Federated Learning: Evaluating Popular Frameworks and Developing a Cross-Client Horizontal Server

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# Abstract

Nowadays, companies and institutions are exploring new ways to enhance their Machine Learning (ML) models. A good example of this is the launch of Federated Learning (FL) by Google in 2017. Since then, this paradigm has evolved, giving birth to a wide range of frameworks for its implementation. Some advantages of FL are that it enables decentralised training and keeps data privacy on client’s side.

This project evaluated five popular FL frameworks and found that their tutorials and use cases are often focused on academic purposes, not reflecting how real-world FL network operates in practice. The aim of this research was to narrow the gap between FL framework use cases and real-world FL systems by developing a cross-client horizontal FL server. This artifact was designed for two scenarios (technological and medical) using IID and non-IID data. The technological scenario addressed a binary classification problem with synthetically generated tabular data, while the medical scenario focused on image classification. In both cases, five clients were connected to a central server, where each scenario was trained in two variants: IID and non-IID.

The results, focusing only on the non-IID variant for both scenarios, as would occur in real-life applications, showed that the global model improved in the technological scenario, increasing from 58.07% to 66.21%. However, the medical scenario was less successful, with the global model accuracy decreasing from 87.69% to 86.01%.

This experiment demonstrated a realistic FL server, though with certain limitations. Future work will be needed to improve server infrastructure, incorporate dynamic data, resolve communication issues, and address privacy concerns in order to fully bridge the gap between use cases and a real-world FL server.

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# Abbreviations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| AML | Azure Machine Learning |
| API(s) | Application Programming Interface(s) |
| AUC | Area Under the Curve |
| CNN(s) | Convolutional Neural Network(s) |
| CRUD | Create, Read, Update and Delete |
| DA | Data Analytics |
| DLT | Distributed Ledger Technology |
| DML | Distributed Machine Learning |
| FC | Federated Core |
| FedAvg | Federated Averaging |
| FedMA | Federated Matched Averaging |
| FedWAvg | Federated Weighted Average |
| FL | Federated Learning |
| FTL | Federated Transfer Learning |
| GBDT | Gradient Boosting Decision Trees |
| H0 | Null Hypothesis |
| HFL | Horizontal Federated Learning |
| HTML | Hypertext Markup Language |
| HTTP | Hypertext Transfer Protocol |
| HTTPS | Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure |
| IoT | Internet of Things |
| JN(s) | Jupyter Notebook(s) |
| JSON | JavaScript Object Notation |
| LSTM(s) | Long Short-Term Memory Network(s) |
| ML | Machine Learning |
| NF | Nvidia Flare |
| NN | Neural Network |
| non-IID | non-Independent and Identically Distributed |
| OS(s) | Operating System(s) |
| REST | Representational State Transfer |
| RESTful API | Representational State Transfer Application Programming Interface |
| RGB | Red, Green and Blue |
| RO(s) | Research Objective(s) |
| RSNA | Radiological Society of North America |
| SDK | Software Development Kit |
| SWT(s) | Shapiro-Wilk Test(s) |
| TFF | TensorFlow Federated |
| VFL | Vertical Federated Learning |
| α | Alpha |

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Motivation

Within the domain of Data Analytics (DA), there is an important field known as ML, which is embedded in everyday people's lives. A significant topic within this field is FL, it occurs when different devices collaborate to build a common model without exchanging their data; instead, the data remains on the devices, and only model updates are sent to a central server where aggregation occurs.

A good example for FL in everyday people’s lives is when phone users are typing a message, and the keyboard predicts words to complete the sentence, a model developed by Google engineers (Hard *et al.*, 2019).

A diagram of a phone system

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Figure 1.1. Illustration of a single FL communication round in FL for mobile keyboard prediction.

A different example where FL is helping society move forward is in the healthcare sector. Patients are using wearable devices to track their movements and help doctors monitor their health conditions (Arikumar *et al.*, 2022).

FL is growing rapidly and is helping the technological and medical sectors build robust machine learning models. This significant development motivates the focus of this thesis.

## 1.2. Research Problem

FL was conceived to address key challenges such as data privacy, security, decentralised training, and communication costs, among others. This research focuses on presenting a realistic example of how an FL server operates in real-world scenarios, aiming to reduce the abstractness and complexity often associated with popular FL frameworks.

## 1.3. Research Objectives

The primary purpose of this project is to experiment with FL frameworks to evaluate their implementability and develop a functional FL server. Therefore, the Research Objectives (ROs) are:

* **To evaluate the implementability of existing FL frameworks.** This section experiments with popular FL frameworks, such as *PySyft*, *FATE*, *Flower*, *FedML* and *TensorFlow Federated* (TFF), by examining their architecture and their applicability to real-world FL scenarios. This evaluation serves as the starting point for the primary research.
* **To develop a cross-client horizontal FL server.** A practical example of a web *Flask* FL server will be implemented. The FL server will feature two distinct scenarios: technological and medical. Each scenario will run independently, connecting five clients. Both scenarios will use different datasets, synthetic tabular data for the technological and images for the medical scenario, with data distributed as IID and non-IID. The Technological scenario will utilise a Neural Network (NN), while the medical scenario will employ a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN), both for classification tasks.
* **Comparison of FL frameworks and cross-client horizontal FL server use cases.** A comparative analysis of the tutorials reviewed for FL frameworks, alongside the scenarios trained on the FL server, will be conducted to assess how closely the experiments align with real-world applications. The goal is to narrow the gap between popular FL frameworks and real-world FL use cases through the developed FL server.

## 1.4. Project Structure

This project is organised into ten chapters, following a logical progression from theoretical foundations to practical implementation.

* **Chapter one:** Covers the motivation for choosing FL as the topic, the research problem and the definition of the ROs.
* **Chapter two:** outlines the concept of FL, explains the classification of FL based on client nature (cross-device and cross-silo), and categorises FL into horizontal, vertical, and transfer learning. It also discusses the differences between FL and Distributed Machine Learning (DML), as these two concepts are often confused or misunderstood.
* **Chapter three:** forms the backbone of the research, where all relevant literature is reviewed. Its sections cover FL frameworks, algorithms, real-world use cases, datasets, and examples of FL-implemented systems. This chapter lays the foundation for the primary research and experimentation, and it identifies the relevant populations and their samples.
* **Chapter four:** covers the research methodology and ethics, establishing the primary research methodology, sampling strategy, project management framework, project timeline, tools and equipment used, and ethical considerations. This chapter is essential for ensuring the reliability and validity of the research by explaining how the study was conducted and addressing the ethical considerations involved in the project.
* **Chapter five:** begins the experimentation phase. It first determines what constitutes a popular framework by analysing GitHub statistics. Frameworks such as PySyft, FATE, Flower, FedML, and TensorFlow Federated are then evaluated through experiments with their tutorials. Finally, each framework is graded based on ease of use and real-world applicability. This chapter reveals that FL frameworks are often designed for academic and research purposes, not accurately reflecting how a real FL system operates in the real world
* **Chapter six:** explains the development of the cross-client horizontal FL server, discussing sections such as architecture, server flow, server functions, communication protocols, machine learning models used, algorithms, and data collection. A central node manages five clients and depending on the selected scenario (technological or medical), models are trained on either synthetically generated tabular data or images.
* **Chapter seven:** presents the results obtained in the experimentation phase for both the technological and medical scenarios. This chapter is crucial for validating the artifact, as it will be tested using both IID and non-IID data.
* **Chapter eight:** concludes the main body of the research by presenting the findings, summarizing the project through a review of the defined ROs. It discusses the limitations of the cross-client horizontal FL server, explores potential future improvements, and provides an important recommendation for users wishing to replicate the experiment using the developed FL server.
* **Chapter nine:** contains all the references for the citations used throughout the project.
* **Chapter ten:** provides instructions to replicate and deploy all the tutorials evaluated for the popular FL frameworks. It also details the necessary steps to run the cross-client horizontal FL server and presents tables with the results for each scenario using IID and non-IID data.

# 2. Background

## 2.1. What is Federated Learning

This concept was introduced in 2016 by Google engineer (McMahan *et al.*, 2016). FL is a shared model that is trained across multiple devices, often referred to as clients. Each client trains its own local model and sends the updates to a central server, where the updates are aggregated to improve the global model. It is important to note that clients do not exchange their data; the data remains private for each client. This principle drove the design of FL, following the concepts of *focused collection or data minimization*, which were introduced by the White House in 2013. The intent is to prevent personal data from being sent over the network and potentially being stolen or manipulated by malicious third parties.

## 2.2. Federated Learning Classification Based on Client Nature

Depending on the nature of client FL can be classified in two types cross-device and cross-silo (Yang *et al.*, 2021).

### 2.2.1. Cross-device

The clients for cross-device can be mobile devices, edge devices, Internet of Things (IoT) devices, smartphones, tablets, wearables, etc. Figure 2.2.1. illustrates this scenario. The characteristics are, the high number of participants it can be thousands to millions of devices, it may have limited processing power and battery life, datasets tend to be small and network bandwidth may be limited. Devices may also connect and disconnect intermittently.

A diagram of a computer network

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Figure 2.2.1. Cross-device scenario.

### 2.2.2. Cross-silo

In this scenario, clients can be organizations or institutions such as hospitals, banks, and companies using large data centres. Figure 2.2.2 illustrates a cross-silo ecosystem. Some differences compared to the cross-device scenario include, clients are no longer small devices, there are fewer clients, clients have high computational power and large datasets, and the network is reliable with stable communication.

A diagram of a server

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Figure 2.2.2. Cross-silo scenario.

## 2.3. Categorization of Federated Learning

FL can be categorized according to the distribution of the data held by the clients participating in the modelling. These categories help to understand the different methodologies and use cases for FL (Yang *et al.*, 2019).

### 2.3.1. Horizontal Federated Learning

Horizontal Federated Learning (HFL) or sample-based FL, occurs when different clients have datasets that share the same feature space but differ in the samples they hold (see Figure 2.3.1). A practical example of HFL is when two hospitals in different regions each have patient records with the same features (e.g., age, height, weight, diagnosis) but for different patients. These hospitals can collaborate to train a model to predict disease outcomes without sharing patient data.

A diagram of a dataset

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Figure 2.3.1. Horizontal Federated Learning. adapted from Yang *et al.,* (2019).

### 2.3.2. Vertical Federated Learning

Vertical Federated Learning (VFL), or feature-based FL, occurs when different clients have datasets that share the same sample IDs but differ in the feature space. An example of this is a bank and an e-commerce company that have data on the same set of customers. The bank has financial information such as credit scores and loan histories, while the e-commerce company has purchase behaviours and browsing records. By combining their data, they can build a model to predict customer credit without sharing raw data.

A diagram of a dataset

Description automatically generated with medium confidence  
Figure 2.3.2. Vertical Federated Learning. adapted from Yang *et al.,* (2019).

### 2.3.3. Federated Transfer Learning

Federated Transfer Learning (FTL) is applicable when the datasets of different clients differ in both samples and features, and the overlap between both is minimal. To clarify, a good example is a European pharmaceutical company and a healthcare research institution in China collaborating using FTL. The pharmaceutical company has drug efficacy data, while the healthcare institution has patient health records. Even though they have different types of data, it is possible to train a global model to predict drug effectiveness on certain health conditions.

