Explainable AI Model in Medical Image Analysis: A Simple Approach Using Semantic Segmentation and Attention Mapping

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***Abstract*—Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Deep Learning are now widely used in the medical field for tasks such as disease detection, tumour segmentation, and automated screening. However, most AI models operate like a "black box" and do not provide explanations for their decisions. In medical science, explainability is extremely important because doctors must understand how and why a system arrives at a particular conclusion. This paper presents an explainable AI (XAI) method that combines semantic segmentation with attention-based mapping to highlight important regions in medical images. By merging segmentation outputs with Grad-CAM-style attention maps, the framework provides both accurate delineation of lesions and intuitive visual explanations suitable for clinical understanding. This expanded version includes a detailed review of XAI literature, a comprehensive methodology, and extended analysis to support academic and student research needs.**

***Index Terms*—Explainable AI, Semantic Segmentation, Attention Mapping, Medical Imaging, Deep Learning**

I. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly transformed the field of medical imaging over the past decade. With the availability of powerful GPUs, large datasets, and improved neural network architectures, deep learning-based systems are now capable of performing tasks such as tumour detection, X-ray classification, cancer screening, and segmentation of anatomical structures with accuracy comparable to human experts in many cases. These models learn complex patterns from vast amounts of data and use these learned features to make predictions that assist doctors in understanding the patient's condition.

Despite their success, a major problem with deep learning models is that they often behave like a "black box." While they can make highly accurate predictions, they usually do not provide any reasoning or explanation for their decisions. In the medical field, this lack of transparency is a serious concern. Doctors, radiologists, and healthcare professionals need to trust AI systems before using them for diagnosis or treatment planning. For example, if an AI model highlights a region as a tumour, the doctor must know what features influenced this decision. Blindly trusting a machine without proper explanations could lead to incorrect diagnoses, wrong treatments, and potentially harmful outcomes.

This is where Explainable AI (XAI) becomes important. XAI refers to a set of methods that aim to make AI decisions understandable to humans. Instead of giving only a prediction such as "tumour present" or "tumour absent," an explainable system also highlights the specific image regions and features responsible for that decision. This builds confidence among clinicians and ensures that AI models are used responsibly in healthcare settings. Surveys on XAI strongly emphasize that interpretability is not optional in medicine—it is essential. Without clear explanations, even accurate models may be rejected by hospitals because they cannot justify their conclusions.

Medical images such as MRI, CT, and X-ray scans contain complex structures, textures, and variations. A model must learn these subtle features to correctly identify abnormalities. However, simply predicting labels is not enough. Doctors want to see which parts of the image were important to the model, whether the highlighted regions match clinical knowledge, and whether the explanation is consistent across different cases. Thus, a system that only makes predictions without visual justification is unlikely to be trusted or deployed.

Semantic segmentation is one of the most powerful techniques for medical image understanding. Instead of just predicting a class, segmentation assigns a label to every pixel in the image. This allows the model to precisely outline tumours, organs, or lesions. The widely popular UNet architecture is specifically designed for biomedical segmentation and has shown excellent performance on many tasks. A segmentation mask not only gives a clear boundary but also provides a strong visual interpretation showing exactly where the tumour is located.

However, segmentation alone cannot fully explain the model's reasoning. It shows *what* the model predicts (the region), but not *why*. To complement segmentation, attention-based explanation techniques such as Grad-CAM are used. These methods generate heatmaps that highlight the important regions influencing the model's decision. For example, a bright region in a Grad-CAM heatmap shows where the model was "looking" while making a prediction. When these maps are overlaid on the original image, they provide a detailed explanation of the model's internal focus.

In this work, we combine semantic segmentation with attention-based explainability to create a unified XAI framework. The segmentation output provides the structural details of the lesion, while the attention map reveals the model's reasoning. This combined approach gives clinicians two powerful visual cues: clear boundaries and highlighted important regions. The method is simple, effective, and easy for students to implement using standard deep learning libraries such as PyTorch or TensorFlow.

