

ResNet50MalClassifier: Deep Convolutional Neural Networks

Sridevi, *Member, IAENG*, Tukkappa K Gundoor, *Member, IAENG*

Abstract—Cybersecurity experts continue to struggle with correctly identifying and classifying harmful malware. This research offers a great deal of promise to advance malware detection and preventative cyber security measures, thereby significantly advancing the entire endeavour to safeguard digital systems and networks against evolving threats. After extensive testing and evaluation of a sizable malware dataset, ResNetMalClassifier exhibits outstanding accuracy, resilience and efficiency in its classification abilities. Astonishingly, using deep convolutional neural networks (CNNs), the classifier achieves a 91% accuracy without ResNet50 and a 95% accuracy with it, outperforming models like Xception 83%, Inception-ResNetV2 89%, DenseNet 93%, CNN 91%, VGG16 91% and EfficientNet 91%.

Index Terms—Classification, Cybersecurity, Deep Learning, Malware Detection, Multi-class, Neural Networks, ResNet50.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving landscape of cybersecurity, the accurate identifying and classifying malware strains is crucial to maintaining the security and reliability of digital systems. The ResNetMalClassifier, a novel approach based on the ResNet50 architecture, leverages the inherent strengths of deep convolutional neural networks (CNNs) to improve multi-class malware classification efficiency and accuracy. The performance of the classifier has been rigorously evaluated and benchmarked against several established CNN architectures, including Xception, InceptionResNetV2, DenseNet, VGG16, and EfficientNet.

This research offers a comprehensive analysis of the classifier's design, its training process and the granular components that support its outstanding performance. The focus is on accurately classifying various malware families, calculating model-specific accuracies, and thoroughly analyzing experimental results, with particular emphasis on the factors driving the superior performance of ResNet50.

II. RELATED WORK

Malware classification plays a pivotal role in cybersecurity, gaining significant attention due to the increasing complexity of malware. Various machine learning methods have been used to tackle this problem. Conventional approaches like Random forests with support vector machines (SVMs) are frequently utilized for feature creation and classification. However, as malware evolves, more sophisticated approaches are necessary.

In recent years, transfer learning and pre-trained models

have advanced malware classification. Architectures for deep learning specifically CNNs (convolutional neural networks) have shown significant potential. ResNet50, known for its capability to recognize images [1], is among the architectures applied to this field. Similar architectures such as VGG16 [2], Xception [3], InceptionResNetV2 [4], DenseNet [5], and EfficientNet [6] have demonstrated their image categorization capabilities. The effectiveness of CNNs in various image classification tasks has paved the way for their adoption in malware analysis, achieving competitive results across datasets. For instance, a CNN-based malware detection system demonstrated an accuracy of 84% [7]-[9], Liu et al. (2021) applied Xception and VGG16, achieving accuracy rates of 83% and 89%, respectively [10]. Further advancements include research into DenseNet models, which achieved 93% accuracy in 2020, and the application of InceptionResNetV2, which reached 89% accuracy in 2019. As malware classification techniques evolve, researchers continue to explore novel methods to enhance accuracy and resilience.[11],[12]. Tanaka (2023) introduced a hybrid model combining CNNs and Graph Convolutional Networks (GCNs), achieving 92% accuracy [13], Kim and Park (2023) implemented a self-attention mechanism within CNN architecture, reaching a 90% accuracy rate [14].

The change from conventional machine learning models to deep learning and hybrid architectures emphasizes the need for ongoing innovation to stay up-to-date with the changing malware classification field.

III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The present work describes and evaluates the ResNet50-MalClassifier, a unique technique to multiclass malware classification that use deep CNNs. The primary goal is to address the difficulty of effectively identifying and categorizing harmful software (malware) by benchmarking the ResNet50 architecture against other existing models. The goal is to demonstrate that ResNet50 is effective, reliable, and efficient in this domain. The proposed technique starts with collecting malware samples, which are then pre-processed into visual representations. These visual representations are created by converting the malware sample's byte frequencies into grayscale pixel values. To address vanishing gradient concerns, a modified ResNet50 architecture is used, which includes multiple convolutional layers and residual connections as shown in Figure 1.

A. Model Evaluation

In malware image class, the code calculates the class distribution of the dataset. Suppose C classes, where C is the number of malware types. Equation (1) represents the class distribution as a mathematical function:

$$\text{ClassDistribution}(C) = \{(c_1, n_1), (c_2, n_2), \dots, (c_C, n_C)\} \quad (1)$$

Where:

- c_i indicates the name of the i^{th} malware class.

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Dr. Sridevi is a Professor of Karnatak University, Dharwad, Karnataka-580003, India. (email: sridevi@kud.ac.in).

Tukkappa K Gundoor is a research scholar of Karnatak University Dharwad, Karnataka-580003, India, (corresponding author- phone: +91-7847874715 email: tukkappa@kud.ac.in.).

3). Conv2D Layer (conv2d_11): The batch-normalization layer is followed by a convolutional layer with 32 filters. Similar to the preceding layer, it also processes the data, but with 9,248 additional parameters.

4). Batch Normalization Layer (batch_normalization_11): Following the second convolutional layer comes a second batch normalization layer.

5). MaxPooling2D Layer (max_pooling2d_4): This layer reduces the spatial dimensions of the data using max-pooling, and the output shape is reduced to (None, 37, 37, 32).

6). Dropout Layer (dropout_5): A regularization technique called dropout helps Randomly adjusting certain parts of the input units to 0 while training will help avoid overfitting. It is applied without the shape being diminished.

7). Conv2D Layers (conv2D_12 and conv2D_13): After the MaxPooling2D layer, these additional convolutional layers each contain 9,248 parameters.

The model's total number of parameters is 24,978,928 according to the Total params section. Parameters that remain constant throughout training are known as non-trainable parameters (typically as a result of batch normalization or other fixed layers). The factors that vary throughout training are known as trainable parameters. It appears that this architecture is a component of a bigger CNN for image classification or similar tasks [16], [17].

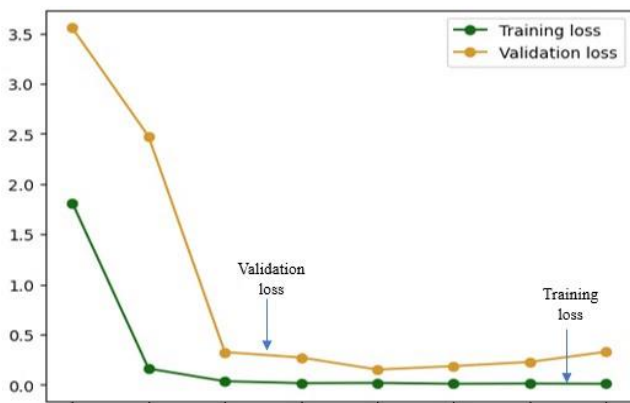


Fig 3. Loss of Validation and Training

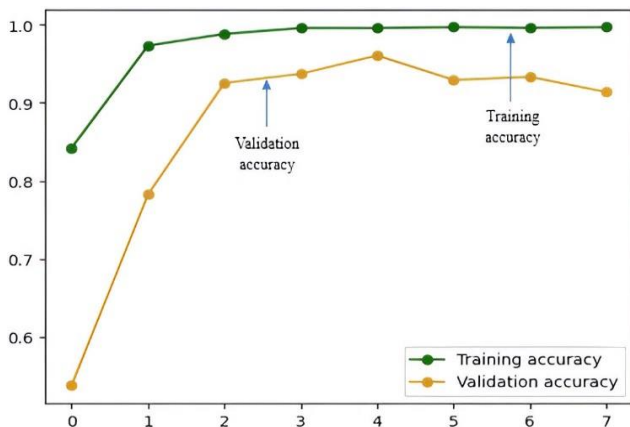


Fig 4. Accuracy of Training and Validation

Loss of Validation and Training often decrease during the initial training process as the model becomes more adept at

