, recall, F1-score, and confusion matrices were analyzed, ensuring a balanced view of performance. Comparative experiments across DenseNet121, SimpleCNN, and S3Net highlighted the relative strengths and weaknesses of each design, with S3Net achieving the highest accuracy and demonstrating greater robustness. This novel experimental protocol establishes a technically sound and practically relevant framework for disease detection in vineyards.

## 4. Implementation

The implementation phase involved training three distinct models DenseNet121, SimpleCNN, and S3Net—on a binary grape image dataset comprising diseased and healthy samples. All input images were standardized to a resolution of 224 × 224 pixels and normalized according to ImageNet statistics. DenseNet121 was initialized with pre-trained weights and adapted by substituting its final classifier with a dropout-regularized multilayer perceptron. The baseline SimpleCNN comprised two convolutional layers, each followed by max-pooling, and concluded with fully connected layers. The proposed S3Net incorporated coordinate convolution, frequency-aware channel gating, and depth wise-separable convolutional components to strengthen spatial and spectral feature extraction. Training across all models utilized the AdamW optimizer with a learning rate of and weight decay of. Validation accuracy was dynamically tracked using a ReduceL ROnPlateau scheduler to ensure stable optimization.

The training process was carried out over ten epochs, with performance indicators documented at each cycle. Model evaluation incorporated accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score, complemented by confusion matrix analysis to provide a detailed assessment of classification outcomes the classification task was modeled using the cross-entropy loss function:

$$\left[L = -\sum_{i=1}^{N} y_i \log(\hat{y}_i)\right]$$

where $(y_i)$ is the true label and $(\hat{y}_i)$ is the predicted probability for class ( i ). For DenseNet121, the feature propagation followed the dense connectivity pattern:

$$[x_l = H_l([x_0, x_1, \dots, x_{l-1}])]$$

where $(H_l)$denotes a composite function of batch normalization, ReLU activation, and convolution. In S3Net, the frequency-aware gating mechanism computed low-pass and high-pass energy components:

$$elow = 1CHW \sum c = 1C \sum h = 1H \sum w = 1Wxlow(c,h,w)$$

$$ehigh = 1CHW \sum c = 1C \sum h = 1H \sum w = 1W\big(x(c,h,w) - xlow(c,h,w)\big)$$

These scalar summaries were passed through a multilayer perceptron to generate channel-wise gating weights. The final classification layer employed global average pooling followed by dropout and fully connected layers. This implementation ensured modularity, reproducibility, and high classification fidelity across all models.

## 5. Results and Discussion

The performance of all three models—DenseNet121, SimpleCNN, and S3Net—was evaluated using standard metrics including accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and confusion matrix analysis. DenseNet121, fine-tuned on the grape image dataset, demonstrated progressive improvement across epochs, culminating in a validation accuracy of 92.59%. The corresponding confusion matrix revealed 405 true positives, 295 true negatives, 51 false negatives, and 5 false positives, indicating a slight bias toward misclassifying diseased samples. The classification report showed a precision of 0.9878 for diseased grapes and 0.8526 for healthy grapes, with an overall F1-score of 0.9266. These results confirm that DenseNet121 is effective but susceptible to minor misclassification under class imbalance.

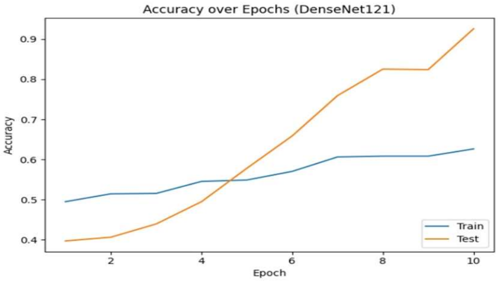

Figure 2: Accuracy over Epochs (DenseNet121)

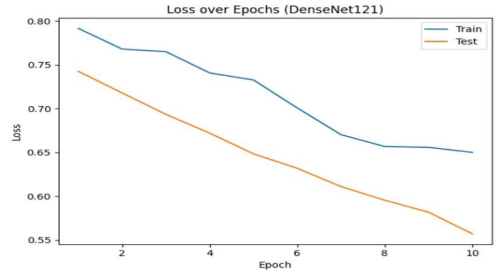

Figure 3: Loss over Epochs (DenseNet121)