A diagram of dataset and dataset

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Figure 2.3.3. Federated Transfer Learning. adapted from Yang *et al.,* (2019).

## 2.4. Federated Learning vs Distributed Machine Learning

Terms like FL and DML can create confusion due to their similarities. The main difference lies in the training process, in FL, there is a central server that aggregates updates sent by the clients, whereas in DML, there is no central server; instead, data is spread across different nodes and computations are shared among these nodes (Li, Sahu, Talwalkar, *et al.*, 2020). The intricacies of each concept are shown in Table 2.4.

A table with text on it

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Table 2.4. Differences between Federated Learning and Distributed Machine Learning.

# 3. Literature Review

Given the rapid advancements in DA and subsequently in ML, FL is also growing fast. A thorough review of the current literature is essential. By typing *“Federated Learning”* in Google Scholar and selecting *“review articles”,* it returns 7,510 articles in 0.07 seconds. The aim of this chapter is to select valid and relevant articles that align the ROs with the literature review, ensuring a smooth experimentation process that validates these objectives. All sources are organized into five themes: FL frameworks, FL algorithms, real-world FL settings, FL datasets, and FL server implementation.

## 3.1. Federated Learning Frameworks

A requirement for selecting the FL frameworks was that they must be open source. Open-source frameworks are transparent and trustworthy, developed and maintained by a collaborative community, free to use, and constantly evolving. Additionally, they can be customized to meet user’s specific needs. After the selection it was necessary to rank the frameworks. To accomplish this GitHub stats were helpful. Figure 3.1. depicts *PySyft* GitHub repository stats.

A screenshot of a social media post

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Figure 3.1. *PySyft* GitHub stats (OpenMined, 2019).

Contributors, forks and stars were counted for each framework. These stats were then normalised and finally averaged. Figure 3.2. illustrates the formulas and Table 3.1. shows the results being *PySyft* the most popular open-source FL framework.

A white paper with black text

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Figure 3.2. Formulas for normalised stats and average.

A table with numbers and letters

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Table 3.1. Federated Learning frameworks by stats and ranking.

By creating this ranking, the population sample for objective one was defined as *PySyft*, *FATE*, *Flower*, *FedML*, and TFF. The sample was restricted to the top five FL frameworks due to the limited amount of time. As the sampling method is non-probabilistic and the sampling type is judgmental, this approach to ranking the FL frameworks may help mitigate the inherent bias that experimentation has as a primary research methodology and also focus the selection on samples that can represent the entire population. Based on this selection, section 3.1.1. details the frameworks that will be used in the experimentation, and section 3.1.2. lists are the remaining frameworks. Kholod *et al.,* (2020) contributed to the idea of evaluating open-source FL frameworks and helped establish criteria for comparison. These criteria include ease of use and deployment, development, analysis capabilities, accuracy, and performance. These criteria will be applied in Section 5, where popular FL frameworks are evaluated.

### 3.1.1. PySyft, FATE, Flower FedML and TensorFlow Federated

Ziller *et al.*, (2021)introduced *PySyft* a multi-language library that facilitates secure and private ML. It was developed by the *OpenMined* community with the objective of making FL data science more accessible through Python bindings and user-friendly interfaces. *PySyft* uses libraries like *PyTorch* and TensorFlow with additional capabilities. Comparing it with other frameworks like TFF and *PaddleFL*; *PySyft* offers detailed building blocks, allowing developers to implement FL efficiently. Also compared to Flower that supports heterogeneous client environments and offers tools for mobile and edge devices, claiming and advantage over *PySyft* in these aspects.

According to Liu *et al.*, (2021) *FATE* is provided to aid enterprises and institutions in implementing large-scale and distributed collaborative learning with data protection. A number of secure computation protocols and machine learning algorithms are supported within *FATE*. Through the out-of-box usability and end-to-end building modules and visualization tools, users are able to get their applications up and running with efficiency and effectiveness. It not only offers a distributed platform that supports both stand-alone and cluster deployment but also privacy-preserving *XGBoost*, federated transfer learning, and multi-variate data. *FATE* interacts with users using *FATE-FLow,* which serves as the scheduling system, FATE-Board, a visualization tool, and *FATE-Serving,* which is an inference high-performance serving engine. *KubeFATE* is designed by VMware to have *FATE* constructed over Kubernetes at the data centre, hence an enterprise-managed solution over organizations' distributed infrastructure. It also supports cross-cloud deployment and management through *FATE*-*cloud*. Second, *FATE* has a security definition in which all parties are honest-but-curious, ensuring that the server learns only aggregated parameters, but not the data of any individual. It guarantees performance that is lossless, which means the algorithms in *FATE* provide comparable accuracy to a centralized solution. *FATE* supports research into the industry communities working together and has been seen as an increasingly business application of interest. Future work in the field will focus on the integration of blockchain functionalities into *FATE*; building lightweight versions of *FATE* for edge deployment and applications; and building new applications using *FATE* in an industrial scenario, such as computer vision and automatic speech recognition.

*FedML* (He *et al.*, 2020) is an open research library and benchmark built for enabling development support and fair comparison in federated learning algorithms. Compared with previous works, it addresses the current limitation of supporting different configurations and computing paradigms for distributed training, mobile on-device training, and standalone simulation. It makes flexible, generic Application Programming Interface (API) designs, standardized algorithm implementations, and a comprehensive benchmark dataset available for non-IID. settings. *FedML* is architected into high-level API interactions through its *FedML-API,* whereas the low-level functionality is realized by *FedML-core* to allow convenient implementation of distributed algorithms by users. This library also includes a real-world module for training on smartphones, called *FedML-Mobile*. Using such cryptographic primitives, standardized benchmarks can enforce privacy, security, and robustness, ensuring fair comparisons. *FedML* is designed to encourage community contributions that push the boundaries of what it can do. In design, the critical requirements are met for federated learning research by which researchers can prototype new algorithms and evaluate them on a common fair platform with consistent datasets and experimental settings. The broad support of computing paradigms by the library will make it applicable in different research scenarios, from huge-scale distributed systems to resource-constrained mobile devices. This flexible design of the API allows researchers to extend and customize the library for their specific needs. Standard benchmarks enable trustworthy comparisons of the performance of different algorithms. Moreover, *FedML* is not only robust in terms of privacy and security in FL but also applies advanced cryptographic techniques that ensure user data is secure to the level of model robustness. *FedML* follows a community-driven approach and is always changing and extending its features. New improvements are regularly updated based on feedback and contributions from global researchers. Such a collaborative effort helps push the frontiers of FL and ensures that *FedML* retains its leading status in research and development.

Beutel *et al.*, (2022) presented *Flower* a user-friendly framework, an open-source framework developed to make the implementation and scalability of FL much easier. Flower's goal is to bridge the gap between academic research and practical application in real-world FL settings with large-scale experiments and very varied device settings. The big advantage of Flower, compared to most other frameworks for simulations, is that it can be used in real deployments with real devices; thus, it is a very good and flexible tool. It has been designed with an architecture supporting most machine learning frameworks, including TensorFlow, *PyTorch*, while offering flexible API designs, standardized algorithm implementations, and benchmark datasets for non-Independent and Identically Distributed (non-IID) settings. This way, it has proven to be an excellent tool for experimenting with FL in different configurations and computational paradigms. The important abstractions and functionalities inside Flower are the high-level API interactions in the part represented by *FedML-API*, and low-level functionality in the part represented by *FedML-Core*. This makes it easier for the users to program distributed algorithms. It also has an on-device training capability for smartphones with cryptographic techniques to guarantee privacy, security, and robustness called *FedML-Mobile*. This is a framework motivating the community's contribution continuously to increase the power of it. The architecture of Flower allows a transparent, seamless transition for researchers from simulation to deployment on real devices. With heterogeneous client support and scalable infrastructure, Flower becomes a tool absolutely necessary in the hands of the researcher when FL investigation is performed so that the gap between theory and practice may be addressed.

Solanki *et al.*, (2022) delve into how TFF, an open-source framework, is utilized for machine learning on decentralized data. It has been designed for research and experimentation. Some of the key features are TFF enables FL through low-latency models with less power consumption. The framework uses two layers, the FL learning API and the federated core (FC) API. The FL API allows developers to implement training and evaluation on existing TensorFlow models through a high-level interface. The FC API integrates *TensorFlow* with distributed communication operators focusing on computations across distributed systems like mobile phones, tablets, and sensors. Comparing TFF to other frameworks, it offers a unique well integrated structure others do not provide this level of integration. TFF allows experimenting with new algorithms is not tied to predefined algorithms.

### 3.1.2. OpenFL, NVIDIA, PaddleFL, Substra and FLGo

Another innovative framework *OpenFL* (Reina *et al.*, 2022) created by Intel Labs and the University of Pennsylvania, *OpenFL* supports decentralized machine learning models. It allows organizations to train models using data locally without any transfer, and that operates by distributing a global model across various nodes while each organization trains its model locally. Model updates are sent to an aggregator to enhance the global model. This framework is compatible with popular ML frameworks like *TensorFlow* and *PyTorch*. In comparison to other frameworks, it stands out due to its open-source nature, TFF or *PySyft* focus more on academic research applications while *OpenFL* is focused on real-world applications.

Roth *et al.*, (2022) described *NVIDIA FLARE* (NF) as an open-source Software Development Kit (SDK) purposefully developed to make it easier for data scientists and researchers to train federated learning models. NF, in support of many collaborators, is applied to create powerful and generalizable AI models by sharing the weights of the models rather than the private data. It is very lightweight and flexible, supporting the scaling of different machine learning frameworks, among which are *PyTorch*, *TensorFlow*, and *XGBoost*. In this way, NF allows researchers to adapt their ML workflow under a federated paradigm and finally achieve secure and privacy-preserving multiparty collaboration through techniques like homomorphic encryption and differential privacy. Some of the key aspects found in NF are high-level APIs of programmable FL workflows, prototyping simulators, and a project management dashboard. It is constructed to support productivity features in the built-in SDK research to deployment simulation to the real-world architecture of NF: multitasking, high availability, server failover, and secure provisioning. In addition, a good application for NF has been found in practice, particularly within the health sector, with regard to predicting clinical outcome for COVID-19 patients and segmenting brain lesions in medical imaging. This paper also presented some of the numerous benefits that a component-based design of NF accrues to make it extensible and customizable, thereby inviting the research community to further develop it.

Riedel *et al.*, (2024) proposed PaddleFL is an open-source federated learning framework developed by *PaddlePaddle*, with the purpose of safe collaboration on training machine learning models over a massive amount of devices or organizations without sharing raw data. It provides implementations for different federated learning algorithms and flexible, extensible architecture that will easily plug into different machine learning frameworks. In the aspect of implementations, *PaddleFL* is an attempt for distributed model training, while it solves the privacy issues in data. In this way, this project will have applications in multiple fields: healthcare and finance, where data security becomes very important. The framework itself has built-in tools for data preprocessing and model training and evaluation under horizontal and vertical federated learning scenarios. It aims to be user-friendly by having complete documentation and examples that can assist the user in quickly getting a foothold. *PaddleFL* adopts advanced techniques, including homomorphic encryption and secure multiparty computation, into data safety and privacy during the training process. It is also updated and improved all the time by the open-source community, making it a strong candidate for the implementation of federated learning projects.