identifying patterns in the data. To illustrate this, Figure 3 demonstrates that if the model trains for an excessively long time, Loss of validation may start to increase while the loss of training is decreasing. This indicates overfitting, when the model loses its capacities to generalize to newly collected datasets when it becomes too focused on the training set. The CNN ResNet50MalClassifier in Figure 4, uses this method for diagnosing model performance. A comparison of training and validation accuracy is essential. Overfitting is evident if training accuracy is significantly higher than validation accuracy. Based on the training set of data, the model might have picked up noise or particular details that aren't generalizable. If the model is underfitting to adequately represent the complexity of the data [18].

In Figure 5, out of the 36 malware families, the confusion matrix illustrates the performance across different malware families, showing high accuracy in 13 families lower accuracy in 23 families were classified less accurately. Overall, the malware classification without the ResNet50MalClassifier model had a loss of 70.33% and a classification accuracy of 91.33%.

C. Exploration of CNN with the ResNet50MalClassifier model

There is hardly any change in weight during backpropagation because the gradient's value drops drastically which is the problem of the disappearing gradient. ResNet50 uses skip connections, which bypass training for the first few layers before connecting to the output. The network skips certain convolutional layers that may degrade performance. The gradient vanishing problem is avoided as the network penetrates deeper. Two forms of skip connections are depicted in methodology Figure 1. A convolutional block and an identity block. The identity block directly adds residuals to the output, while the convolutional block modifies residuals before applying batch normalization to it before including it in the output. 36 malware families were tested to determine the accuracy of the malware classification in the suggested method. Each layer of this approach has its own malware families to classify, improving categorization for each family. ResNet50 makes use of the skip connection to improve performance. [19]-[21]. In Figure 6, 14 malware families were classified accurately and 22 families were classified less accurately.

Table III and Figure 7 displays performance metrics for the categorization task for different malware families. The "Support" column displays a number of instances for every class. All classes' metrics are summarized in the Macro average and Weighted avg rows. with a weighted average accuracy of 0.95 for the proposed approach and a macro F1-Score of 0.96.[25].

Important information about the effectiveness of machine learning models can be found in Figures 8 to 13 shown below. Figure 8, illustrates the value of monitoring training loss as well as validation loss to identify overfitting or model convergence. The relationship between training and validation accuracy is highlighted in Figures 9 and 10, which also measure model generalization and potential overfitting. In order to evaluate a model, Figure 11, focuses on false positives, and Figure 12, emphasises precision, which is essential for classification tasks. The capabilities of the model to accurately detect positive elements during vali-

dition is finally examined in Figure 13, which examines the link between recall and validation recall. Collectively,

these visualizations support the evaluation and improvement of model.