Another important reason for XAI in medical imaging is accountability. Hospitals and healthcare organisations must ensure that AI systems follow ethical guidelines, maintain fairness across populations, and do not rely on biased features. For example, some models trained on biased datasets may learn shortcuts such as identifying text markers on images rather than actual tumour features. Such issues can be uncovered only through proper explainability methods. Grad-CAM and segmentation overlays help detect whether the model is focusing on clinically relevant regions or irrelevant artefacts.

Furthermore, in many real-world cases, medical datasets are imbalanced. Tumours or abnormalities may occupy a small portion of the image, and models may easily learn wrong correlations. Explainability serves as a diagnostic tool, allowing researchers to inspect model behaviour during training and make improvements. In this way, XAI does not only benefit the final user (doctor) but also the developer and student who want to debug or refine the model.

This expanded introduction aims to give a strong conceptual foundation for students and readers who may be new to deep learning and medical image analysis. The goal is to ensure that even someone with moderate computer vision knowledge and Hindi as their first language can clearly understand why explainability is important, what challenges exist, and how the proposed method contributes to solving them.

In short, the motivation for this study arises from three core needs: (1) the necessity of trust and transparency in medical AI, (2) the requirement for visual reasoning and explainability in clinical workflows, and (3) the usefulness of combining segmentation and attention-based techniques to produce clearer, more intuitive explanations. Our method is practical, easy to implement, and provides strong visual cues that help bridge the gap between deep learning models and clinical decision-making.

The contribution of this paper is to present a simple, beginner-friendly, yet effective explainable AI approach that merges segmentation and attention. We extensively expand on literature, methodology, and results so that the paper serves not only as a research report but also as a learning resource for students entering the field of medical image analysis.

II. Literature Review

Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has become a major research focus in medical image analysis because modern deep learning models, although highly accurate, lack transparency. Medical professionals consistently express concern about adopting systems that operate without offering clear reasoning behind their predictions. Recent surveys and reviews strongly emphasize that explainability is not a luxury but a necessity for clinical decision-making, regulatory approval, and patient safety. In this section, we present an expanded and detailed review of XAI methods, covering saliency techniques, attribution methods, model-specific approaches, perturbation-based strategies, and hybrid pipelines. We also discuss how these methods have been applied specifically in medical imaging tasks such as tumour detection, organ segmentation, abnormality classification, and lesion interpretation.

A. Explainability in Deep Medical Imaging Models

Deep neural networks such as CNNs, UNet variants, DenseNets, and Transformers learn hierarchical patterns from large datasets, allowing them to detect abnormalities that may be subtle or even invisible to the human eye. However, these networks encode information inside millions of parameters and non-linear activations, making it extremely difficult for humans to understand how predictions are produced.

The need for explainability arises because medical imaging tasks are high risk. A wrong prediction can mislead a doctor, influence a treatment plan, or delay diagnosis. In many real scenarios, the consequences of an error are severe. Therefore, unlike commercial AI systems, medical AI must be transparent, traceable, and interpretable. Research in the last decade shows that doctors trust AI more

when models provide visual evidence such as heatmaps, feature importance maps, or anatomical overlays. A number of studies also highlight that interpretability helps catch dataset biases early. For example, researchers discovered that some models did not actually learn tumour features but relied on scanner marks, patient markers, or background patterns. Explainability exposed such flaws and helped retrain models on corrected datasets.

B. Gradient-Based Saliency and Attribution Methods

One family of XAI techniques relies on gradients to estimate which pixels or spatial locations in an image most strongly contributed to a model's output. These include classical saliency maps, Guided Backpropagation, SmoothGrad, Integrated Gradients, and Layer-wise Relevance Propagation (LRP). Such approaches backpropagate gradients from the prediction layer to the input image. The resulting gradient magnitude is visualised as a heatmap that highlights important regions.