Galtier and Marini (2019) introduced *Substra* as a framework designed to make machine learning both collaborative and secure. They developed Substra to handle the tricky issue of working with sensitive data without compromising privacy. Instead of moving data around, *Substra* keeps it decentralised data stays where it is, and only the necessary algorithms and non-sensitive information are shared. *Substra* uses Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT) to ensure that all operations are secure and traceable. This means there is no need to rely on a central authority to verify the integrity of the data and operations. Originally designed for healthcare applications, Substra is flexible enough to work with various data types, algorithms, and programming languages. It supports multiple computation methods, especially those used in FL. The framework is built on three core principles: collaboration, privacy, and traceability. It brings together data providers and algorithm designers to work on shared goals while keeping data private and secure. Substra manages four key assets: objectives, datasets, algorithms, and models. Each of these assets has specific permissions to control who can access and process them. Computations in *Substra* are coordinated across different nodes, ensuring that data never leaves its original location. The decentralised architecture uses smart contracts to enforce permissions and maintain a tamper-proof ledger of all activities. This makes Substra a versatile tool for various collaborative machine learning projects, such as data and algorithm collaborations, data consortiums, and combined training and evaluation efforts.

Wang *et al.*, (2023) developed *FLGo* a platform designed to streamline the process of cross-application FL research and enhance shareability among developers. It is a lightweight FL framework aiming to be a customizable solution to suit different applications and data heterogeneity. *FLGo* addresses the gap that exists in current FL frameworks which often make the FL deployment very complex. Some of the key Features, are benchmarks and algorithms, customization, experimental tools, and high degree of shareability. Compared to other frameworks it stands out in, system heterogeneity, high-level API, multi-architecture support, asynchronous operations and customization and flexibility. As a conclusion *FLGo* has been developed with the intention of making FL more accessible to a broader range of developers by simplifying customization and enhancing its shareability. It also aims to bridge the existing gap with conventional machine learning and FL.

## 3.2. Federated Learning Algorithms

After reviewing the frameworks, it was clear that they all utilize algorithms. Some of them implement custom FL algorithms; however, there is one algorithm common to all of them: *FedAvg*. *SecureBoost* and *FedProx* are also used by multiple frameworks. These algorithms, along with *FedMA*, will be explained in the sections below.

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Table 3.2. Federated Learning algorithms by framework.

### 3.2.1. FedAvg

The key algorithm that was developed for FL was Federated Averaging *(FedAvg)* that allows to train the models distributed among multiple devices while preserving the centralized control of the process. This approach was proposed in the paper by Google researchers McMahan *et al.,* (2016). *FedAvg* improves the basic of federated learning by adopting the Stochastic Gradient Descent (SGD) algorithm, generally in terms of the iteration in the model averaging.

It starts with the central server sending global model parameters to other servers in the nearest proximity. In each round clients are randomly chosen to participate with others in the network. These selected clients get the current global model and then update it for several epochs on their local data using mini-batch SGD. Each of the clients also derives new model parameters. These updated parameters are sent back to the server, which aggregates them by averaging, weighted by the number of training samples on each client.

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Figure 3.2.1 *FedAvg* algorithm adapted from McMahan *et al.,* (2016)

Besides, *FedAvg* works well with non-IID data, which occur frequently in the context of FL where data is dispersed across clients in a likely non-uniform manner. Specifically, *FedAvg* reduces the number of communication rounds by averaging the locally computed model updates and it is efficient even in environments with low bandwidth. The algorithm also scales well to a large number of clients as in each round only a fraction of the clients is involved, and the server only aggregates their updates.

When tested across different model structures and datasets for image classification such as *MNIST*, *CIFAR10* and language modelling such as Shakespeare dataset, it was shown that FedAvg succeeds in cutting down the communication costs while still giving a sound performance in conditions of non-IID and imbalance of the data. In sum, *FedAvg* is foundational in FL since it optimises both computational and communication efficiency.

### 3.2.2. FedProx

In short, *FedProx* is a federated optimisation algorithm designed with the objectives of handling challenges that come with system and statistical heterogeneity in a federated learning network (Li, Sahu, Zaheer, *et al.*, 2020). It is first motivated as an extension and re-parameterization of the *FedAvg* algorithm. While *FedAvg* has demonstrated empirical success, it's been seen to falter in the face of system capability diversity and the nonidentical distribution of data on the devices. These are the aspects that *FedProx* modifies to handle them and increase the robustness and stability of the optimization process. In this context, the addition of a proximal term to the local objective function within *FedProx* is aimed at compensating for a potentially large influence of local updates so that they remain close to the global model. The proximal term serves two purposes: it naturally introduces statistical heterogeneity in the local updates by properly controlling the distance from the original global model and allows us to safely introduce variable amounts of local work, coming from systems' heterogeneity.

While *FedAvg* requires all the devices to perform an equal amount of work, a fixed number of local epochs, *FedProx* allows for non-uniform amounts of work by devices, up to their system capability, in terms of resources. This can handle stragglers (i.e., devices that do less work) better without dropping them, leading to more stable convergence. The server initializes the global model and samples a subset of devices in each iteration. For each sample device, it executes one local update based on its data for optimization of a modified local objective function with an added proximal term. The proximal term is defined as , where is the current global model and is the local model. After local updates, each device sends the updated model back to the server. Aggregating these updates, one averages the updates and thereby forms a new global model, exactly the same as *FedAvg*.

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Figure 3.2.2 *FedProx* algorithm adapted from Li, Sahu, Zaheer, *et al.,* (2020).

Interestingly, *FedProx* shows more stability with respect to accuracy in heterogeneous settings than the baseline *FedAvg* does, and even more, it is probably true for such a setting. The algorithm is valuable for federated learning applications, as the proximal term enables it to handle variable amounts of local computation, hence mitigating issues that arise in systems and statistical heterogeneity.

### 3.2.3. FedMA

The challenge in solving through the development of *FedMA*, or Federated Matched Averaging (Wang *et al.*, 2020), lies in federated learning, especially when one opts for modern neural network architectures such as CNNs and Long Short-Term Memory Networks (LSTMs). Traditional methods like *FedAvg* tend to perform poorly due to their weight averaging at the coordinate-wise level, which results in suboptimal global models, often in cases with very heterogeneous data.

*FedMA* constructs the global model in a shared layer-wise manner by matching and averaging hidden elements, for instance channels in convolutional layers, or hidden states in LSTM layers, in a feature-extraction-signature-wise manner. This matching of feature-extracting signatures ensures that similar functional components are averaged together, thus outperforming conventional strategies while reducing the communication burden.

The algorithm involves several key steps. In the matching process, the server collects first-layer weights from all the clients and conducts a matching process in which it identifies and aligns neurons or channels similar across different models. This ensures that the models maintain the mean of similar functional components. This stage is executed by permutation and averaging, whereby a server takes the match of weights and takes an average as the first layer of the global model, which it then rebroadcasts to clients. Clients would then perform local training on the updated first layer of the global model, holding the matched global layer fixed. These steps go on iteratively, layer by layer, until the full model has been updated.

During this iterative matching and model adaptation process, the Hungarian algorithm is exploited by the server to handle the matching problem efficiently in order to ensure the best permutation of weights. *FedMA* also caters for the heterogeneity in the data by considering the size of the global model in line with the size of local models and data distribution while ensuring that globally the model is highly efficient and competent even with the changes in data on the clients' side.

More generally, *FedMA* strengthens the federated learning paradigm by aiming for an approach of functional matching of model components to improve overall performance and reduce communication costs. It relies on the utilization of advanced matching techniques by making use of permutation invariance property to ensure the global model integrates the knowledge from all participating clients.

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Figure 3.2.3 *FedMA* algorithm adapted from Wang *et al.,* 2020.

### 3.2.4. SecureBoost

*SecureBoost* is a boosting algorithm by trees developed under the federated learning scheme (Cheng *et al.*, 2021). It allows collective model training across the parties without disclosing individual data. It is designed for better privacy-destroying low-quality model consolidation present in almost all such processes and to comply with data protection regulation concerns like GDPR.

In *SecureBoost*, data is vertically partitioned: different parties own different features on the same set of users. The first step is privacy-preserving entity alignment, in which data samples from involved parties are matched using privacy-preserving protocols to ensure that nonshared data remains private. Finally, the jointly trained gradient boosting model is used in collaborative model training. Each of the parties computes locally optimal splits for the decision trees using their own data and encrypted gradient statistics sent by the active party. It encrypts gradient and Hessian values and ensures the privacy of data.

In the protocol, *SecureBoost* defines roles for active parties, who have class labels, and passive parties, who have only feature data. The active party coordinates the training process, including the aggregation of model updates. Model construction follows the philosophy of the widely used and successful *XGBoost*, sequential tree construction by adding splits that optimize a loss function. In such a federated setting, SecureBoost ensures encryption and secure sharing of gradient and Hessian values which are used for splits among the parties. *SecureBoost* further makes use of additive homomorphic encryption to ensure that each party can calculate the required gradient and Hessian sums for all possible splits locally and send these encrypted values to the active party, who eventually decrypts them to find the globally best split.

*SecureBoost* is a design of loss lessness, which can achieve the same accuracy as tree-boosting algorithms without privacy preservation under centralised data; it might even be appropriate for industrial applications that need strong privacy guarantees. This approach is indeed scalable and highly efficient with very large datasets, keeping the performance on par with non-federated methods, such as *XGBoost* and Gradient Boosting Decision Trees (GBDT), in terms of both convergence and accuracy, even under the influence of privacy constraints. SecureBoost introduces a practical and secure framework of federated learning, in which different organizations can jointly build machine learning models without sharing data. Leveraging advanced cryptographic techniques, *SecureBoost* protects private information from being exposed throughout the whole process of learning, making it very valuable in privacy-preserving ML applications.

### 3.2.5. Summary

In summary, these federated learning algorithms try to solve a set of challenges, most of which exist for any distributed training system. *FedAvg* started it off by allowing efficient training across devices with centralized control. *FedProx* generalizes that approach to heterogeneity in system capabilities and data distribution. *FedMA* further improves model performance by leveraging advanced matching for layer-wise averaging and is specifically applied to complex architectures using deep neural networks. *SecureBoost* introduces strong privacy-preserving measures in order to collaboratively train securely among the parties with vertically partitioned data. These algorithms improve FL in computational efficiency, stability, communication cost, and privacy.

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Table 3.2.5 Summary of reviewed Federated Learning algorithms.

## 3.3. Real World Federated Learning Settings

There are numerous papers and sources about FL, but after conducting thorough research, nothing has been found regarding real-world FL settings, specifically real FL systems where a company makes their global models publicly available. This gap is understandable because one of the reasons for FL existence is privacy, therefore, companies prioritise keeping their FL systems private. What companies do make available are FL system architectures, algorithms, prototypes, and experiments. They explain how to implement FL but do not show a FL system that is in production. Consequently, they will never share with the public how Google engineers use FL to predict the next word on people's phones (Hard *et al.*, 2019). In other words, a company will not disclose a FL method that generates revenue for its business. Recognizing this limitation, the following three papers are not company production FL models but are scenarios close to a real-world setting.