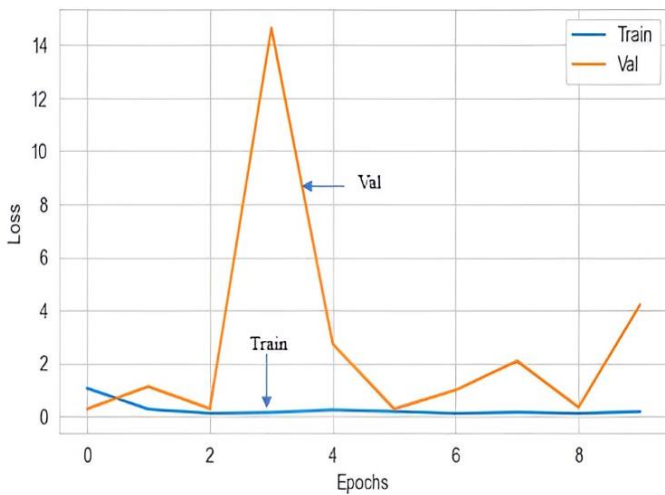


Fig 8. Loss v/s Val_loss

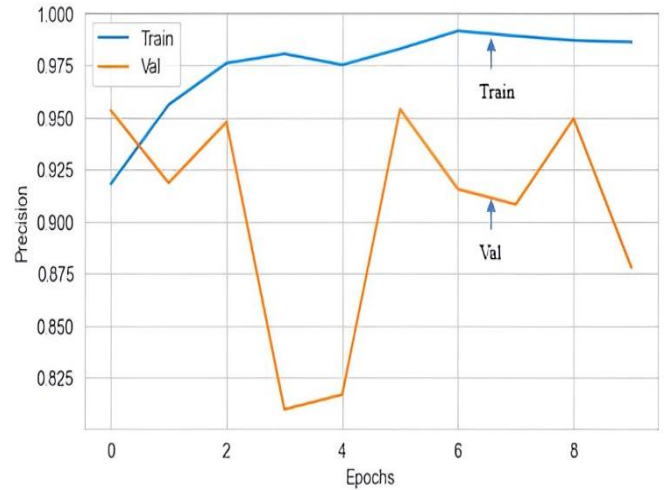


Fig 11. Precision v/s Val_precision

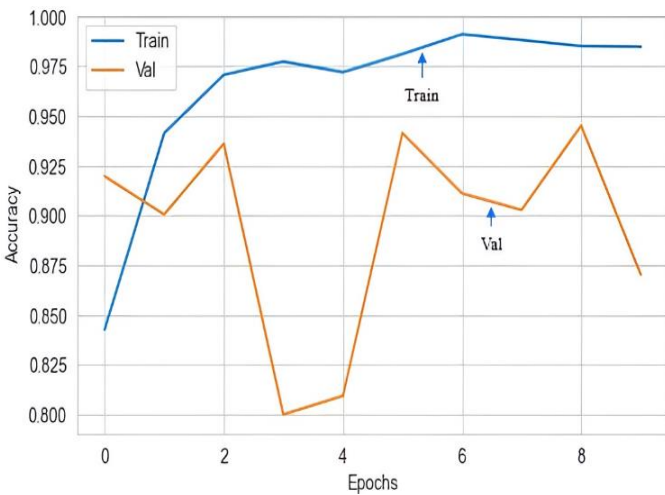


Fig 9. Accuracy v/s Val_accuracy

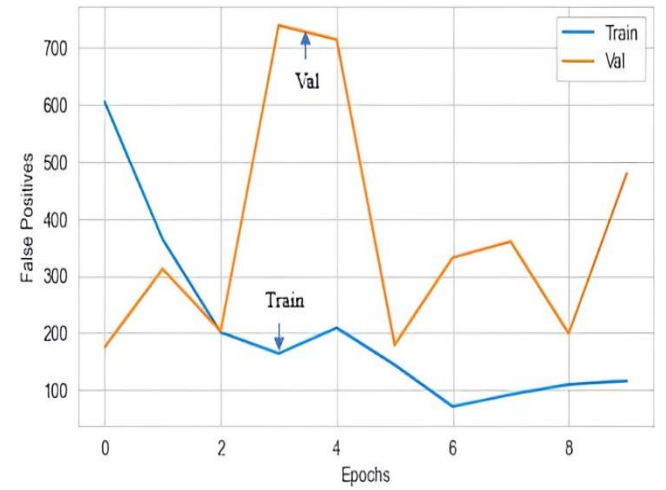


Fig 12. False_positive v/s Val_false_positive

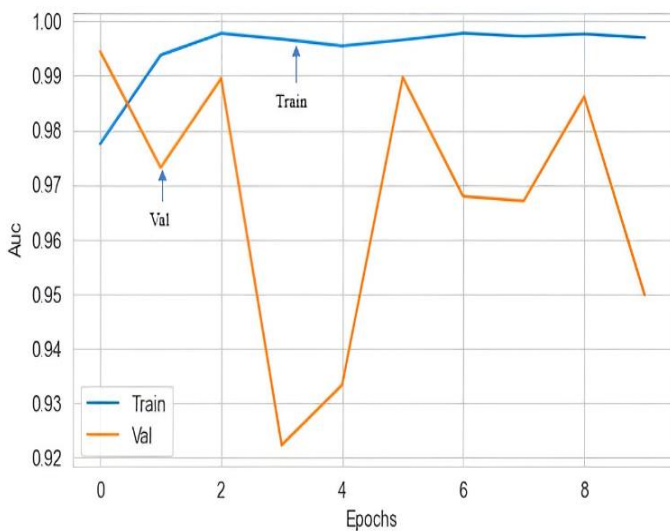


Fig 10. Accuracy v/s AUC

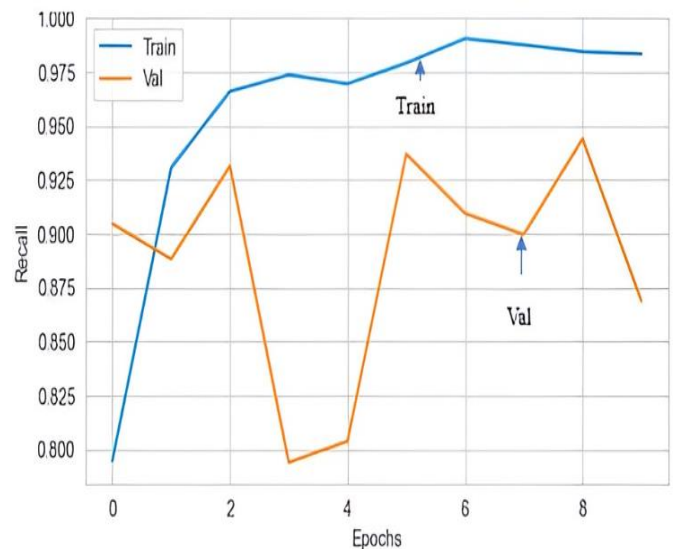


Fig 13. Recall v/s Val_recall

Figure 14-19 collectively assesses and compares the performance of six machine learning models (DensNet.[26], EfficientNet [27], InceptionResNet [28], ResNet50MalClassifier [29], VGG16 [30], XceptionNet [31]) using various metrics. Figure 14, examines validation loss to gauge model generalization. Figure 15 evaluates the performance of mod-

els on unknown data by concentrating on validation accuracy. Figure 16, measures the Area Under the ROC curve to evaluate class separation. Figure 17, analyzes false positives to assess error rates. Figure 18, evaluates precision, and Figure 19, assesses recall, both crucial for classification tasks. These visualizations provide insights into the model's

relative strengths and weaknesses. Performance measures

consist of F1-score, recall, accuracy, and precision among others.