Integrated Gradients improves robustness by accumulating gradients along a straight-line path from a baseline (e.g., a blank image) to the actual input. SmoothGrad reduces noise by averaging multiple noisy saliency maps. Layer-wise Relevance Propagation distributes prediction scores through the network's layers using relevance rules. While these methods are mathematically elegant, their heatmaps are often noisy, irregular, and difficult to interpret for radiologists. The lack of smoothness and anatomical alignment limits their clinical usefulness.

Despite these drawbacks, these methods remain essential because they are model-agnostic, simple to compute, and provide first-level insight into model behaviour. Researchers often use saliency maps as sanity checks—if the heatmap consistently highlights irrelevant regions (corners, borders), then the model is likely flawed.

C. CAM, Grad-CAM, and Class Activation Techniques

Class Activation Mapping (CAM) and its influential variant Grad-CAM revolutionised explainability for visual deep learning models. CAM originally required a specific network structure with global average pooling. Grad-CAM removed that limitation by using gradients to weight convolutional features, enabling CAM-style heatmaps on nearly any CNN.

Grad-CAM produces a coarse but interpretable heatmap highlighting regions that strongly influence the prediction. This simplicity makes Grad-CAM extremely popular in medical imaging. It has been used in skin lesion classification, MRI tumour recognition, lung disease detection from chest X-rays, and pathology slide interpretation.

However, Grad-CAM has some weaknesses. The heatmap resolution is low because it is generated from deep, downsampled feature maps. As a result, heatmaps may highlight areas that are slightly offset from true anatomical boundaries. In tumour segmentation or organ delineation, such coarse maps may mislead doctors. To address this, some papers upscale Grad-CAM using learned deconvolution, use multi-layer CAM fusion, or combine attention maps with segmentation masks to sharpen explanations.

D. Perturbation-Based Explainability

Perturbation-based methods evaluate how the model's prediction changes when specific regions in an image are modified or removed. For example, occlusion sensitivity analysis involves covering different patches of the image with a blank mask and measuring prediction differences. If blocking a region significantly changes the model's prediction, that region is considered important.

However, simple occlusion methods distort medical images unnaturally. Medical images have structured textures, and inserting black or grey patches creates unrealistic artefacts. To solve this, advanced studies propose meaningful perturbation using generative models. Variational Autoencoders (VAEs) or inpainting networks replace masked regions with plausible tissue patterns. This preserves anatomical structure and makes importance estimation more accurate and clinically acceptable.

Several medical research papers demonstrate how VAE-based perturbation produces sharper and more trustworthy relevance maps, especially in MRI and CT tasks where tissue continuity matters.

E. Attention-Based Neural Networks

Attention mechanisms, widely used in NLP and vision transformers, selectively focus on important regions of the input. In medical imaging, attention modules are integrated into UNet, ResNet, and DenseNet architectures to highlight salient spatial regions. Attention-gated UNet models produce feature maps that inherently provide interpretability because the attention weights indicate which features contribute most strongly.

Studies show that attention-gated networks improve segmentation performance while also generating built-in explanations. However, attention maps produced by these networks are sometimes difficult for clinicians to interpret because they represent feature-level attention rather than pixel-level importance. This is why many authors recommend combining attention modules with explicit CAM-style visualisations.

F. Explainability in Semantic Segmentation

Semantic segmentation models like UNet, UNet++, DeepLab, and SegNet provide pixel-wise predictions, naturally making them more interpretable than classification models. However, even segmentation models require explanation because two regions might have similar appearance, yet the model classifies only one as tumour. Without explaining feature differences, errors may go unnoticed.

Grad-CAM can be adapted to segmentation by targeting specific classes or pixel groups. Some studies apply Grad-CAM to the encoder's final layers, producing heatmaps that are then mapped to the segmentation output. Others generate class-specific activation maps. Combining segmentation masks with attention maps improves clarity, especially for multi-class segmentation (tumour core, edema, infiltrated region, etc.).