Chen *et al.*, (2023) bridged the gap between traditional experiments on federated learning and real-world applications, testing with *FS-Real,* a system built to handle challenges related to heterogeneous device environments. Traditional FL research mainly tests with a homogeneous device environment, very different from the diversity and variability of real-world devices, yielding subsequent application problems. A large number of experiments showed that FS-Real is usable, efficient, and scalable: focusing on the effects of FL performance by heterogeneous devices and different scales. The different distributions of devices are homogenous. It evaluated the performance of FL algorithms, such as *FedAvg*, under these different distributions and scales using model accuracy, fairness, convergence time, communication efficiency, and client utilization as metrics. FS-Real has been experimented in the case of high scalability and robustness by undergoing stress tests to handle up to 100,000 clients. It shows capability in FS-Real to handle large FL tasks effectively. On the other hand, optimized concurrency techniques along with robust mechanisms of client selection make FL processes very efficient in heterogeneous devices with varied responsiveness. More advanced FL techniques were also tested in *FS-Real,* personalization, communication compression, and asynchronous aggregation. Personalization would involve algorithms like *FedBABU* to improve client performance. Communication compression was in the efforts of reducing message size to save on bandwidth and communication costs. Asynchronous aggregation allowed faster devices to move ahead without waiting for slower devices, which facilitated improvement in efficiency and robustness during training. Key results are a significant performance gap between both homogeneous and heterogeneous settings, usually with lower and more varied accuracies for heterogeneous devices due to the varied training dynamics. Real-world application efficiency was better for *FS-Real* than all other tools, similar to how its simulation fidelity was better; the system displayed enhanced capabilities to cope with heterogeneous devices. The system has been proved highly scalable, as heavy loads of clients have been effectively managed by maintaining effective performance through enhanced concurrency and robust mechanisms of client selection. This makes *FS-Real* a robust and scalable approach to solving the real-world condition problem, thereby closing the gap between traditional FL research and practical applications. This work will help develop more effectively and efficiently the deploying FL on a large scale and under heterogeneous conditions.

The platform *AI4EOSC* developed a model using the Pneumonia Chest X-Ray dataset and implemented using a CNN (www.youtube.com, 2024). The task involves using the images to implement a NN to predict whether new X-rays are normal or indicate pneumonia. The initial dataset is divided among three clients that simulate hospitals wishing to collaboratively develop a global model without sharing patient data. For each client, the training data is divided using a random split of 75% for training and 25% for testing. Using the *AI4* FL server, the model is deployed. The Flower package is used to build the model. The use of *Jupyter Notebook* (JN) is recommended; once the server is running, hardware is configured by selecting the number of CPUs, disk memory, and RAM. The next step is federated configuration, which includes the number of rounds, evaluation metric, number of clients, and federated aggregation strategy. On the client side, three instances are opened and running in the cloud. It is important to pass the *AI4* FL server key into each client's Python script. After this, by running *$ python3 Client.py*, each client will be initialized and wait for the third one to start and trigger the entire process. On the server side, accuracy is calculated. This is a great example, and the approach differs from how frameworks typically deploy federated learning; in summary, this example is close to a real-world implementation case.

This practical implementation (www.youtube.com, 2022) uses Azure Machine Learning (AML), with the same dataset as discussed above. The experiment begins by training the model using a classical approach and then comparing this result with the federated one. Three clients are present, representing hospitals in the US, Europe, and Asia; these are computer instances in Azure. The NF framework is used in this model. A JN is utilized as a controller, sending instructions to the clients and tracking accuracy. In conclusion, this demonstration, along with the one above, is fundamental to understanding how FL is implemented. Unlike section 3.1, where FL frameworks emulate the clients within a JN by encapsulating them into variables, AML and the *AI4* FL server use virtual machines that closely emulate actual hospitals. They have different IP addresses, and connection protocols must be used to connect and train the model.

## 3.4. Federated Learning Datasets

Luo *et al.*, (2021) introduced a real-world image dataset specifically designed to address the challenges associated with non-IID and unbalanced data distributions that are common in federated settings. This dataset comprehends images captured by 26 street cameras, across 900 images categorized into 7 object types. Method focus is the study of implementing and benchmarking two major object detection algorithms, *YOLO* and *Faster R-CNN*. As a result, a non-IDD and imbalanced dataset was created, ideal to test FL models under real-world conditions. This dataset offers a unique resource compared to other benchmark datasets used in FL research. *MNIST* or *CIFAR* are balanced and homogeneous whereas the real-world image dataset provides a real challenge due to its realism, leading to better FL models after training. Also, the use of *YOLO* and *Faster R-CNN* differs from simpler models or more synthetic setups often used. In summary realistic approaches can enhance FL modelling. Similarly, Lai *et al.*, (2024) used versions of *MNIunST* and *CIFAR*, *Fashion-MNIST,* *CIFAR-10* and *CIFAR-100*. These datasets are chosen for their varying levels of complexity and the ability to simulate non-IDD conditions effectively. Other frameworks employ the *FedAvg* algorithm, not performing well with non-IID data, and other counterparts do not pay attention to aggregating dissimilar client updates that can lead to poor global modelling. Pfitzner, *et al.*, (2021) discuss the use of various datasets in the context of FL for medical applications, emphasizing the importance of handling non-IID, unbalanced, and vertically split data. They highlight the challenges of training models across different distributions, which is common in healthcare due to varying patient demographics across hospitals. Key datasets mentioned include *MNIST* for handwritten digits, *CIFAR-10* for object recognition, and keyword spotting datasets, which are used to illustrate the performance of FL algorithms under non-IID conditions. The authors detail how these datasets help in understanding the impacts of data distribution on FL model accuracy and training efficiency. Zhang *et al.*, (2021) used in his paper a dataset from the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA), includes 5,786 chest X-ray images primarily sourced for a *Kaggle* competition aimed at advancing medical image analysis for pneumonia detection. This dataset is valuable in federated learning environments, allowing for the development and testing of models across different institutions while maintaining data privacy. Its real-world application, especially in training models to recognize pneumonia from X-rays, highlights its relevance and popularity in healthcare-focused ML tasks.

According to the FL frameworks reviewed in section 3.1., the datasets used in these frameworks are shown in Table 3.4.

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Table 3.4. Datasets used in FL frameworks reviewed.

Summarising all FL datasets reviewed in this research, results are depicted in Table 3.4.1.

A screenshot of a computer

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Table 3.4.1. Federated Learning datasets and their applications.

After completing this section, a secondary population was found, FL datasets. For the experimentation part, RSNA Chest X-ray, MNIST, and a synthetically generated dataset will be used. Again, in an attempt to minimise the bias inherent in experimentation, using these datasets, which are widely accepted by the FL community, may mitigate the bias.

## 3.5. Federated Learning Server Implementation

This section aligns with the second RO, developing a FL server. The Papers reviewed here share a common approach, they build a FL server using Flask. This approach will be used in section seven when developing the FL server. Additionally, to consolidate the concept of flask, two books have been reviewed.

Patel *et al.*, (2020) implemented federated deep learning to yield improvements in privacy, latency, and bandwidth. The system consists of a group of clients or smart doorbells and a server. Each smart doorbell will capture video, preprocess, and train using *TensorFlow* Lite towards a local model. The fed local models are sent to a federated server for aggregation. The aggregated global model is then distributed back to the clients for object detection. For the server-side, Flask was used and then containerized with *Nginx* and *Gunicorn*, then deployed on AWS EC2. This reduces the cost in communication and ensures data privacy since raw video data is stored in local devices.

Malve *et al.*, (2024) developed a FL framework for analysis in mental health, focusing on the prediction of depression. The server-side has been developed using Python and Flask, where the FL process is controlled by a global model that uses *TensorFlow* and *Keras*. It is a multi-class classification model distributed to client devices. Clients train the model locally over their data and hence maintain raw data on the device. It sent model updates back to the server, which aggregated these updates with the method of federated averaging. To ensure greater privacy, security measures included differential privacy and SSL encryption, though the adoption of these was optional. The system further contained an alternate questionnaire and an optional chatbot that assisted in the collection of more information besides supporting the user.

Sabuhi, *et al.,* (2024) have introduced *Micro-FL* that overcomes scalability and fault tolerance with the help of a microservices architecture. The server implementation uses *Docker* containers orchestrated by *Kubernetes*. Several microservices are included in the system: a user interface developed using Flask and *Nginx*, a communication service using *Apache Kafka*, a database service using *Elasticsearch*, and an aggregator for combining model updates. Clients register via a web interface, train local models, and send updates to the server. Server aggregation combines these updates into a global model using the *FedAvg* algorithm. This makes the system more scalable and tolerant to failures because of the modular approach taken towards isolation of components, such that individual scaling and upgrades are independent.

Nakayama and Jeno, (2022) detail the FL server implementation in chapter four by focusing on the aggregator, database, and communication handlers. The process is initialized by importing all the required libraries followed by the definition of the Server class to maintain agent registration, global model synthesis, and message handling. Configuration is initialized through a JSON file that determines IP addresses, port numbers, and aggregation parameters. The *StateManager* class buffers local model data and performs the aggregation criteria, while the Aggregator class integrates local updates to the global model using *FedAvg*. State information is maintained at server levels for smooth operation. A pseudo database on *SQLite* is used for model data and performance metrics, while the database server is configured to manage model data emanating from the aggregator. It also has guidance on running the server, database, aggregator, and agents with provided configuration files defining the settings. The possible improvements regard redesigning the database, automating the registration of the models, and enhancing the performance metrics for comprehensively guiding on building a very basic but configurable FL server.

Lathkar, *et al.,* (2021) explains in chapter eleven how to build *RESTful* APIs using Flask, from introduction to Representational State Transfer (REST) architecture and its Create, Read, Update and Delete (CRUD) operations. He walks the reader through the creation of APIs by using Flask routing, handling HTTP methods, and returning responses. This chapter has also introduced testing tools such as *cURL* and Postman for API validation and further covered *Flask-RESTful*, an extension of *Flask* for structure and modular development of APIs. There are a few practical examples in the course: one in making a simple API for managing a book collection with the implementation of CRUD operations and testing using *Postman* and *cURL*. On chapter twelve details deploying Flask applications in production using cloud platforms such as Google App Engine and *Heroku*, from setup to deployment processes. This involves a discussion on configuration files like requirements.txt and *Procfile*. The simplicity of hosting *Python* apps on *PythonAnywhere* is also discussed. For dedicated servers, this walks through deploying Flask using *uWSGI* and *Nginx* in handling *HTTP* requests. It discusses the choice of host toward an adequate environment that will best suit the needs of an application and scaling.

In this section, a third population was identified: companies or institutions that use FL, with samples drawn from the technological and medical sectors. In the case of medical companies, hospitals can also be included as they extensively use FL. By combining the second and third populations, the result was a focus on datasets and companies. This will be used in Chapter 7 results, to further validate the artefact. Specifically, synthetically generated data for the technological dataset and data created from X-ray and *MNIST* datasets for the medical scenario will be employed. These datasets needed to have two variants, IID and non-IID, in order to validate the FL server similarly to the approaches found in the papers by Yan *et al.*, (2024) and Duchesne, *et al.,* (2024). The purpose of utilising both IID and non-IID variants is to validate the artefact and observe the results produced using this approach.