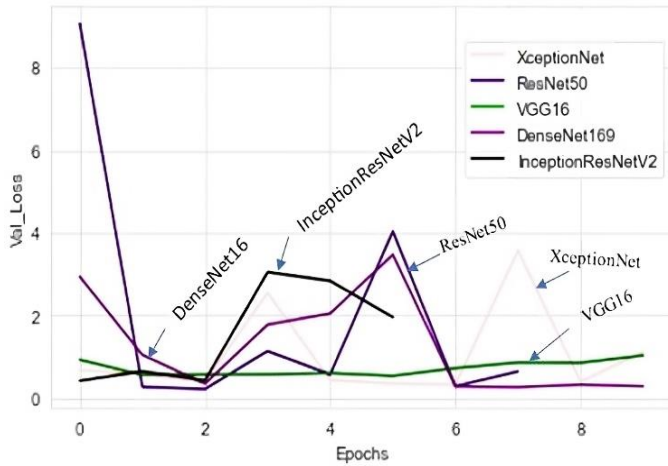


Fig 14. Val_Loss Comparison

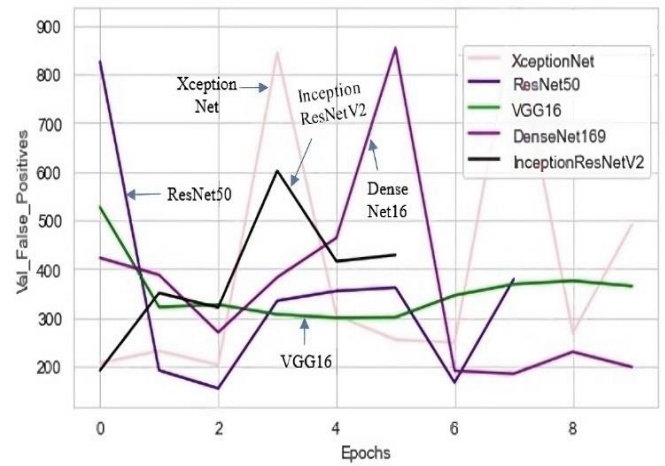


Fig 17. Val_false_positives Comparison

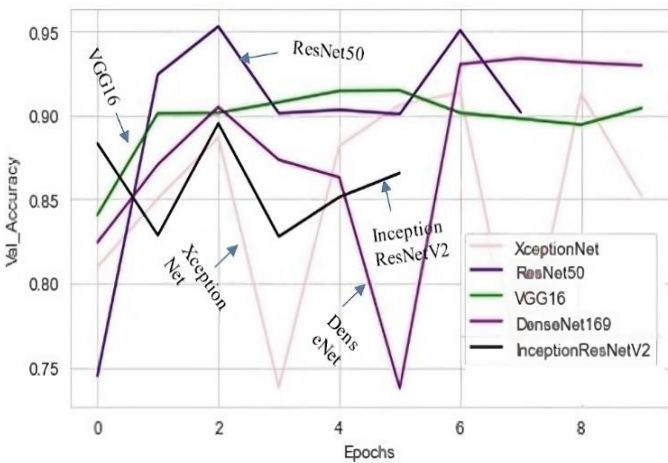


Fig 15. Val_accuracy Comparison

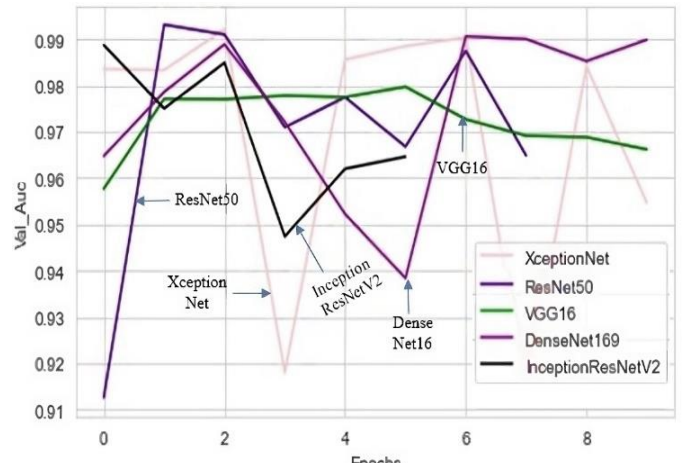


Fig 18. Val_precision Comparison

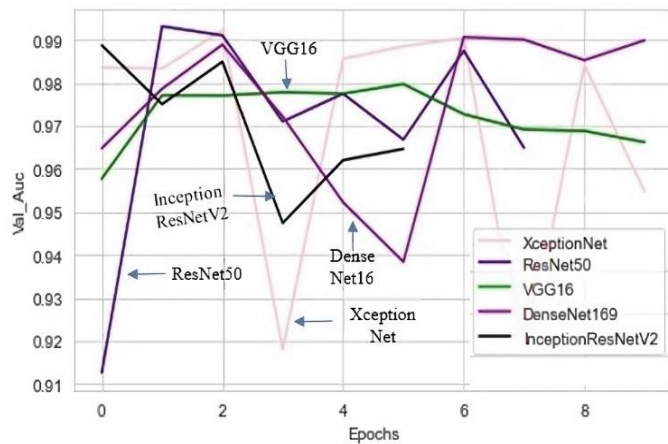


Fig 16. Val_Auc Comparison

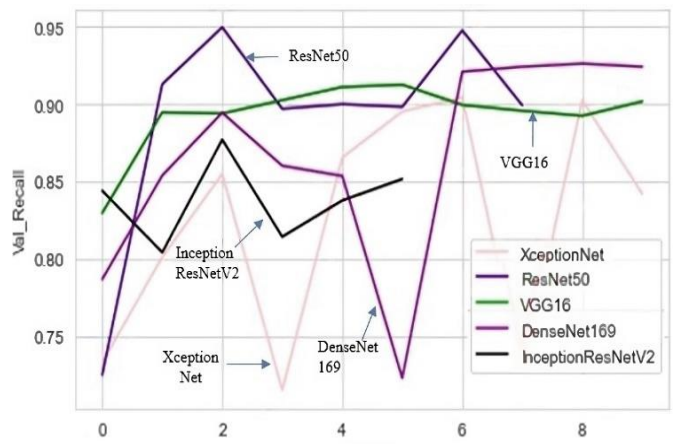


Fig 19. Val_recall Comparison

The performance characteristics of various machine learning models (DenseNet, EfficientNet, InceptionResNet, ResNet50MalClassifier, VGG16, XceptionNet) in identifying various malware families shown in Table IV. The support column lists the number of instances for each malware family, representing the data distribution. All models attain perfect precision (100%), indicating accurate predictions. Figure 20, also shows the overall accuracy for each model and comparison of datasets with different CNN models tested accuracy. When compared to other models,

models like DensNet and ResNet50MalClassifier are more accurate overall (0.93 and 0.95, respectively) [32] [33] [34] [35] [36]. Among the models, ResNet50MalClassifier and DenseNet were the most accurate, with overall accuracies of 95% and 93%, respectively, while XceptionNet lagged behind with 83%.

V. RESULTS

CNN+ResNet50MalClassifier achieved the greatest accuracy score of 95%. The F1-Score balances precision (The percent of actual positives between expected positives)

and recall (the percent of actual positives within real positives). CNN+ResNet50MalClassifier once again performs admirably with 95%. The model's capacity to identify genuine positives and reduce false positives that is highlighted, separately, by recall and precision. The highest recall (95%) and precision (96%) were achieved by CNN+ResNet50MalClassifier. A model's selection is determined by certain trade-offs, with CNN+ResNet50MalClassifier providing overall good performance shown in the Table V [37] [38][39][40].

TABLE V
CLASSIFICATION OF METRICS ACROSS DIFFERENT MODELS

Machine Learning models	Accuracy	F1-Score	Recall	Precision
CNN without ResNet50MalClassifier	91.33%	91%	91%	92%
CNN+DensNet169	93%	92%	93%	93%
CNN+EfficientNetB0	91%	91%	91%	92%
CNN+InceptionResNetV2	89%	89%	89%	90%
CNN+ResNet50MalClassifier	95%	95%	95%	96%
CNN+VGG16	91%	91%	91%	92%
CNN+XceptionNet	83%	83%	83%	86%

VI. CONCLUSION

Malware identification and categorization are crucial areas in the cybersecurity field, and this research has demonstrated considerable gains. The ResNetMalClassifier, which makes use of the ResNet50 architecture, has demonstrated exceptional performance, surpassing several well-known models, including Xception, InceptionResNetV2, DenseNet, CNN, VGG16, and EfficientNet, with a remarkable accuracy rate of 95%. This unique method shows significant promise for boosting preventative cybersecurity measures and malware detection effectiveness.