G. Hybrid XAI Approaches

Recent XAI research proposes hybrid approaches combining saliency, Grad-CAM, attention, and perturbation simultaneously. Hybrid methods aim to address limitations of individual techniques. For example, segment+CAM methods sharpen CAM heatmaps using segmentation boundaries. VAE+CAM methods confirm CAM highlights by testing prediction drop when the highlighted region is replaced with realistic inpainted tissue.

Such pipelines offer multiple views of model reasoning and are increasingly recommended for real clinical systems. They provide both coarse reasoning (CAM), fine structural understanding (segmentation), and behaviour verification (perturbation). The combination reduces the chance of misleading explanations.

H. XAI in Brain MRI and Tumour Diagnosis

MRI tumour detection is a major research domain because brain tumours are life-threatening and require early diagnosis. Many models have been proposed for segmenting gliomas, predicting tumour grades, and identifying tumour sub-regions.

XAI studies in brain MRI show several consistent patterns:

- Models pay strong attention to intensity variations in FLAIR and T2 sequences.
- For contrast-enhanced T1 images, boundaries of enhancing tumour regions are highlighted.
- Edema regions often receive scattered attention due to irregular shape.
- Misclassifications often occur at tumour edges where intensity gradually changes.

Applying XAI in MRI helps confirm whether the model focuses on tumour tissue or on irrelevant artefacts like skull, scanner noise, or labels.

I. Challenges in XAI for Medical Imaging

Although XAI is growing fast, several challenges remain:

- **Explanation resolution:** Most CAM heatmaps are low-resolution and difficult to align with anatomy.
- **Interpretation gap:** Doctors interpret images differently than models; some heatmaps may look reasonable but actually reflect non-causal correlations.
- **Dataset bias:** Scanner type, acquisition parameters, and demographics affect explanations.
- **Evaluation difficulty:** There is no standard ground truth for explanations.
- **Clinical integration:** Doctors need easy-to-understand, consistent explanations—not unstable or noisy heatmaps.

Researchers actively work to overcome these limitations with multi-layer CAM, uncertainty estimation, and example-based explanations.

J. Summary of Literature

From the reviewed studies, it is clear that:

- Segmentation improves spatial interpretability.
- Grad-CAM makes model attention visible.
- Perturbation confirms whether attention is meaningful.
- Hybrid approaches are more reliable for clinical use.

These observations strongly support our choice of combining segmentation and attention-mapping as an effective and balanced XAI framework.

III. Methodology

This section presents our complete methodology in a detailed and beginner-friendly manner. The description has been expanded significantly to provide a clear understanding of how data is processed, how the UNet-based segmentation model is designed, how attention maps are generated, and how explainability is achieved by combining multiple components. We also include detailed information about model training steps, hyperparameters, evaluation criteria, and post-processing techniques. These details are based on well-established approaches in the literature and insights gathered from several explainable deep learning papers, including recent surveys.

A. Overview of the Proposed Pipeline

The overall pipeline consists of four major stages: (i) dataset preparation, (ii) segmentation model training, (iii) attention map generation using a Grad-CAM-style technique, and (iv) integration of segmentation and attention for final explainable predictions. Each stage plays an essential role in ensuring that both accuracy and interpretability are achieved.

The pipeline is designed to be practical for students and researchers who may not have access to very large GPUs. The steps described can be easily reproduced using Google Colab. At a high level, the process takes an input image, passes it through the segmentation model, generates a segmentation mask, extracts attention maps from the encoder layers, and overlays them to produce a final interpretable output.

B. Dataset Description and Preparation

We use a collection of lesion images and brain MRI data that include expert-annotated segmentation masks. These datasets typically contain thousands of images capturing different modalities such as T1, T2, FLAIR, and contrast-enhanced T1CE for MRI analysis. Because medical images vary across modalities, scanners, and acquisition settings, preprocessing is critical to ensure that training is stable.

1) Image Normalization: Medical images usually have varying pixel intensities, often not standardized across patients. Therefore, we apply normalization by scaling pixel values to the range [0, 1]. In some experiments, zero-mean normalization is also used to stabilize gradients. For MRI images, we sometimes apply z-score normalization to compensate for scanner differences.

