



Classifying Alzheimer's Disease using MRIs and Transcriptomic Data*

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Abstract: Early diagnosis of neurodegenerative diseases is essential for the effectiveness of treatments to delay the onset of related symptoms. Our focus is on methods to aid in diagnosing Alzheimer's disease, the most widespread neurocognitive disorder, that rely on data acquired by non-invasive techniques and that are compatible with the limitations imposed by pandemic situations. Here, we propose integrating multi-modal data consisting of omics (gene expression values extracted by blood samples) and imaging (magnetic resonance images) data, both available for some patients in the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative dataset. We show how a suitable integration of omics and imaging data, using well-known machine learning techniques, can lead to better classification results than any of them taken separately, also achieving performance competitive with the state-of-the-art.


1 INTRODUCTION


Dementia is a public health problem that affects about 50 million people in the world (WHO, 2019). It is growing rapidly, counting around 10 million new cases worldwide each year, with an estimate that this number will triple by 2050. Dementia manifests itself with a cognitive decline of the patient leading to the inability to carry out daily life activities (Birkenbihl et al., 2020). In addition to devastating the lives of patients and their families, this disease has a significant economic burden on society, estimated at around 600 billion \$ per year in 2013 (Birkenbihl et al., 2020) and


expected to reach around 2 trillion \$ per year in 2030 (WHO, 2019). The most common of the forms of dementia, Alzheimer's disease (AD), is a progressive disease whose pathology begins years before the cognitive symptoms appear and are diagnosed by the clinician. Early intervention, in the pre-symptomatic and not cognitively disabling stages of the disease, is instrumental in any future therapy aimed at treating the disease (Birkenbihl et al., 2021). Indeed, the effectiveness of the treatment often depends on the stage of the disease. For example, dietary supplements of folic acid and vitamin B have been shown to improve cognitive deficits in patients with mild AD, while they are of little benefit to patients with severe AD (Lee and Lee, 2020). However, early intervention poses the problem of diagnosing a patient with AD before the cognitive symptoms indicate the presence of the disease itself. An approach to this problem is based on the analysis of informative biomarkers of the disease, whose discovery and validation are possible by having large sets of data available (Birkenbihl et al., 2021).

In recent years, several longitudinal studies (groups of patients followed over time in a set of consecutive specialist investigations) have been conducted to identify biomarkers for the early diagnosis of AD and to estimate progression from the in-

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termediate state of the disease (Mild Cognitive Impairment, MCI) to the final AD stage, or possibly to its regression (Cognitively Normal, CN) (Birkenbihl et al., 2021; Lovestone et al., 2009; Mueller et al., 2005). The related datasets collect different data modalities, which generally include demographic variables (age, sex, education, etc.), clinical evaluation (results of cognitive tests, such as MMSE - Mini Mental State Examination; CDR-SB - Clinical Dementia Rating Scale Sum of Boxes; AD Assessment Scale ADAS-Cog11 and ADAS-Cog13), genotype (status of APOE4 - the apolipoprotein-e4 gene which represents the major risk factor for AD; single nucleotide polymorphisms - SNP - associated with AD) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), to quantify the atrophy of areas of the brain from volumes, cortical thickness and surface areas. More recently, further imaging modalities are being made available, including Positron Emission Tomography (PET) with FDG-fluorodeoxyglucose, which measures cell metabolism, or Diffusion Tensor Imaging (DTI), for estimation of microstructural parameters related to cells and axons. Other modalities sometimes considered include measurements of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), to estimate the levels of the protein markers beta-amyloid, tau and phosphorylated tau, or transcriptomics data, such as gene expression (GE) values extracted from biopsy/autopsy or blood.