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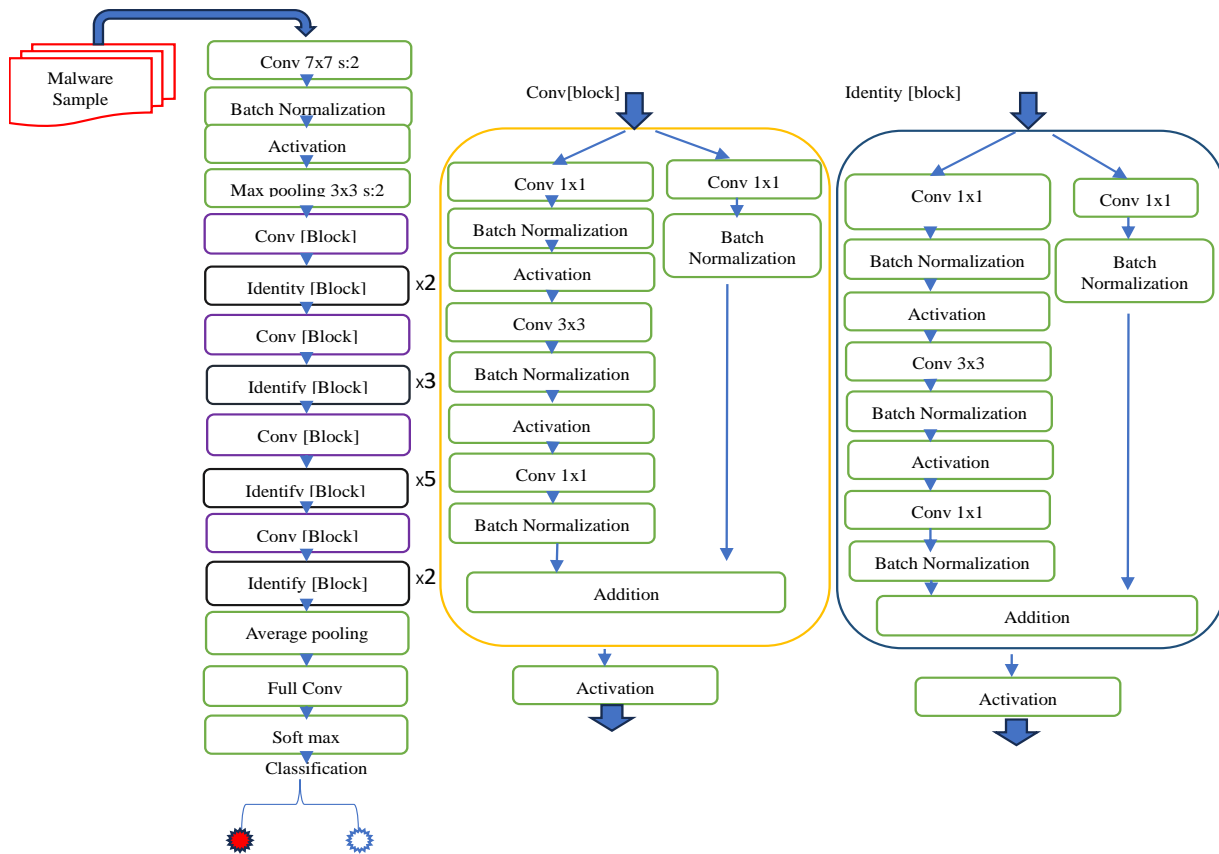