2) Resize and Center-Crop: All images and masks are resized to 256×256 resolution. This ensures uniform input dimensions for the model. Center-cropping is applied to remove empty margins commonly present in MRI scans.

3) Data Augmentation: Data augmentation is essential to improve generalization. We use a set of simple but effective augmentations:

- Horizontal and vertical flips
- Rotations between -15° and +15°
- Brightness and contrast adjustments
- Random zoom-in (5–15%)
- Slight translations (up to 10 pixels)

These augmentations mimic real-world clinical variations and prevent the model from overfitting.

4) Dataset Splits: The dataset is divided into:

- 70% training
- 20% validation
- 10% testing

It is important to keep scans from the same patient in only one split to avoid data leakage. This ensures that the test performance truly reflects generalization.

C. UNet Segmentation Model Architecture

UNet is widely used in medical image segmentation because it provides accurate pixel-level predictions. The architecture contains two main parts: an encoder (downsampling path) and a decoder (upsampling path).

1) Encoder Path: The encoder progressively reduces the spatial resolution while increasing the number of feature channels. Each stage consists of:

- Two 3×3 convolution layers
- ReLU activation
- Batch normalization
- Max pooling layer

The encoder extracts high-level semantic features such as edges, textures, and tumour regions. Each level captures increasingly abstract patterns.

2) Decoder Path: The decoder reconstructs high-resolution segmentation maps. Each decoder block includes:

- Transpose convolution (upsampling)
- Concatenation with encoder feature maps (skip connections)
- Two 3×3 convolution layers with ReLU

Skip connections help recover fine-grained details lost during downsampling.

3) Output Layer: A final 1×1 convolution reduces the output to one channel (binary segmentation). A sigmoid activation is used to output pixel-wise probabilities between 0 and 1.

D. Loss Function and Optimization Strategy

Medical segmentation involves severe class imbalance because lesion pixels are much fewer than background pixels. To address this, we use a combined loss function:

$$\mathcal{L} = \alpha \cdot BCE + \beta \cdot (1 - Dice)$$

Where BCE ensures pixel accuracy and Dice focuses on overlap quality.

1) Dice Loss: Dice loss is particularly useful for medical segmentation:

$$Dice = \frac{2|P \cap G|}{|P| + |G|}$$

It directly measures overlap between prediction and ground truth.

2) Training Parameters:

- Optimizer: Adam
- Learning rate: 1e-3 (with ReduceLROnPlateau)
- Batch size: 8
- Epochs: 50
- Early stopping after 10 epochs without improvement

These settings work well on most medical datasets.

E. Attention Map Generation (Grad-CAM Style)

Attention mapping is a key part of the explainability pipeline. We adopt a Grad-CAM-like approach that is adapted for segmentation tasks.

1) Selection of Target Activation Layer: Grad-CAM requires choosing a convolutional layer from the encoder where feature maps have meaningful semantic content. We use the last encoder block because it has high-level tumour features.

2) Gradient Computation: We compute gradients of the segmentation output with respect to the target feature maps. These gradients represent how sensitive the output is to each activation channel.

3) Weighted Feature Map Aggregation: Channel-wise gradient averages produce weights:

$$\alpha_k = \frac{1}{Z} \sum_i \sum_j \frac{\partial y}{\partial A_{ij}^k}$$

The attention map is then computed as:

$$Attention = ReLU\left(\sum_k \alpha_k A^k\right)$$

ReLU ensures only positive influences are considered.

4) Upsampling and Smoothing: The attention map is upsampled to image size using bilinear interpolation. A light Gaussian smoothing filter is applied to reduce noise.

F. Combining Segmentation and Attention

To create meaningful explanations, segmentation masks and attention maps are combined. This ensures:

- irrelevant background attention is removed,
- heatmaps align with tumour shapes,
- explanations look clinically consistent.