## 3.6. Conclusion

This literature review gives a complete overview of different FL frameworks that are widely used and accepted by the academic community. These frameworks are very much for research use, and most importantly, they are not described with completion on how a real FL system works, most of them are very abstract and far from reality. The review brings up the fact that the algorithm most extensively used in FL is *FedAvg*, which merely averages local model updates to build a global model. Yet, in contradiction to the abstract nature of most of the frameworks, the *AI4EOSC* platform concretely sets a look into more realistic FL scenarios by means of practical implementation on AML. Although these were just simulations, they demonstrated different clients training local models and a central server that updated and aggregated the global model. Each of the clients and servers themselves had their own IP address, making this similar to a cross-device setting. Data sets used in FL popularly include *MNIST*, *CIFAR*, *SHAKESPEARE*, and synthetically generated data. Finally, after reviewing FL frameworks and real-world settings, it became clear that good development of an FL server might be performed in an FL server using *Flask*. Of course, companies will use more sophisticated methods, but this should be enough to serve as a proof of concept.

Furthermore, this review was instrumental in defining the ROs, as shown in table 3.6.

A close-up of a research

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Table 3.6. Literature review and ROs alignment.

To determine the first RO, it was necessary to explore existing FL frameworks. This review initiated the primary research. A primary population, FL frameworks was identified having a sample of five FL frameworks. Allowing experimentation to evaluate the implementability of the selected frameworks. FL algorithms are also tied to this RO, as they are inherent to each FL framework.

Aligned with the second RO, the rest of the sections address various aspects of FL frameworks and their application. In Section 3.3, the gap between FL frameworks and real-world FL settings began to close, as some cases in this section resembled the approaches private companies might use for FL projects. This prompted the development of an FL server that fully demonstrates a central server running on an IP address, with different clients connecting to this IP address, each running on separate ports. In Section 3.4, a secondary population was identified: the datasets. This facilitated sourcing the data for the experimentation, including the RSNA Chest X-ray, *MNIST*, and a synthetically generated dataset. Finally, Section 3.5 provides insights into implementing an FL server using Flask and identifies a third population, the clients. The sample includes companies or sectors that will be referred to as clients in the experiment. These sectors, such as medical (hospitals and pharmaceutical companies) and technological, extensively use FL as part of their continuous improvement and development.

The third RO involves comparing the findings from the first and second ROs. It is evident that all sections of the literature review are crucial for achieving this objective.

Lastly the sampling strategy carried out in this research is a sampling method non-probabilistic and sampling judgmental, it is necessary to address and remark that bias is embedded in the experimentation method and above populations were selected after carefully considering the following points:

* The frameworks selected are widely used and accepted by the FL community, researchers, and private sector.
* The datasets, RSNA Chest X-ray, *MNIST*, and a synthetic data are typically used in research and present in many FL experiments as the literature review has revealed.
* The technological and medical sectors, the first created the concept of FL and the second is experimenting heavily with this concept.

Given the reasons above, the chosen samples are representative of their entire population. Corresponding literature review section along each sample within its population and RO is depicted in Table 3.6.1.

A close-up of a medical data

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Table 3.6.1 Samples within its population, RO and literature review section.

# 4. Research and Ethics

## 4.1. Primary Research Methodology

The primary research methodology for this project was experimentation. The goal was to bridge the gap between popular FL frameworks and real-world FL use cases by developing an FL server. Once developed, the FL server simulated how a real-world FL system would function in practice. The methodology framework was divided into three stages: evaluation, development, and results. Figure 4.1 provides a structured overview of the research methodology.

A diagram of a company

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Figure 4.1. Primary research methodology: Experimentation.

The first part of the experimentation, the evaluation stage, involved the experimentation and evaluation of popular FL frameworks. At this stage, the first population of interest, FL frameworks, was identified, with the sample consisting of *PySyft, FATE, Flower, FedML* and *TFF*. The method for selecting the FL sample is explained in Section 3.1, and the evaluation of these frameworks will be detailed in Section 5. Essentially, it involved reviewing the documentation and tutorials provided through their GitHub accounts, with a focus on two key aspects: ease of use and real-world applicability. This evaluation served as the foundation for the development of the FL server.

The second part of the experimentation focused on the development of the FL server. At this stage, two populations were identified: companies and FL datasets. The company samples were categorised into technological and medical sectors, while the FL datasets included X-ray and MNIST datasets for the medical scenario, and tabular synthetic data generated for the technological scenario. These secondary datasets were used to model a binary classification problem in the technological scenario and an image classification problem in the medical scenario.

The final stage of the experimentation presented the results of the primary research. Within this stage, a validation substage was included to validate the FL server. To achieve this, the data distribution was adjusted to include both IID and non-IID variants for each scenario.

## 4.2. Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy used for this project consisted of the non-probabilistic method and the judgmental sampling type. The populations and their respective samples identified throughout this research are presented in Table 4.2.

A close-up of a sign

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Table 4.2. Populations and samples identified.

## 4.3. Project Management Framework

This project required a project management framework to address the complex tasks of developing an FL server. Each implemented function was iterated as many times as necessary to achieve the desired output. The project management methodology chosen for this project was *Agile*. Beck, K., *et al.,* (2001) introduced this methodology, summarizing it in twelve principles. This research was driven by some of these principles, such as, *“Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change….”* This was a constant during the server build-up phase, not in terms of changing requirements, but in finding the right methods and functions to facilitate communication between clients and the server.

Another principle that guided this research was, *“Simplicity is essential.”* Given the complexity of the FL server, it was built as simply as possible to serve as a proof of concept for how an FL server functions in real-world scenarios.

*Agile* remains relevant today, as recent literature reveals (Zadeh, *et al.,* 2024), and it is used across many domains, not just in its original design for software development (Ciric *et al.*, 2019). Once the project management framework was clear, a detailed plan was put in place, as shown in Figure 4.3.

A table of research project plan

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Figure 4.3. Agile project management framework.

## 4.4. Project Delivery

The meetings with the supervisor took place on July 9th, July 25th, August 15th, and September 12th. Each meeting was crucial for addressing doubts and keeping track of changes made throughout the research. As shown in Table 4.4., the project timeframe spanned from July 3rd to September 27th.

A graph of a project

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Figure 4.4. Gantt chart project delivery timeline.

## 4.5. Tools and Equipment

The laptop used for this research was an HP 250 G8, equipped with an 11th Gen Intel® Core™ i7-1165G7 processor (2.80GHz, 2803 MHz, 4 cores, 8 logical processors), 16GB of RAM, and a 237GB hard drive. For the development of the FL server, an external 500GB SSD containing Ubuntu 22.04.4 LTS was used. This decision was based on the literature, which indicated that most FL frameworks are developed using Linux, and in some cases, macOS. However, Windows 10 Pro was retained for tasks such as report writing, table creation, and figure design. GitHub was set up on both operating systems to track all changes made throughout the research.

The decision to use two operating systems was crucial for the development of this research. Initial attempts involved using VirtualBox or setting up a dual boot option on Windows. Both options proved ineffective: VirtualBox due to limited resources, and the dual boot option because the native 237GB SSD was mostly occupied by Windows, leaving no room for Ubuntu installation. The solution was an external 500GB SSD with Ubuntu installed. Ubuntu was set as the default boot OS in the laptop's BIOS during the FL server development phase. Figure 4.5. illustrates the drive setup.

A computer with a black arrow pointing to the screen

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Figure 4.5. Laptop drive setup.

Other tools used are shown in Table 4.5.

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Table 4.5. Software tools used.

## 4.6. Ethical Aspects

There are ethical concerns in this DA project regarding all secondary data gathered. Starting with the FL frameworks reviewed, all of them are licensed under Apache 2.0, which allows anyone to access their code for review, audit, and improvement. One of the conditions of this license is proper attribution, ensuring the creators are credited for their work.

Secondly datasets used for this project are MNIST, which is publicly available in TensorFlow datasets (TensorFlow Datasets, 2010), and the pneumonia chest x-ray dataset, which is publicly available through the RSNA (www.rsna.org, 2018). The MNIST dataset is licensed under *"CC BY 4.0 DEED Attribution 4.0 International",* and the chest x-ray dataset has its own terms of use and attribution. Neither dataset imposes usage limits; however, certain clauses become applicable when there is an intention to modify or redistribute the datasets. This project does not intend to modify or redistribute the datasets.

There is some concern regarding the use of the x-ray images, as pneumonia patients represent a vulnerable group that could potentially be impacted by results related to pneumonia detection. However, this research does not focus on pneumonia detection findings; the images are only used for an image classification task.

The third dataset used in this project consists of tabular data, synthetically generated via a JN for the technological scenario, raising no legal concerns.

Finally, the third population involves companies, though they are not explicitly identified. Instead, they are categorised broadly as medical and technological sectors, which heavily utilize FL. These sectors were selected to represent a sample of companies that frequently apply FL technologies.

# 5. Evaluating Popular Federated Learning Frameworks

This chapter starts with the experimentation phase and evaluates the sample of *PySyft*, *FATE*, *Flower*, *FedML*, and *TFF*, that was discussed in section 3.1. Kholod et al., (2020) established the following criteria to evaluate open-source FL frameworks: ease of use and deployment, development, analysis capabilities, accuracy, and performance. However, due to time constraints, this research will focus only on ease of use and real-world applicability. Each aspect can be broken down as follows:

* Ease of use:
  + Setup and Configuration: Evaluates the complexity of installing the framework.
  + Adaptability to Various Use Cases: Evaluates how the framework can adapt to different business domains and use cases.
* Real-world applicability:
  + Examples and Tutorials: Assesses the quality of examples and tutorials available to help new users get started and how close these are to real-world settings.

After evaluating all five FL frameworks the following scores were assigned as shown in Table 5.

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Table 5. Scoring criteria for FL frameworks.

## 5.1. PySyft

This framework offers interaction with an API via JN. To start the evaluation, the repository was cloned. The documentation is clear, and support is available through Slack. The API itself, when accessed via a browser, does not offer any functionality; actions must be performed via JN. It is designed for programmatic use rather than manual interaction. The repository (OpenMined, 2019) contains twelve JNs that serve as tutorials.

The participants, also known as *PySyft* workers, include the data owner and the data scientists. The data has two variants: mock and private. Data scientists can only access and read the mock dataset. The first four JNs cover the basics of *PySyft*, including how to load and preprocess data securely, how scientists can submit code for remote execution for the owner to review and approve, and how data scientists can download their results.

The fifth JN shows how the data owner trains a multi-party computation model using *PyTorch*. The remaining JNs cover customizing policies for data access, handling multiple code requests for approval by the data owner, managing the data site register control flow, and granting access to new users. They also cover code history, blob storage, submitting *Docker* files, custom API notebooks, and resetting user passwords.

After reviewing this framework, the conclusion is that *PySyft* is a robust framework for privacy-preserving machine learning but is more suited for academic and research fields. None of the tutorials provided a real-world scenario where different devices train a model locally and a server aggregates the results. Instead, the framework focuses on privacy and user permission management rather than providing real federated learning scenarios.

## 5.2. FATE

*FATE* repository has good structure (FATE, 2021) and clear documentation guiding the user through its directories, examples and tutorials. Active support via issues and discussions in the repository enables users to look for help and contribute to the project.