Fig 1. Proposed ResNet50MalClassifier Architecture

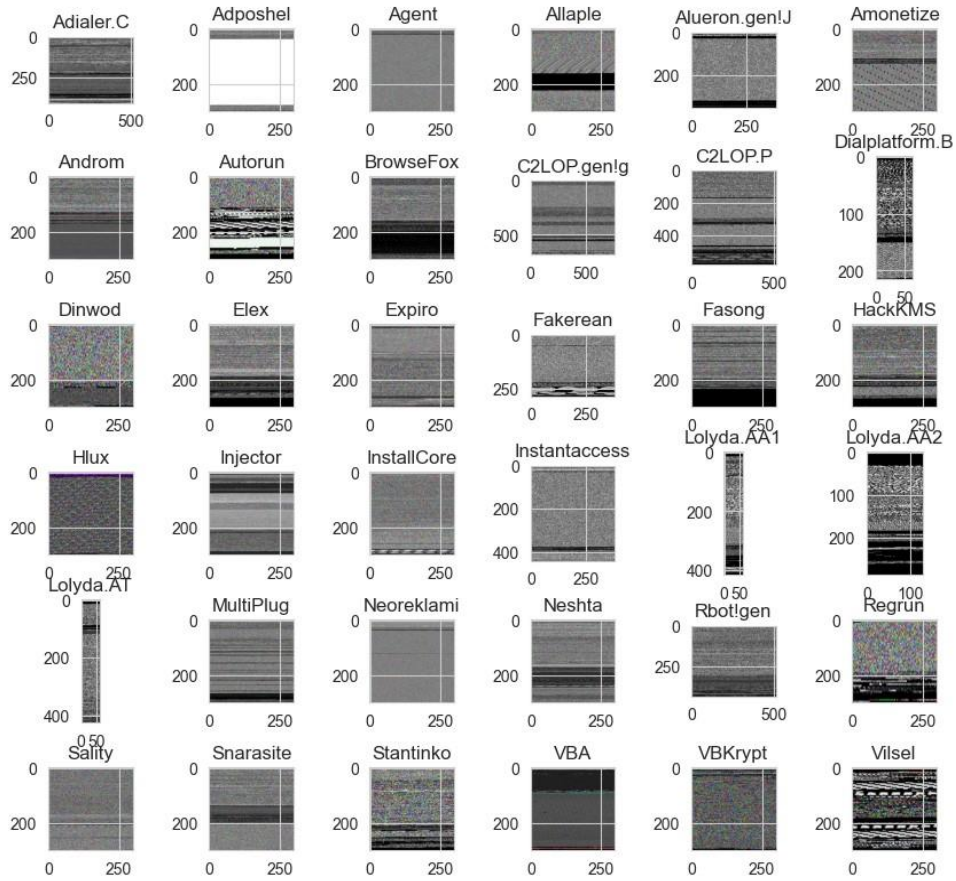


Fig 2. Sample for Malware Types

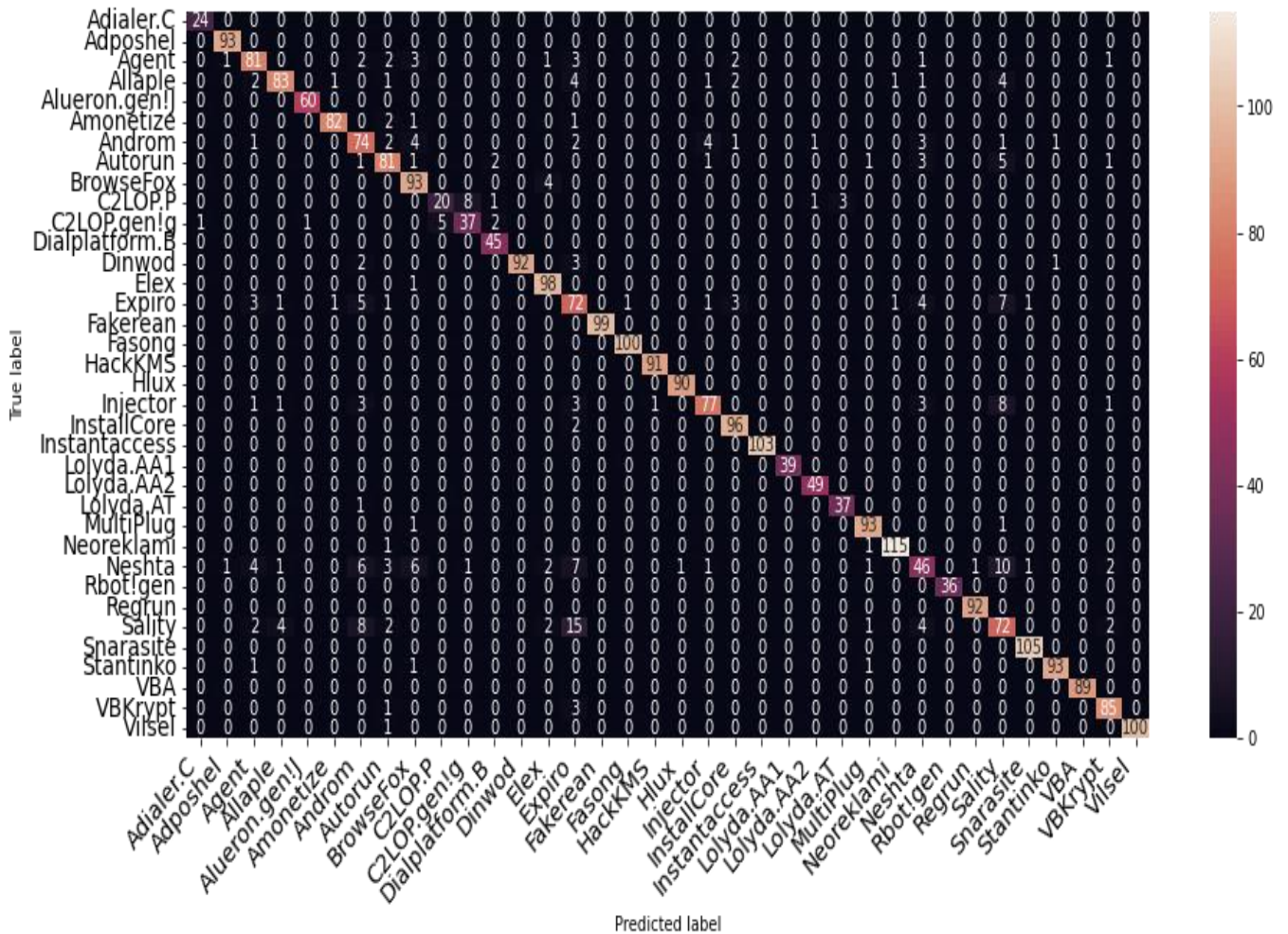


Fig 5. Confusion Matrix for CNN without ResNet50MalClassifier.