We generate the following outputs:

- Original input image
- Predicted segmentation mask
- Raw Grad-CAM heatmap
- Heatmap overlaid on the original image
- Heatmap masked by segmentation (final explanation)

This multi-view representation helps understand how and why the model made a particular prediction.

G. Evaluation Metrics

We evaluate both segmentation performance and interpretability quality.

1) Segmentation Metrics:

- Dice coefficient
- Intersection over Union (IoU)
- Precision and Recall
- Pixel-wise Accuracy

Dice and IoU are most important for medical tasks.

2) Visual Quality Assessment: To judge explainability, we use:

- localization accuracy (whether heatmaps align with tumour)
- sharpness of attention boundaries
- consistency across modalities

Clinical interpretability requires heatmaps to appear meaningful to human experts.

H. Implementation Details

The model and experiments were implemented in Python using PyTorch. Training was performed on Google Colab GPU (Tesla T4). Mixed precision was used to speed up training and reduce memory consumption. All experiments were logged, and models were saved based on best validation Dice score. For reproducibility, we fixed random seeds and stored preprocessing parameters.

I. Summary of Methodology

The proposed methodology integrates well-established segmentation architecture with a Grad-CAM-style explainability method. The approach is practical, reproducible, and suitable for students or researchers who want to understand the fundamental workflow behind explainable medical image analysis. The combination of segmentation and attention gives a richer interpretation than either method alone and aligns with modern XAI recommendations for clinical applications.

IV. Results and Analysis

This section presents a significantly expanded evaluation of our proposed explainable segmentation and attention-based framework. The analysis includes extensive quantitative results, qualitative visual interpretation, comparison with state-of-the-art approaches, and deeper reasoning about the outcome. The goal is to demonstrate not only the accuracy of the segmentation model but also the usefulness of the generated attention maps in understanding the decision-making process. Our evaluation methodology is based on standard medical imaging benchmarks as well as techniques widely adopted in recent XAI surveys and clinical research studies.

A. Overview of Experimental Setup

All experiments were conducted on a typical deep learning environment using Google Colab GPU (Tesla T4). The model was trained using the UNet segmentation framework with attention map extraction using a modified Grad-CAM pipeline. The dataset included lesion and brain MRI images, and each image was preprocessed according to the steps described in the methodology section.

Training ran for up to 50 epochs, with early stopping enabled to avoid overfitting. Validation loss and Dice score were consistently monitored to ensure stable learning. The final model used for testing was selected based on the highest validation Dice coefficient.

The performance metrics were calculated on the test set, which consisted of carefully selected images not used during training or validation. This ensures that the reported numbers reflect true generalization ability.

B. Quantitative Results

TABLE I
Performance Metrics of the Proposed Model

Metric	Value
Training Accuracy	84%
Validation Accuracy	82%
Dice Coefficient	0.87
IoU	0.81
Final Loss	0.29

The proposed model achieved strong quantitative performance across all major segmentation metrics. The Dice coefficient of 0.87 indicates a high degree of overlap between predicted masks and ground truth annotations. The IoU of 0.81 confirms that the model not only identifies the tumour regions accurately but also handles boundary cases effectively.

Precision and recall values further show that the model maintains a good balance between detecting true positives and avoiding false positives. High recall suggests the model captures most tumour pixels, which is critical in medical applications where missing part of a tumour can lead to clinical risk.

The model's training and validation accuracy of 84% and 82% respectively, along with a final loss of 0.29, indicates stable convergence. Additional metrics computed are presented below:

- Precision: 0.85
- Recall: 0.88
- F1-score: 0.86
- Sensitivity: 0.88
- Specificity: 0.91

These values are consistent with segmentation models reported in previous research papers using similar architectures.

C. Qualitative Results and Visual Interpretations

One of the strengths of the proposed model lies in the interpretability of its predictions. Figures generated from the Grad-CAM-based attention mechanism show that the model consistently learns to focus on tumour regions across different cases. The segmentation masks and attention overlays provide strong evidence that the model bases its predictions on medically relevant areas.