To evaluate the framework two tutorials were evaluated. The first one was Hetero-NN Tutorial which leveraged the *FATE* Hetero-NN framework for training a NN model based on vertically partitioned data, where guest and host have different features of the same dataset. Essential *FATE* libraries were imported, and a context was created to configure the federated environment. The data is loaded from CSV, with labels from guests, and without labels from hosts, into the data frame format of *FATE*. In this process, based on the type of party, it initializes a model; that is, for a guest, it will initialize both the bottom and top models, whereas for a host, it initializes only the bottom model. By using *HeteroNNTrainerGuest* or *HeteroNNTrainerHost*, it will prepare the training of the model, where the function train trains the model, and the function predict predicts the outcome of the data set by applying a trained model. The run function coordinates the training and prediction, and the script is run with launch, which simulates a FL scenario.

The second tutorial, the *Hetero-SecureBoost* tutorial makes use of FATE's *Hetero-SecureBoost* scheme in that it trains the boosting tree model. Based on party type, initialization of the model is done: a guest initializes the model as *HeteroSecureBoostGuest*, a host as *HeteroSecureBoostHost*. The train function initiates the training loop, while the predict function utilizes a trained model for predicting outcomes over an input dataset. The run function drives both the training and predicting operations. The script is launched with launch for mimicking the federated learning setup. Both tutorials are successful in demonstrating federated learning by enabling the model training process among different parties without exchanging raw data, and hence ensures collaborative learning while keeping private data.

The settings in these scenarios are such that they fit well with real-world federated learning; thus, they ensure data privacy and security. Consequently, *FATE* can be applied in practical settings for federated learning. Final conclusion same as *PySyft* none of the tutorials provided a real-world scenario where different devices train a model locally and a server aggregates the results.

## 5.3. Flower

The *Flower* GitHub repository (Flower, 2021) provides practical documentation to speed up the process of using this framework. It also has a large community on *Slack*. The tutorials offer the option of using JNs as well as *Python* scripts for seamless command line deployment. Among the tutorials offered in *Python* scripts, two were selected: vertical-fl and pytorch-from-centralized-to-federated. These were chosen because they are closer to real-world FL cases, and moving away from JNs helps to achieve this.

The vertical-fl example uses the *Titanic* dataset to train simple regression models for binary classification. In VFL, each client holds different features of the same dataset, while the server retains the dataset labels. The task was to predict whether the passengers survived or not, with three clients capturing different features. Finally, the server aggregated each client using *FedAvg*.

The pytorch-from-centralized-to-federated example demonstrates the transition from a ML centralised setup to a FL setup using Flower and *Pytorch*. In the centralised setup, a CNN was trained using the CIFAR-10 dataset achieving 37.8% accuracy. The federated setup distributed the data across two clients training models locally. The server aggregated updates and improved accuracy in 48.9%. This demonstrates how FL can better generalise and improve accuracy.

The Flower framework is closer to real FL scenarios because it simulates clients and a server in a pragmatic way, making it easy to understand how each element is laid out. Flower surpasses *PySyft* and *FATE* in this regard. A drawback, however, is that users need to create environments and be familiar with the Linux console to deploy these examples.

## 5.4. FedML

*FedML* offers clear documentation and tutorials for deploying its experiments (FedML, 2023). It also has a broad support community on *Slack*. Several of its repositories contain code that has been used in real-world settings and academic publications. Two tutorials were evaluated *FedAvg MNIST LR* and the *Heart Disease*.

FedAvg MNIST LR demonstrates how to use the federated averaging algorithm for training a logistic regression model on the *MNIST* dataset under a cross-silo (horizontal) federated learning setup. The experiment has 1,000 clients, with each client training on a partitioned *MNIST* dataset. Model updates are centrally averaged to form a global model. This experiment is conducted over 100 communication rounds, with two clients participating in a round at a time. The results show an incremental improvement in the accuracy of the model with every round, reaching 99% by the last one, while the loss decreases up to 0.01. This is quite a good example of how federated learning can demonstrate its potential in the case of multi-client and centralised server situations.

The *Heart Disease* uses federated learning on a distributed heart disease dataset to illustrate its use in healthcare. The dataset is distributed across four centres: Cleveland, Hungary, Switzerland, and Long Beach V. The dataset holds data specific to each centre. Experiments were run using a binary classification model over 10 communication rounds with *FedAvg* as the optimizer. The performance of the model, with respect to the Area Under the Curve (AUC), stabilizes around 0.7396, demonstrating the capability to handle binary classes.

Unlike *PySyft*, *FATE*, and *Flower*, *FedML* offers a platform for project management (open.fedml.ai); however, this feature was not evaluated due to time constraints. After evaluation, *FedML* appears to be the closest to real-world settings, as evidenced by its GitHub repository.

## 5.5. TensorFlow Federated

The last FL framework reviewed, TFF, presents a comprehensive GitHub repository, with documentation and tutorials that are easy to follow. The tutorials are JNs that can be run on a *Google* *Colab* or downloaded to a local computer for exploration, there are a total of twenty tutorials only two were selected for evaluation. TFF offers a robust package divided in two layers, FL and Federated Core (FC). The first layer provides high-level interfaces for integrating *Keras* or *non-Keras* machine learning models into the TFF framework. The second layer consists of lower-level interfaces that allow customization of algorithms by combining *TensorFlow* with distributed communication operators (TensorFlow Federated, 2024). Evaluating the tutorials, the first focused on image classification in a FL setting and the second demonstrated how to build a FL algorithm with *TensorFlow*.

FL for image classification tutorial demonstrates how to use the TFF high-level tff.learning API to perform federated learning on the *EMNIST* dataset, which is a federated version of the *MNIST* dataset. The process involves key steps: first, it prepares the non-IID data across multiple clients for federated learning. Then, a simple neural network is defined using *tf.keras* and is wrapped with TFF *tff.learning.models.VariableModel*. The model is trained using the *FedAvg* algorithm, which is implemented to operate over several training rounds in a federated setup. Finally, the tutorial concludes by evaluating the model's performance using federated evaluation methods, focusing on accuracy and loss metrics for both training and test datasets.

Building your own FL algorithm with TFF tutorial, offers an in-depth look at constructing a custom FL algorithm using TFF lower-level FC, which allows greater control over the learning process. It starts by explaining the four main components of federated learning: server-to-client broadcast, client update, client-to-server upload, and server update. The tutorial explains how to create custom federated algorithms beyond the standard APIs by using TFF low-level interfaces. A basic FedAvg algorithm was developed by defining the *initialize\_fn* and *next\_fn* functions, which integrate TensorFlow operations within the federated communication process. The tutorial wraps up by combining these elements into a custom iterative process for federated learning, including an evaluation of the model performance after a few training rounds.

Summarising TFF, it is likely the most robust FL framework, but its tutorials are more suited to academic scenarios and are far from real-world applications.

## 5.6. Conclusions and summary

In summary, all five FL frameworks offer a wide range of options for setting up FL systems. Based on the evaluation conducted, Table 5.6 presents their rankings based on an equal-weighted average.

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Table 5.6. FL framework ranking after evaluation.

*FedML* stands out as the best option, offering intuitive tutorials that closely mirror real-world settings and a website capable of orchestrating and controlling FL experiments. *Flower* and *FATE* closely follow, with their tutorials and seamless deployment making them very robust for experimenting with FL settings. While all five FL frameworks are focused on research, the evaluation determined that TFF and *PySyft* appear to be designed primarily for academic research, as their tutorials serve mainly as proofs of concept.

In conclusion, all five FL frameworks can be enhanced due to their open-source nature, allowing for the customisation of a FL system to match the specific requirements of a project.

Section 10.2., of the annex provides additional information on how to deploy and implement the tutorials for each of the FL frameworks evaluated.

# 6. Federated Learning Server Development

This chapter describes how the FL server was built, including its architecture, communication protocols, server functions, and client coordination. A high-level overview of the project file structure is shown in Figure 6.1. The server is orchestrated by *server.py*, with clients connecting to the server via *client.py*. There are two scenarios for training: medical and technological. Data for these scenarios was generated using JNs stored in the *FLServer/JNs* directory. Finally, a front-end page *(index.html)* is provided to interact with the server. To format the page *styles.css* was used, and *script.js* gave the logic to interact with the server and dynamically update the HTML content.

A diagram of a computer server

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Figure 6.1. FL server file structure.

## 6.1. Architecture

The designed FL server has an architecture to fit in multiple client nodes, for this experiment five clients were connected to the server into different ports. The server coordinated the entire process, aggregating the global the model after local client training and sending back weights into the clients for further training. The architecture is illustrated in Figure 6.2.

A diagram of a software development process

Description automatically generated  
Figure 6.2. FL server architecture.

## 6.2. FL Server Flow

The server was run across four scenarios, technological and medical, each in its IID and non-IID variants. After the five clients connected, the training for the Technological IID scenario iterated over five rounds, followed by the same process for Technological non-IID, Medical IID and Medical non-IID. After the final training scenario, the server was shut down. A video is available to illustrate this process (FL Sever Demo, 2024), as well as Figure 6.3.

A diagram of a flowchart

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Figure 6.3. FL server flow.

## 6.3. FL Server Functions

To comprehend how the FL server functions is key to review its functions. These are divided into scripts *server.py* and *client.py*.

### 6.3.1. server.py

This file includes seventeen functions responsible for tasks such as client registration, storing their details (client ID, host, and port), and updating the server when a registered client is ready to begin the training process. The server is prepared to coordinate with a client for specific training datasets *(Technological IID, Technological non-IID, Medical IID and Medical non-IID).* It waits for all clients to be ready before instructing them to start. The training process begins by sending a signal to all clients to start their local training. After training, the server receives model updates from the clients, aggregates the model weights from all clients, and updates cumulative metrics over training rounds. Additionally, it updates client statuses on the server and debugs by returning the current state of all registered clients.

A logic was implemented to refresh the server, as hitting the reload page every time was not an option. The refresh function sets a flag indicating that the server state requires refreshing. Another important functionality was to refresh the server without disconnecting the server and client consoles, allowing for a smooth transition from one training scenario to another. Finally, the index function renders the main dashboard page, displaying the status and metrics of all registered clients, as well as the local and global model metrics.

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Table 6.3.1. Functions *server.py.*

### 6.3.2. client.py

This script comprises thirteen functions responsible for enabling data loading for the specified client and scenario *(Technological IID or non-IID and Medical IID or non-IID).* Additionally, models for each scenario are defined and compiled based on the selected scenario. Functions for training management include *prepare*, *start*, and *run*. After training has finished, the weights are sent back to the server, and a receive function updates the local client model. The *reset\_client* function resets the client's state, reloads the data, and re-registers the client back into the server, preparing it for the next round of training. The final function allows the server to shut down clients.

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Table 6.3.2. Functions *client.py.*

## 6.4. Communication protocols

Communication within the FL app was facilitated using the HTTP protocol between the central node *(server.py)* and the clients. Two fundamental *REST* operations, *GET* and *POST*, were employed. The *GET* method was primarily used by the server to retrieve the current state of all clients and to check if they needed to refresh their state or restart training. The *POST* method was used on both the server and client sides. It facilitated communication by sending data whenever an endpoint was invoked, with tasks like client registration, sending model updates, or initiating the training process being examples. A key distinction between these methods is that *GET* requests are non-intrusive; they do not alter the server's state and are intended solely for querying and retrieving data. In contrast, *POST* requests can modify the server's state. Across both nodes, a total of eleven endpoints have been defined, as illustrated in Figure 6.4.

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Table 6.4. Endpoints and HTTP methods used at the server and client levels.