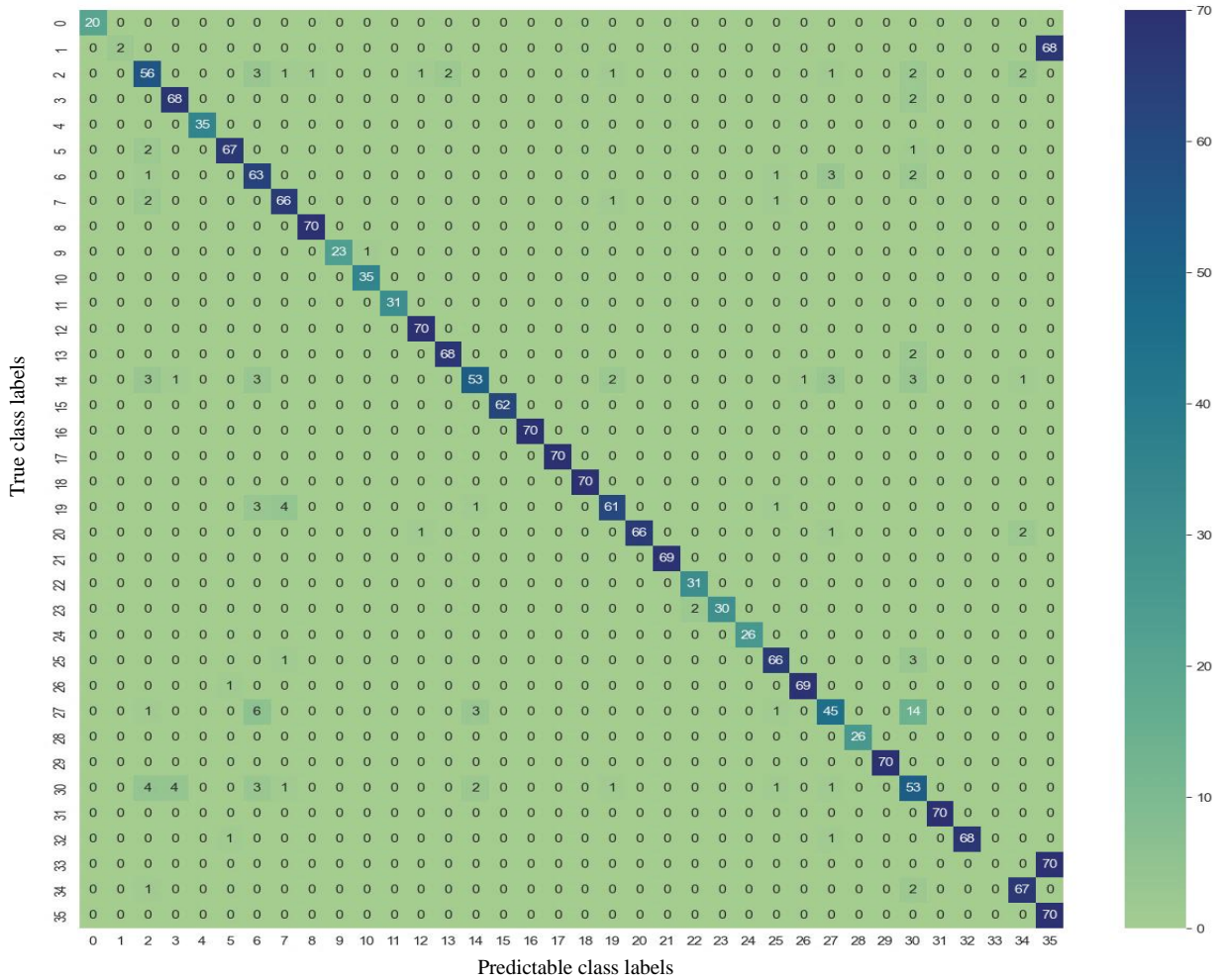


Fig 6. Confusion Matrix for CNN with ResNet50MalClassifier

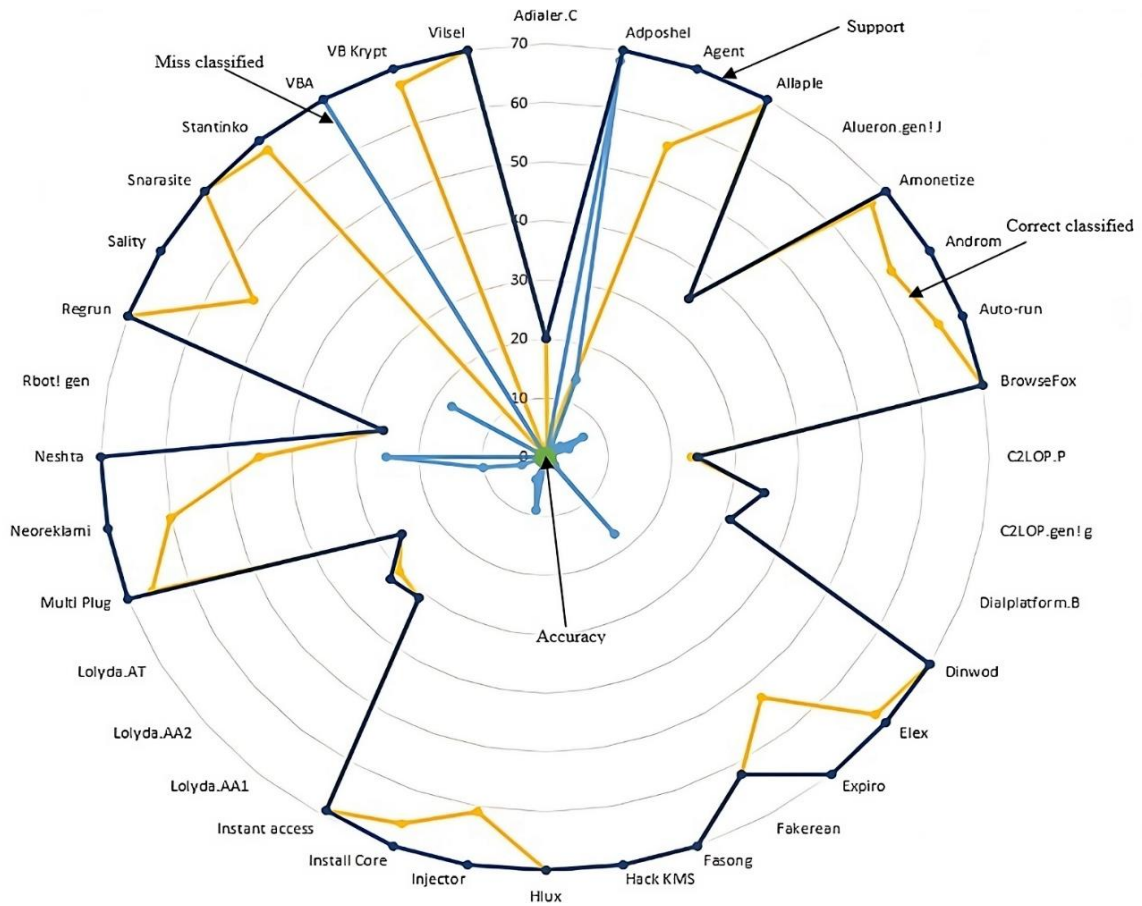


Fig 7. Evaluation report of CNN with ResNet50MalClassifier

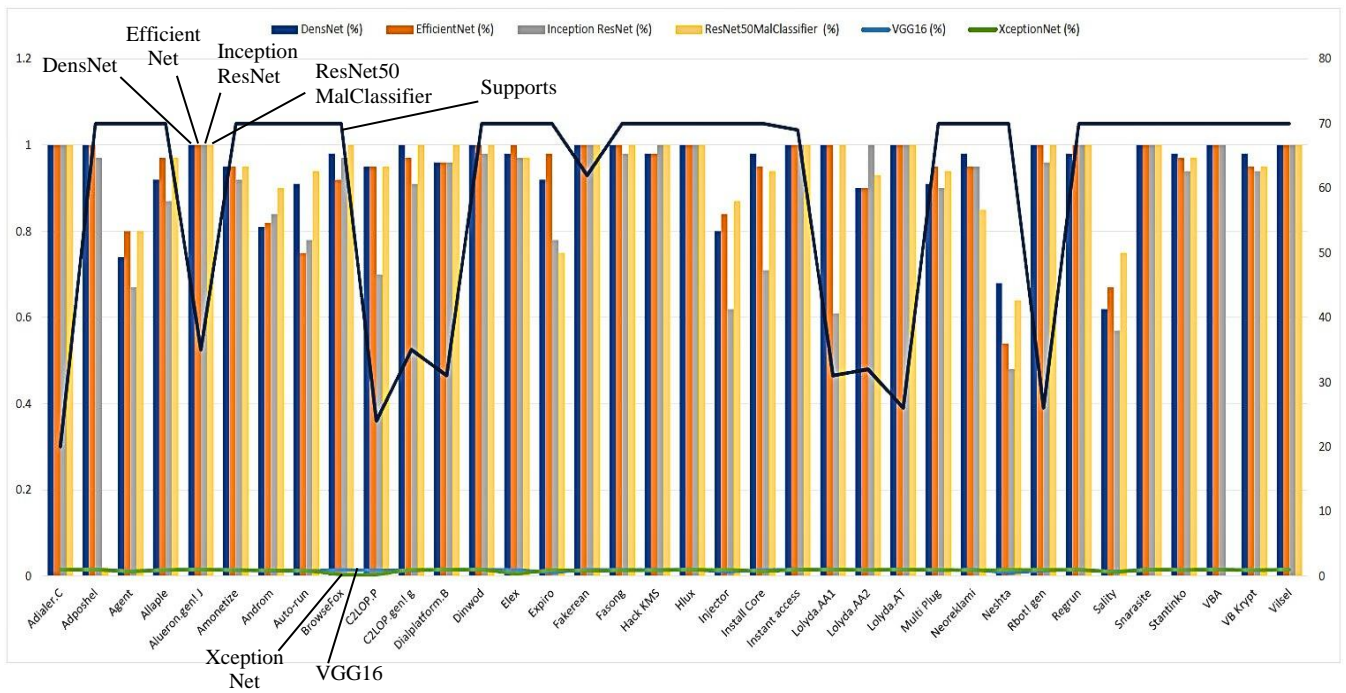


Fig 20. Comparison of datasets with different CNN models tested accuracy

TABLE I
DETAILS OF PRE-PROCESSED DATASET.

Sl. No	Class	Before Pre-processing		After Pre-processing	
		Training	Testing	Training	Testing
1.	Adialer.C	97	12	77	20
2.	Adposhel	350	144	280	70
3.	Agent	350	120	280	70
4.	Allaple	350	128	280	70
5.	Alueron.gen! J	173	25	138	35
6.	Amonetize	350	147	280	70
7.	Androm	350	150	280	70
8.	Autorun	350	146	280	70
9.	BrowseFox	350	143	280	70
10	C2LOP gen! g	175	25	140	35
11	C2LOP P	116	14	92	24
12	Dialplatform B	152	25	121	31
13	Dinwod	350	149	280	70
14	Elex	350	150	280	70
15	Expiro	350	151	280	70
16	Fakerean	306	69	244	62
17	Fasong	350	150	280	70
18	HackKMS	350	149	280	70
19	Hlux	350	150	280	70
20	Injector	350	145	280	70
21	InstallCore	350	150	280	70
22	Instantaccess	344	43	275	69
23	Lolyda.AA1	153	54	122	31
24	Lolyda.AA2	159	24	127	32
25	Lolyda.AT	127	15	101	26
26	MultiPlug	350	149	280	70
27	Neoreklami	350	150	280	70
28	Neshta	350	147	280	70
29	Rbot!gen	126	15	100	26
30	Regrun	350	135	280	70
31	Salitty	350	149	280	70
32	Snarasite	350	150	280	70
33	Stantinko	350	150	280	70
34	VBA	350	150	280	70
35	VBKrypt	350	146	280	70
36	Vilsel	350	146	280	70