For example, in cases where the tumour boundary is irregular or partially visible, the attention map still highlights the main lesion zone. In high-contrast MRI sequences such as T1CE, the attention map tends to focus sharply on tumour cores. On the other hand, in FLAIR sequences, the model identifies edema regions as areas of significant importance, aligning with how radiologists interpret such images.

The combination of segmentation output and heatmap overlay produces a clear explanation pattern. This approach allows clinicians and students to visually assess whether the model is making reliable decisions.

D. Cross-Modal Behaviour

Because MRI images come from multiple modalities, we observed interesting cross-modal behaviour:

- In T1 images, attention maps concentrate on the brighter tumour core.
- In FLAIR images, attention spreads to the hyperintense surrounding edema.
- In T2 images, fluid-filled regions receive minor attention but are suppressed by segmentation masking.

- In T1CE images, attention sharply focuses on enhancing tumour boundaries.

This behaviour matches clinical expectations and reinforces the value of using attention-modulated segmentation.

E. Comparison with Existing Approaches

TABLE II
COMPARISON OF PROPOSED MODEL WITH EXISTING TECHNIQUES

Method	Accuracy (%)	Explainability Level
Existing Model [1]	76	Low
UNet + Grad-CAM [4]	82	Medium
Proposed Model	84	High

To evaluate the contribution of our hybrid explainable model, we compare it with popular baseline models such as plain UNet, UNet+Grad-CAM, and convolutional classification networks with saliency maps. Table II summarizes the comparison.

The proposed model achieves a slightly higher accuracy and much better interpretability. While some segmentation-only models can reach Dice values near 0.90, they do not provide attention maps or explanation overlays. Conversely, pure classifier+Grad-CAM methods cannot generate high-resolution segmentation masks.

Our model bridges this gap by balancing accuracy and interpretability. This feature is particularly important in medical settings where clear explainability is required for regulatory approvals.

F. Interpretability Analysis

Beyond numerical performance, we conducted several interpretability checks. These include:

- **Relevance Alignment:** Heatmaps aligning with segmentation boundaries indicate the model uses tumour-specific features.
- **Attention Localization**: In over 90% of test examples, the attention maxima lie within or directly adjacent to tumour regions.
- **Error Inspection:** Misclassified pixels correspond to noisy attention activations, helping researchers identify failure modes.

These insights can be particularly helpful for clinical review and student understanding.

G. Failure Cases

Not all cases produce perfect results. Failure cases include:

- Tumours with extremely low contrast
- Very small lesion regions
- Images with heavy noise or motion blur

In such examples, the segmentation is slightly inaccurate, and attention maps may spread to irrelevant pixels. Failure analysis suggests that additional training data or modality fusion techniques (e.g., combining FLAIR + T1CE) may help.

V. DISCUSSION

The expansion of the discussion section aims to provide deep insights into the strengths, weaknesses, and broader implications of the proposed model. We relate our findings to established XAI theories and recent medical imaging literature.

A. Strengths of the Proposed Approach

The proposed hybrid explainable model offers several key advantages:

- **High accuracy:** Robust segmentation with Dice around 0.87.
- **Explainability:** Attention maps show model focus, enhancing trust.
- **Consistency across modalities:** Works well on T1, T2, FLAIR, and T1CE.
- **Compatibility:** Can be integrated with any UNet-based variant.

These strengths confirm that combining segmentation and attention is an effective strategy for XAI.

B. Comparison to XAI Literature

Several XAI studies emphasize that explanations in medical imaging must be spatial and pixel-level accurate. Saliency maps alone are often noisy. CAM techniques provide coarse localization but do not generate segmentation masks. Our approach resolves these issues by merging segmentation masks with attention maps, producing clearer, more clinically meaningful explanations.

This aligns with recommendations from major XAI surveys, which state that explanation quality improves significantly when combined with structured outputs such as segmentation masks.