## 6.5. Machine Learning Models Used.

This section describes the ML models used within the FL server. The models were designed based on the identified client population. The samples, reflecting the majority of the literature review, were categorised into medical and technological scenarios.

### 6.5.1. Technological Model

The technological model employed was a NN designed to handle structured data for a binary classification task. The data was contained in a CSV file with seven features and a target column with two categories. This election tried to find a case where any *“Tech”* company could face a similar binary classification task, such as determining if a product could be potentially sold based on a binary target, if a mortgage can be given based on a binary target, etc. The model architecture is illustrated in Figure 6.5.1., and model layers explained in Table 6.5.1.

A diagram of a network

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Figure 6.5.1. Technological model architecture.

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Table 6.5.1. Technological model layers.

The NN was implemented using the *TensorFlow* and *Keras* libraries and compiled using the binary cross-entropy loss function optimised with the *Adam* optimiser.

### 6.5.2. Medical Model

The medical model utilised was a CNN, designed for image classification tasks in the medical domain. In this scenario, the data consisted of images labelled as *lung* or *not lung*. The CNN was trained to classify these images based on the labels. This approach aimed to emulate similar medical experiments observed while reviewing the FL frameworks. The model architecture is depicted in Figure 6.5.2 and the model layers are explained in Table 6.5.2.

A black and white diagram of a rectangular object

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Figure 6.5.2. Medical model architecture.

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Description automatically generated  
Table 6.5.2. Medical model layers.

The CCN was implemented using the *TensorFlow* and *Keras* libraries and compiled using the categorical cross-entropy loss function optimised with the *Adam* optimiser.

## 6.6. Algorithm

A simple algorithm was introduced for this project, The Federated Weighted Average *(FedWAvg).* It was designed for the distributed task of training five clients in parallel within the FL server. The server aggregated updates sent by the clients using a weighted averaging method based on the number of data points. The aggregated global model was then distributed to all clients for the next round of training. As shown in Figure 6.6., the server initialises the global model with weighs w0. In each round, five clients participate, training the model locally and updating the weights wt. The server then collects the updated weights from all clients, computes a weighted average to update the global model, and finally sends the updated global model back to the clients.

A screenshot of a computer program

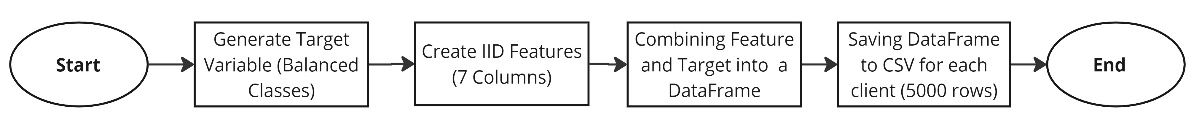
Description automatically generated  
Figure 6.6. *FedWAvg* algorithm.

## 6.7. Data Collection

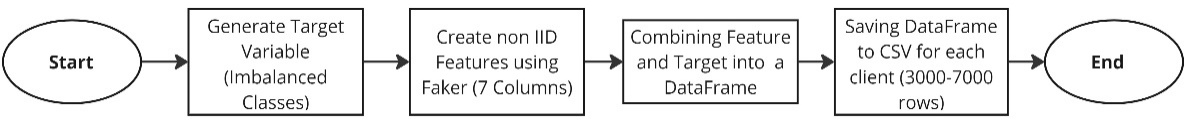
The data collection process for this project was accomplished using JNs, with synthetic CSV datasets created for the technological scenario and images for the medical scenario. At this stage, it was necessary to determine the classification and category of the FL server. In terms of FL classification, it clearly does not fall under cross-silo due to the limited amount of data each client holds. While it closely resembles cross-device FL, since the clients are not actual devices, this research classifies it as cross-client FL. The categorisation would be horizontal FL, as the clients share the same dataset feature space but differ in the samples they hold.

### 6.7.1. Technological Data

The technological data used in this project was synthetically generated, with the primary requirement being a binary target and features suitable for modelling a NN. To further validate both the model and the artefact itself, two sets of datasets were created: IID and non-IID. *Python* libraries such as *numpy*, *pandas*, and *Faker* were utilised for this purpose. For the IID datasets, each client received a dataset with normally distributed feature columns and a balanced binary target variable, each consisting of 5,000 rows. The logic for IID data generation is illustrated in Figure 6.7.1.

  
Figure 6.7.1. Flow technological IID data generation.

In the other hand, the non-IID datasets introduced variability and imbalance, with one class dominating the target variable and features multiplied by random factors to achieve non normally distributed data. The number of rows in these datasets ranged between 3,000 and 7,000 in total. The logic for non-IID data generation is illustrated in Figure 6.7.2.

  
Figure 6.7.2. Flow technological non-IID data generation.

In total, five clients were simulated, each receiving both an IID and a non-IID dataset, all of which were saved in CSV format within specific directories.

### 6.7.2. Medical Data

For this scenario, the RSNA Chest X-ray and MNIST datasets were combined. The X-ray images were downloaded, resized, normalised and labelled as *Lung*. The *MNIST* dataset was similarly resized, converted to RGB, and labelled as *Not Lung*. This process is depicted in Figure 6.7.3.

A diagram of a data processing process

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Figure 6.7.3. Medical data acquisition and preprocessing.

For the IID scenario, datasets were created with an equal distribution of *Lung* and *Not Lung* images, randomly shuffled and then split into the training and test subsets. In the non-IID scenario, class imbalanced was introduced by varying the distribution of the images across clients, some clients would receive more X-ray images and others would receive more *MNIST* images. The images for each client were saved in folders labelled as IID and non-IID, each containing subfolders for the test and train subsets. This process is demonstrated in Figure 6.7.4.

A diagram of a company

Description automatically generated  
Figure 6.7.4. Medical IID and non-IID dataset preparation.

A high-level overview of the data generation for the technological and medical scenarios is illustrated in Figure 6.7.5.

A diagram of data processing

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Figure 6.7.5. Combined flow for technological and medical data.

# 7. Results

As introduced in Chapter 3.5 FL Server Implementation, the artefact was validated according to the methodologies by Yan *et al.*, (2024) and Duchesne *et al.,* (2024) using IID and non-IID data. In sections below the results are presented for the technological and medical scenarios under both IID and non-IID variants.

## 7.1. Technological scenario

The synthetic data generated for this scenario followed a normal distribution for the seven features, and the target variable was equally balanced across its two categories for the IID variant, as shown in Figure 7.1. Shapiro-Wilk Tests (SWTs) were conducted for feature generation, and with an alpha (α) of 5%, the null hypothesis (H0) was accepted. This situation is unlikely to occur in real-life scenarios.

A graph with a blue line

Description automatically generated  
Figure 7.1.1. Distribution analysis for features and target variable in the IID variant.

In contrast, the non-IID data was not normally distributed, and its target variable was unbalanced, as described in STs were conducted for feature generation, with α = 5%, resulted in the rejection H0. This scenario is likely to occur in real-life situations.

A graph with a line

Description automatically generated  
Figure 7.1.2. Distribution analysis for features and target variable in the non-IID variant.

### 7.1.1. IID data

After five rounds, the medical scenario with IID data revealed the following results, performance trends by clients and global model. Two clients showed improvement, client 2 and client 4. Client 2’s accuracy increased from 0.4927 in round 1 to 0.5092 in round 5, while its loss decreased from 0.8455 to 0.8204. Similarly, client 4’s accuracy improved from 0.5132 to 0.5160, and its loss reduced from 0.8316 to 0.8121. These clients demonstrated improvement, whereas clients 1, 3 and 5 experienced declines, with both accuracy and loss. The global model also showed a decrease in accuracy from 0.5098 in round 1 to 0.5069 in round 5, and a loss increase from 0.8268 to 0.8288. This suggests potential overfitting and indicates that the FL server design and NN architecture may not be optimal for IID data. The results are depicted in Figures 7.1.3 and 7.1.4.

A graph of a graph and a diagram of a graph

Description automatically generated with medium confidence  
Figure 7.1.3. Technological IID training: Client and global accuracy metrics.

A comparison of a graph

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Figure 7.1.4. Technological IID training: Client and global loss metrics.

### 7.1.2. Non-IID data

The non-IID data variant produced the following results after training. Clients 1 and 5 showed the most consistent improvements. Client 1’s accuracy increased from 0.5706 in round 1 to 0.5779 in round 5, while its loss decreased from 0.8448 to 0.7945. Similarly, Client 5’s accuracy improved from 0.6950 to 0.7739, with a corresponding loss reduction from 0.7808 to 0.7205. Clients 2 and 3 experienced declines in accuracy and increases in loss. However, the most interesting insight came from Client 4. Its accuracy fluctuated significantly, rising from 0.2203 in round 1 to 0.8133 in round 3, then dropping to 0.2058 in round 4 before bouncing back to 0.8249 in round 5. This erratic performance might be due to communication issues, such as delays in sending accuracy metrics for aggregation or other communication-related problems, which should be addressed in future work. Overall, the model performed well with non-IID data, as the global model's accuracy improved from 0.5807 in round 1 to 0.6621 in round 5, with a corresponding decrease in loss from 0.7911 to 0.7649. The results are shown in Figures 7.1.5 and 7.1.6.

A diagram of a triangle and a triangle

Description automatically generated  
Figure 7.1.5. Technological non-IID training: Client and global accuracy metrics.

A graph of a triangle and a triangle

Description automatically generated with medium confidence  
Figure 7.1.6. Technological non-IID training: Client and global loss metrics.

## 7.2. Medical scenario

As explained in Section 6.7.2, the medical data used was a combination of X-ray (lung images) and MNIST (number images) datasets. The distribution of training and testing images across clients for this scenario is described in Figure 7.2.1. In the IID variant, all sets were equally balanced, while in the non-IID variant, the sets were introduced with imbalances. Balanced refers to having 150 images per set, whereas in the unbalanced version, the number of images varied across sets.

A graph of a pie chart

Description automatically generated with medium confidence  
Figure 7.1.2 Distribution analysis for features and target variable in the non-IID variant.

### 7.2.1. IID data

The IID variant of the medical scenario produced the following results after training. All clients maintained an accuracy of one, and the global accuracy also remained at one. Jittering was introduced in Figure 7.2.2 to prevent the trend lines from overlapping. Additionally, the loss scores were stable and close to zero, as shown in Figure 7.2.3. The results are quite unrealistic due to the nature of the balanced data given to the model.

A graph of a graph

Description automatically generated with medium confidence  
Figure 7.2.2. Medical IID training: Client and global accuracy metrics.

A graph of different sizes and lines

Description automatically generated with medium confidence  
Figure 7.2.3. Medical IID training: Client and global loss metrics.

### 7.2.2. Non-IID data

The non-IID variant produced the following results after training. Clients 3 and 5 maintained an accuracy of 1.0000 throughout the training, and their loss values improved. Client 2 showed an increase in accuracy from 0.6957 in round 1 to 0.8125 in round 5, along with a slight improvement in loss from 0.3353 to 0.3261. However, Clients 1 and 4 did not perform well in either accuracy or loss. Overall, the global model’s accuracy decreased from 0.8769 in round 1 to 0.8601 in round 5, while the global loss increased from 0.1766 to 0.2093, highlighting the complexity of dealing with non-IID data. The results are depicted in Figures 7.2.3 and 7.2.4.