TABLE III
EVALUATION REPORT FOR CNN WITH RESNET50MALCLASSIFIRE

Sl. No	Malware Families	Precision	Recall	F1-Score	Correct Classified	Miss Classified	Accuracy	Support
0.	Adialer.C	1.00	1.00	1.00	20	0	1.00	20
1.	Adposhel	1.00	1.00	1.00	2	68	0.02	70
2.	Agent	0.75	0.87	0.81	56	14	0.80	70

3.	Allaple	0.96	0.94	0.95	68	02	0.97	70
4.	Alueron.gen!	1.00	1.00	1.00	35	00	1.00	35
5.	Amonetize	0.99	0.96	0.97	67	03	0.95	70
6.	Androm	0.98	0.80	0.88	63	07	0.90	70
7.	C2LOP.gen! g	0.97	0.94	0.99	35	00	1.00	35
8.	Dialplatform.B	1.00	1.00	1.00	31	00	1.00	31
9.	Dinwod	0.99	0.96	0.99	70	00	1.00	70
10.	Elex	0.96	0.80	0.97	68	02	0.97	70
11.	Expiro	0.90	0.94	0.88	53	17	0.75	70
12.	Fakerean	1.00	1.00	1.00	62	00	1.00	62
13.	Fasong	1.00	0.96	1.00	70	00	1.00	70
14.	Hack KMS	1.00	0.80	1.00	70	00	1.00	70
15.	Hlux	1.00	0.94	1.00	70	00	1.00	70
16.	Injector	0.93	1.00	0.92	61	09	0.87	70
17.	Install Core	1.00	0.96	0.99	66	04	0.94	70
18.	Instant access	1.00	0.80	1.00	69	00	1.00	69
19.	Lolyda, A1	1.00	0.94	0.98	31	00	1.00	31
20.	Lolyda, A2	1.00	1.00	1.00	30	00	0.93	32
21.	LolydaAT	1.00	0.96	1.00	26	00	1.00	26
22.	Multi Plug	0.91	0.80	0.95	66	04	0.94	70
23.	Neoreklami	1.00	0.94	1.00	60	10	0.85	70
24.	Neshta	0.73	1.00	0.75	45	25	0.64	70
25.	Rbot! gen	1.00	0.96	1.00	26	00	1.00	26
26.	Regrun	1.00	0.80	0.99	70	00	1.00	70
27.	Sality	0.71	0.94	0.72	53	17	0.75	70
28.	Snarasite	1.00	1.00	1.00	70	00	1.00	70
29.	Stantinko	1.00	0.96	0.99	68	00	0.97	70
30.	VBA	1.00	0.80	1.00	00	70	0.00	70
31.	VB Krypt	1.00	0.94	0.97	67	00	0.95	70
32.	Vilsel	1.00	1.00	1.00	70	00	1.00	70
Overall Accuracy of the proposed method							0.95	2141
Macro average				0.96	0.80	0.96	-	2141
Weighted average				0.96	0.94	0.95	-	2141

TABLE IV
COMPARISON OF DATASETS WITH DIFFERENT CNN MODELS TESTED ACCURACY

Sl. No	Malware Families	DensNet (%)	EfficientNet (%)	Inception ResNet (%)	ResNet50MalClassifier (%)	VGG16 (%)	XceptionNet (%)	Support (%)
0.	Adialer.C	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	20
1.	Adposhel	1.00	1.00	0.97	0.02	1.00	1.00	70
2.	Agent	0.74	0.8	0.67	0.8	0.77	0.7	70
3.	Allaple	0.92	0.97	0.87	0.97	0.95	0.95	70
4.	Alueron_gen! J	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	35
5.	Amonetize	0.95	0.95	0.92	0.95	0.95	0.9	70
6.	Androm	0.81	0.82	0.84	0.9	0.82	0.9	70
7.	Auto-run	0.91	0.75	0.78	0.94	0.78	0.84	70
8.	BrowseFox	0.98	0.92	0.97	1.00	0.97	0.24	70
9.	C2LOP.P	0.95	0.95	0.70	0.95	0.87	0.24	24
10.	C2LOP_gen! g	1.00	0.97	0.91	1.00	0.88	1.00	35
11.	Dialplatform.B	0.96	0.96	0.96	1.00	0.96	1.00	31
12.	Dinwod	1.00	1.00	0.98	1.00	1.00	1.00	70
13.	Elex	0.98	1.00	0.97	0.97	0.97	0.37	70
14.	Expiro	0.92	0.98	0.78	0.75	0.57	0.97	70
15.	Fakerean	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.83	62
16.	Fasong	1.00	1.00	0.98	1.00	1.00	0.88	70
17.	Hack KMS	0.98	0.98	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.88	70
18.	Hlux	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	70
19.	Injector	0.8	0.84	0.62	0.87	0.68	1.00	70
20.	Install Core	0.98	0.95	0.71	0.94	0.97	0.72	70
21.	Instant access	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.98	69
22.	Lolyda A1	1.00	1.00	0.61	1.00	1.00	1.00	31
23.	Lolyda A2	0.90	0.90	1.00	0.93	0.93	0.96	32
24.	Lolyda.AT	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	26
25.	Multi Plug	0.91	0.95	0.9	0.94	0.91	0.97	70
26.	Neoreklami	0.98	0.95	0.95	0.85	1.00	0.91	70
27.	Neshta	0.68	0.54	0.48	0.64	0.51	1.00	70
28.	Rbot! gen	1.00	1.00	0.96	1.00	0.84	1.00	26
29.	Regrun	0.98	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.98	0.98	70
30.	Sality	0.62	0.67	0.57	0.75	0.71	0.61	70
31.	Snarasite	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	70
32.	Stantinko	0.98	0.97	0.94	0.97	0.95	0.95	70
33.	VBA	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	70
34.	VB Krypt	0.98	0.95	0.94	0.95	0.91	0.94	70
35.	Vilsel	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	70
Total Testing Samples								2141
Models Overall Accuracy		0.93	0.91	0.89	0.95	0.91	0.83	--

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Dr. Sridevi, Professor, Karnatak University, Dharwad, Department of Computer Science. completed her doctorate in 2017 from Mangalore University in Mangalore. In 2021, she became a member of IAENG. Cloud computing, mobile and wireless communication, network security, advanced computer networks, and the internet of things are some of her areas of interest. Four research scholars are under her guidance at present, and one M.Phil. will be granted. She reviews articles for the Journal of Advances in Computer Science and Mathematics. over 30 research articles published in both domestic and international publications.



Mr. Tukkappa K. Gundoor was born on August 14, 1994, in Janginakoppa, Haveri district, Karnataka, India. In 2018, he graduated with an MCA in computer science from Visvesvaraya Technological University. Dr. Sridevi, a professor in the computer science department at Karnatak University in Dharwad, is currently mentoring him while he pursues his PhD. He received a research scholarship from the Karnataka government's DST and KSTePS, and he became a member of IAENG in 2021. His research focuses on "Network Security." The research subject he is now working on is "Study and design of Effective algorithm to detect non-portable malicious files." Additionally, he is a student member of the IEEE (Member No. 94567049) and the International Association of Engineers (IAENG) (Member No. 291948) and certified artificial intelligence professionals by the Defense Research and Development Organization (DIAT).