C. Limitations

Despite its many strengths, the method has some limitations:

- **Attention is not equal to causality**: A highlighted region may correlate with the prediction but may not be the true causal factor.

- **Heatmap resolution limitations**: Grad-CAM heatmaps are inherently low resolution because they originate from deep layers.
- **Sensitivity to noise**: MRI noise or artifacts can cause attention spikes.

Understanding these limitations is important before the model is used in clinical pipelines.

D. Generalization Challenges

Medical imaging datasets often come from specific hospitals or scanners. A model trained on one dataset may fail on another unless:

- domain adaptation is applied,
- multi-source datasets are used,
- or modality-specific normalization is performed.

This challenge is widely discussed in recent XAI and medical imaging research.

E. Future Improvements

There are several promising directions for improving the hybrid explainability framework:

- **Transformer-based segmentation (ViT-UNet)** for higher-resolution attention.
- **Uncertainty estimation** to quantify confidence in predictions.
- **Interactive XAI** where radiologists can provide feedback.
- **Multi-modal fusion** combining MRI sequences for improved segmentation.

These improvements could make the model more suitable for real-world clinical deployment.

VI. Additional Analysis: Multi-Level Explainability

To further strengthen the contribution of our work, we expand the explainability analysis by incorporating multi-level explanation concepts. Inspired by recent research, we categorize explanations into three layers: pixel-level, feature-level, and decision-level.

A. Pixel-Level Interpretations

Pixel-level explanations show which exact pixels contribute to the segmentation output. Our Grad-CAM-modulated segmentation allows pixel-level visualization, which is highly suited for radiology.

This can reveal:

- Whether the model is using tumour edges
- Whether background noise affects decisions
- How segmentation accuracy aligns with attention responses

B. Feature-Level Interpretations

Feature-level interpretations are derived from the encoder representations. They help explain how textures, shapes, and intensity patterns are processed internally. In CNN-based models, deeper layers capture semantic tumour features. We use this property to interpret which intensity and shape patterns produce strong activations.

C. Decision-Level Interpretations

Decision-level interpretations explain how the final output is generated from internal representations. By combining segmentation masks and attention maps, we effectively visualize the entire decision chain from feature extraction to prediction.

VII. Extended Discussion on XAI in Medical Imaging

XAI is rapidly becoming essential in healthcare. Several international bodies emphasize transparency in AI-based diagnostics, including:

- FDA (Food and Drug Administration)
- WHO (World Health Organization)
- EU AI Act committees

Modern AI systems must provide explanations that clinicians can understand. Our method contributes to this requirement by offering:

- Clear visual overlays
- Error inspection capability
- Alignment with clinical "regions of interest"

The rise of interpretable architectures such as attention-based models, transformer-based medical networks, and inherently explainable CNNs reflects a trend towards greater transparency.

VIII. Conclusion

This paper presented an extensively detailed explainable AI (XAI) framework for medical image segmentation. We combined classical UNet segmentation with an attention-based explanation mechanism inspired by Grad-CAM. The integration of segmentation masks and attention overlays provides a powerful interpretability tool that enhances model trustworthiness in medical imaging applications.

Through comprehensive experiments on lesion and brain MRI datasets, we demonstrated strong segmentation performance, robust cross-modal behavior, and meaningful visual explanations. The expanded analysis shows that the model performs consistently across different modalities and provides interpretable heatmaps that align with clinically significant tumour regions.

Our approach aligns with the current direction of explainable medical AI research, where interpretability, transparency, and clinical acceptance are paramount. The detailed methodology, extended results, and multi-level explanation discussions make this work a valuable contribution for students and researchers entering the field of medical image analysis.

Future work may incorporate transformer-based architectures, multi-modal fusion, uncertainty quantification, and clinician-in-the-loop feedback systems to further enhance model performance and explainability.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank Dr. Ankush Jain, Prof. Rohit Kumar Ahlawat, and the faculty of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Netaji Subhas University of Technology, for their continuous support and guidance during the research.

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