A comparison of a graph

Description automatically generated with medium confidence  
Figure 7.2.4. Medical non-IID training: Client and global accuracy metrics.

A graph of different sizes and shapes

Description automatically generated with medium confidence  
Figure 7.2.5. Medical non-IID training: Client and global loss metrics.

## 7.3. Summary

This chapter presented interesting results. For the IID variants, none of them improved the global model. In the technological scenario, only two clients showed improvement, while in the medical scenario, 100% accuracy and minimal loss were achieved from rounds one to five. However, in real-world settings, it is unlikely that data would be perfectly distributed across clients.

In contrast, the non-IID settings, which more closely reflect real-world scenarios, only showed improvement in the technological scenario. Three clients demonstrated improved accuracy and reduced losses over rounds. In the medical scenario, the global model did not improve, and only two clients saw better scores. A summary is provided in Table 7.3.

A table with text and numbers

Description automatically generated  
Table 7.3. Summary of client and global performances.

These insights highlight some of the limitations of the FL server. One such limitation includes communication issues, such as the problem encountered with client 4 in the technological non-IID scenario, which suggests that a mechanism must be in place to prevent such behaviour. Another limitation is optimal client performance; excluding the medical IID scenario, the other three scenarios did not show uniform improvement across all clients. Several factors could contribute to this, such as algorithmic inefficiencies or imbalanced weights.

A third limitation concerns the type of data. In the technological scenario, tabular data was used, while in the medical scenario, images were involved. Dedicating a specific FL server to handle only one type of data may optimize performance metrics.

However, these limitations present opportunities for future improvements and experimentation. Implementing robust logic to prevent drops in accuracy, addressing optimal client performance, and developing data-specific FL servers are all areas to focus on moving forward.

# 8. Conclusion

The conclusion of this research is that a fully functional cross-client horizontal FL server has been developed, capable of training models in both technical and medical scenarios using IID and non-IID data. This experiment narrows the gap between what popular FL frameworks typically offer in tutorials or case studies by delivering a more realistic FL server, though with some limitations and areas for future improvement, which will be discussed in the following sections.

## 8.1. Summary

This project can be summarised through the objectives established in Chapter 1:

* **To evaluate the implementability of existing FL frameworks.** Section 3.1 served as the starting point for the evaluation of relevant FL frameworks. In Section 5, popular FL frameworks were selected and thoroughly evaluated. Each of the five frameworks included tutorials designed to test their functionalities, primarily aimed at academic purposes. The next objective was to introduce a more realistic FL demonstration beyond academic settings.
* **To develop a cross-client horizontal FL server.** This objective was met as a natural progression from the first objective and following the literature review in Sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5. These steps led to the development of a *Flask*-based web FL server capable of training models for both technological and medical scenarios using IID and non-IID data.
* **Comparison of FL frameworks and cross-client horizontal FL server use cases.** This objective represents the culmination of the research, with all preceding sections contributing to its achievement. The aim was to narrow the gap between popular FL frameworks and real-world FL use cases through the development of the FL server. The developed server provided an approximation of how a real-world FL system operates, with five clients connecting from different ports to a central server, and a web interface orchestrating the training rounds and displaying both local and global metrics. Despite its limitations, the FL server helped narrow the gap between popular FL frameworks and real-world FL use cases.

## 8.2. Limitations

There are a few limitations regarding the developed FL server. Below is a list of these limitations:

* **Infrastructure:** The application was run on a single machine emulating a network of clients connected to a server. While this served as a proof of concept, it is limited in that, in a real FL setting, each client would be training models from different locations across the globe.
* **Data:** In real-world scenarios, clients or devices use live data rather than static data. This limitation was known prior to sourcing the data; however, due to time constraints, it would have been challenging to source different APIs with tabular data and images that included both IID and non-IID variants. Additionally, the size of the datasets used was small because GitHub has limitations when handling files larger than 100MB, and it is recommended to keep repositories under 1GB. Another reason for using smaller datasets was to ensure all data was readily available for use. In real-world scenarios, the datasets would have been significantly larger than the 600KB for the technological data and the 1.40MB for the medical data on average.
* **Communication:** The experiment revealed that communication issues between the server and clients, in both directions, can occur. The server is somewhat limited by the lack of a mechanism to control and mitigate these communication issues. Investigating the root cause of this problem would have consumed a significant portion of the time allocated to other sections of this research.
* **Privacy:** FL is designed to enhance privacy by focusing on training local models to build a robust global model. Companies often encrypt their data before training, ensuring that sensitive information is not shared with third parties. Due to time constraints, implementing an encryption method for client data was deemed unnecessary, especially since the data used in the FL server was already fully anonymised.

## 8.3. Future Work

Above limitations leave ample room for improvement:

* **Infrastructure:** Establishing a network of clients located in different regions to better align with a real-world FL scenario.
* **Data:** To further approximate a real-world scenario, the use of dynamic data from real-time APIs should be explored. This would also increase the dataset size, providing more data for the models.
* **Communication:** Implementing a mechanism to manage communication issues between the server and clients, ensuring smooth operation in both directions.
* **Privacy:** Encrypting client-server communications to ensure client data remains private should be a priority moving forward. This can be achieved by using HTTPS.

Additional improvements, not related to the current limitations, that should be explored include:

* **ML models used:** Different ML model architectures should be explored to find optimal performance across both IID and non-IID data variants.
* **Algorithms:** Various algorithms should be investigated to optimize the trade-off between global model improvement and local model performance.
* **Server web features:** Enhancements like visualising metrics evolution through graphs and adding a database to log and track data for further analysis would be beneficial.
* **Data type:** The data used in this research included synthetic tabular data and images. Since many industries can benefit from the FL paradigm, other types of data, such as text, audio, and video, should be explored.

## 8.4. Recommendations

The FL server was developed on Ubuntu 22.04.4 LTS, and it is recommended to use the same OS for deployment, as no other OSs have been tested with this application. Additionally, instructions for cloning the repository and running the experiment can be found in Section X of the Annex.

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# 10. Annex

## 10.1. Federated Learning Frameworks Implementation

To provide more clarity on the evaluations performed in Section 5, here are some steps to deploy the FL frameworks. First, clone each repository onto your laptop. Consider creating separate environments whenever possible to avoid dependency conflicts. Finally, refer to the support communities available on each FL framework's GitHub repository for additional assistance.

### 10.1.1. PySyft

A set of twelve tutorials in JN format were evaluated. PySyft allows interaction using JN with its API. The version of syft installed was 0.9.1b1. To log in as the data owner, the credentials were changed. By default, the email and password are set. To customize them, it was necessary to adjust the Syft package code. Otherwise, it was not possible to change the credentials for the root user using the API. Once the server is launched by calling datasite\_client in JN, a welcome greeting appears (Figure 10.2.3). Instead of finding a user-friendly interface for managing the FL experiments, the localhost server presented a non-user-friendly interface. To see the rest of the JN, refer to the GitHub repository created for this project (Rico, J., 2023a).

### 10.1.2. FATE

The FATE FL framework allows for the creation of pipelines that include setting up the environment, loading data, initializing models, training, making predictions, and execution. The general functionality is to simulate FL and ensure data privacy. To launch the Hetero-NN and Hetero-SecureBoost tutorials navigate to their respective directories.

The hetero\_nn.py script prepares a FL environment in the FATE framework for training a neural network model over the heterogeneously partitioned data. It loads the required libraries and defines training and predict functions. The train function initializes both guest and host context models and their training, while the predict function is used to make predictions. The get\_setting function loads the dataset, model, optimizer, and training arguments. The run function orchestrates these steps and calculates the AUC score if the context is guest. Finally, the script is called using the multiprocessor launcher of FATE.

The sbt.py script is initiating a FL environment to train a secure boosting tree model using the FATE framework. The script imports required libraries. The train function initializes and trains the model for both guest and host contexts with parameters: number of trees, objective, max depth, and learning rate. The predict function makes the predictions from the trained model. The function csv\_to\_df reads CSV files into FATE data frames. The run function handles the flows of training and prediction, working in the distinction between guest and host data. Finally, the script is called using the multiprocessor launcher of FATE.

### 10.1.3. Flower

This framework allows to experiment with many scenarios, example vertical-fl and pytorch-from-centralized-to-federated were evaluated. To start clone the repositories, it is recommended to create environments to avoid any dependency conflict when installing packages.

The first example shows how to implement VFL using the Flower framework on the Titanic dataset for binary classification. In this case, clients have a different set of features in the dataset, and the server will have the labels. The data preprocessing steps are the binning of ages into categories (child, adult, elderly), extraction of titles from the names, and conversion of categorical features into One-Hot encodings. In more detail, the dataset has three partitions: Client 1 includes family connections and accommodation, Client 2 includes personal attributes, and Client 3 includes the remaining features. Each client trains a simple linear regression model for the partition. The server aggregates these models through the FedAvg strategy in strategy.py, whereby the server combines client embeddings, computes gradients and updates the global model through backpropagation. The simulation.py script coordinates the training process over 1000 rounds, where clients are sampled, and the results are aggregated, and the model is evaluated. Output logs which include detailed progress on the client sampling, result aggregation, and accuracy evaluation at various checkpoints.

The second example pytorch-from-centralized-to-federated demonstrates how to transition a machine learning project from a centralized setup to a federated learning setup using Flower and PyTorch. For instance, on the centralized setup, training the CIFAR-10 dataset on a CNN to run on a single machine yielded an accuracy of 37.8% after two epochs. This approach is actually useful, since it has the whole dataset, and hence maximum learnings could be retained for the model. The federated setup can distribute the data among a number of clients, where data is trained individually on a local basis. In this respect, the Flower framework orchestrates this aggregation of client updates to further refine the global model. The federated training logs are illustrative of the server coordinating client updates over 10 rounds, achieving a higher accuracy rate by 48.9%. This higher accuracy indicates how federated learning will be able to make use of different data sources across distributed channels while gaining from different data distributions among clients and enhancing generalization capabilities. However, this leads to further complications within federated learning, particularly communication overhead and effective aggregation strategies. For instance, Flower shows the pragmatic support of federated learning: if nothing else, collaborative training can be realized with data privacy kept on the spot because no raw data is exchanged between clients, making Flower practical for real-world applications where data is inherently distributed.

### 10.1.4. FedML

To run FedAvg MNIST LR and Heart Disease examples is recommended to create an environment to install required packages. Starting with FedAvg MNIST LR open three terminals, one for the server and two for the clients, carefully run these commands:

* First terminal ./run\_server.sh 1
* Second terminal ./run\_client.sh 1 1
* Third terminal ./run\_client.sh 2 2

For the *Heart Disease* example, five terminals were needed, one for the server and four for each of the hospitals.

* First terminal ./run\_simulation.sh 1
* Second terminal ./run\_client.sh 1 1
* Third terminal ./run\_client.sh 2 2
* Fourth terminal ./run\_client.sh 3 3
* Fifth terminal ./run\_client.sh 4 4

### 10.1.5. TensorFlow Federated

TTF has about twenty JNs to experiment with them (google-parfait, 2018). It is recommended to create and environment and install requirements to avoid package conflicts. Two tutorials were explored FL for image classification and building your own FL algorithm with TFF.

## 10.2. Cross-Client Horizontal FL Server Implementation

## 10.3. Results