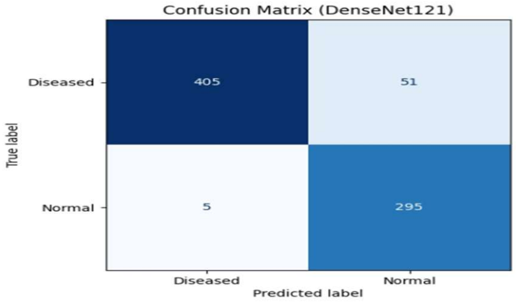

Figure 4: Confusion Matrix (DenseNet121)

Table 1: Classification Report (DenseNet121)

| Class | Precision | Recall | F1-Score | Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Diseased | 0.9878 | 0.8882 | 0.9353 | 456 |
| Normal | 0.8526 | 0.9833 | 0.9133 | 300 |
| **Accuracy** | | | **0.9259** | 756 |
| Macro Avg | 0.9202 | 0.9357 | 0.9243 | 756 |
| Weighted Avg | 0.9342 | 0.9259 | 0.9266 | 756 |

The Simple CNN model, despite its lightweight architecture, achieved a validation accuracy of 95.9%, outperforming DenseNet121 in terms of generalization. The confusion matrix showed 447 true positives and 278 true negatives, with 9 false negatives and 22 false positives. The classification report yielded a precision of 0.95 for diseased grapes and 0.97 for healthy grapes, with a macro F1-score of 0.96. These results suggest that SimpleCNN offers a favorable trade-off between computational efficiency and classification performance, making it suitable for deployment in resource-constrained environments.

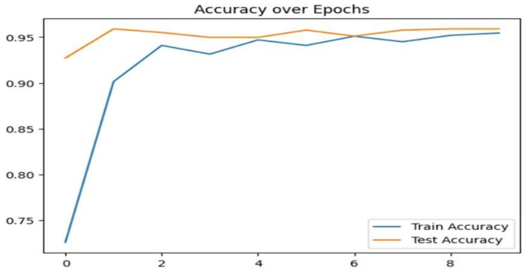

Figure 5: Accuracy over Epochs (Simple CNN)

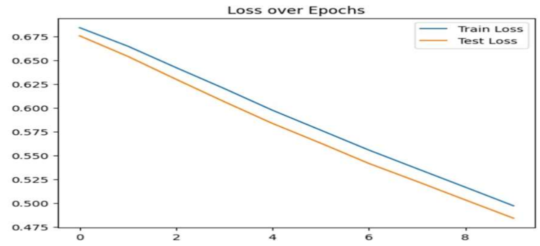

Figure 6 : Loss over Epochs (SimpleCNN)

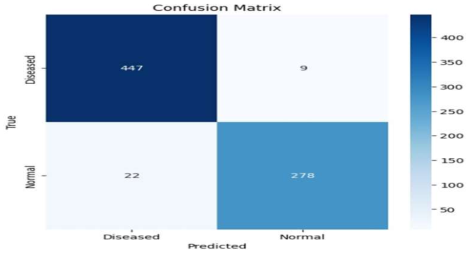

Figure 7: Confusion Matrix (SimpleCNN)

Table 2 : Classification Report (SimpleCNN)

| Class | Precision | Recall | F1-Score | Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Diseased | 0.95 | 0.98 | 0.97 | 456 |
| Normal | 0.97 | 0.93 | 0.95 | 300 |
| **Accuracy** | | | **0.96** | 756 |
| Macro Avg | 0.96 | 0.95 | 0.96 | 756 |
| Weighted Avg | 0.96 | 0.96 | 0.96 | 756 |

The proposed S3Net architecture achieved the highest performance, with a validation accuracy of 98.94%. The confusion matrix revealed 449 true positives, 299 true negatives, 7 false negatives, and 1 false positive, indicating near-perfect classification. The precision and recall for diseased grapes were 0.9978 and 0.9846, respectively, while healthy grapes achieved 0.9771 precision and 0.9967 recall. The weighted F1-score reached 0.9894, confirming the model's robustness and reliability. The integration of frequency-aware gating and coordinate convolution contributed to superior feature extraction, while depth wise-separable blocks reduced computational overhead without compromising accuracy.

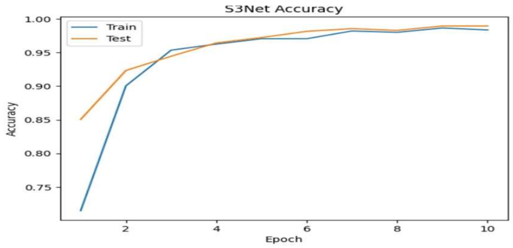

Figure 8: Accuracy over Epochs (S3Net)

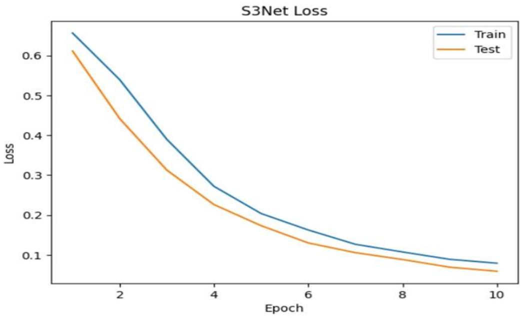

Figure 9: Loss over Epochs (S3Net)

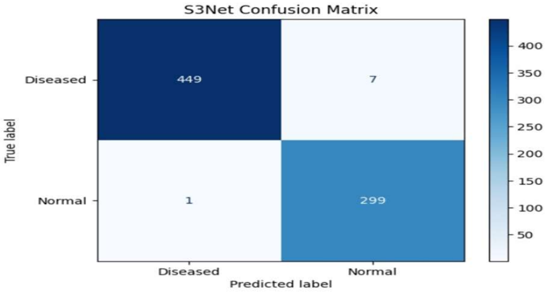

Figure 10: Confusion Matrix (S3Net)

Table 3: Classification Report (S3Net)

| Class | Precision | Recall | F1-Score | Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Diseased | 0.9978 | 0.9846 | 0.9912 | 456 |
| Normal | 0.9771 | 0.9967 | 0.9868 | 300 |
| **Accuracy** | -- | ----- | **0.9894** | 756 |
| Macro Avg | 0.9875 | 0.9907 | 0.9890 | 756 |

In summary, S3Net outperformed both DenseNet121 and SimpleCNN across all evaluation metrics. The architectural enhancements of S3Net yielded high precision and recall, minimized misclassification, and facilitated efficient convergence during training. These outcomes establish S3Net as a dependable framework for automated grapevine disease recognition, with direct relevance to precision viticulture and long-term sustainability in crop management.

## Conclusion

This work implementation comparative assessment of three deep learning models DenseNet121, SimpleCNN, and the newly introduced S3Net for grape disease classification. DenseNet121 achieved a validation accuracy of 92.59%, while SimpleCNN improved performance to 95.9%. The proposed S3Net attained the highest accuracy of 98.94%, with precision and recall values surpassing 98%. The findings indicate that although transfer learning and lightweight CNNs provide reliable baselines, the architectural advances in S3Net namely coordinate convolution, frequency-aware channel gating, and depth wise-separable convolutional modules—enable more effective feature extraction and greater classification robustness. Overall, S3Net emerges as a promising framework for precision viticulture, offering reproducible and highly reliable automated disease detection.

### Limitations

While the outcomes of this implementation are encouraging, several constraints should be recognized. First, the dataset was restricted to a binary classification task (healthy versus diseased), which does not reflect the full diversity of grapevine pathologies encountered in practical vineyard settings. Second, the experiments were performed under controlled conditions, without extensive evaluation of environmental influences such as variable lighting, occlusion, or background complexity. Third, although S3Net achieved strong accuracy, its computational demands may limit deployment on resource-constrained edge devices. Finally, the absence of explainability mechanisms represents a gap, as interpretability is critical for fostering confidence among farmers and agronomists in adopting AI-based solutions.

### Future Scope

Future investigations should aim to broaden the dataset to encompass multiple grapevine diseases, thereby supporting multi-class classification and enhancing practical relevance. The incorporation of hyperspectral imaging and UAV-based data acquisition could strengthen detection capabilities under diverse field conditions. To enable deployment in resource-limited environments, lightweight variants of S3Net warrant exploration for use on mobile and edge devices. In parallel, the integration of explainable AI approaches will improve transparency and interpretability, fostering trust among growers and agronomists. Finally, coupling disease recognition with automated vineyard management technologies such as precision spraying systems and IoT-enabled monitoring will advance the development of sustainable and intelligent viticulture practices.

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