Much of the studies based on existing longitudinal datasets are devoted to predicting the progression of the disease over time, as illustrated in recent surveys (Lawrence et al., 2017; Martí-Juan et al., 2020). Other research is aimed at the diagnosis of each patient, to classify the degree of disease (CN, MCI or AD) based on the results of a predetermined visit. Examples include methods based on various omics data, such as GE data (Lee and Lee, 2020; Li et al., 2018; Voyle et al., 2016), or imaging data, such as MRIs and PETs (Aderghal et al., 2017; Aderghal et al., 2018; Bäckström et al., 2018; Li and Liu, 2018; Shi et al., 2018; Bae et al., 2020). Some research started focusing on the integration of omics data with information from bio-medical images (Nho et al., 2016; Peng et al., 2016; Maddalena et al., 2020; Maddalena et al., 2021). Bringing together information coming from different sources, these omics imaging methods (Antonelli et al., 2019) can lead to revealing hidden genotype-phenotype relationships, with the aim of better understanding the onset and progression of many diseases and identifying new diagnostic and prognostic biomarkers.

Our research aims to develop methods for the classification of patients potentially affected by AD that are helpful for the clinical diagnosis of the disease and

that exploit multi-modal information on the patient’s status that is readily available. In view of the current pandemic, which limits the possibility of patient access to dedicated and highly specialized medical infrastructures, here we are interested in the early diagnosis of AD based on the results of individual exam sessions rather than on longitudinal studies. Furthermore, we focus on those multi-modal data that can be collected through easily accessible and not extremely invasive procedures (such as blood tests and MRIs, see Fig. 1), thus excluding, for example, those coming from brain tissue or CSF.

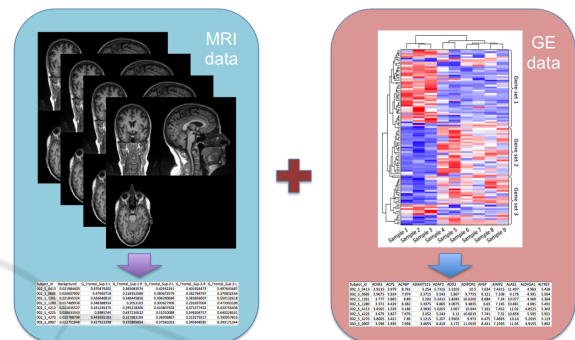


Figure 1: Omics imaging data adopted for the experiments.

We show how a suitable integration of imaging and omics features can lead to better results than any of them taken separately. The proposed approach, based on existing machine learning techniques, achieves accuracy performance competitive with state-of-the-art methods, often based on deep learning.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 explains the proposed method, describing the extraction procedure for both types of features, imaging and omics, adopted. Section 3 discusses the results achieved with the proposed framework and compares them with those obtained with state-of-the-art approaches. Finally, Section 4 concludes our paper and gives some future research directions.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

Data used in the preparation of this article were obtained from the Alzheimer’s Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI) database (adni.loni.usc.edu). The ADNI was launched in 2003 as a public-private partnership, led by Principal Investigator Michael W. Weiner, MD. The primary goal of ADNI has been to test whether serial MRI, PET, other biological markers, and clinical and neuropsychological assessment can be combined to measure the progression of MCI

and early AD.

As our intent was to consider multi-modal information integrating omics and imaging data acquired by non-invasive techniques, we considered gene expression values extracted by blood samples and MRIs. GE data from blood samples, collected between 2010 and 2012, is available for 744 ADNI patients. Only 720 of them also have T1-weighted MRIs in the same time period. According to the baseline visit, 42 patients have been classified as AD, 428 as MCI, and 250 as CN, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Classification of the selected subset of 720 ADNI patients for which both GE and MRI data are available.

| AD | MCI | CN |
|----|-----|-----|
| 42 | 428 | 250 |

2.1 Extraction of Imaging Features

Imaging features from MRIs have been extracted using an open-source framework for reproducible evaluation of AD classification using conventional machine learning methods (Samper-González et al., 2018), recently extended to include deep learning CNN-based methods (Wen et al., 2020), named ClinicaDL. The framework comprises i) tools to automatically convert three publicly available datasets, including ADNI, into the Brain Imaging Data Structure (BIDS) format (Gorgolewski et al., 2016) and ii) a modular set of pre-processing pipelines, feature extraction and classification methods, together with an evaluation framework, that provide a baseline for benchmarking the different components. Its extension includes a modular set of image preprocessing procedures, CNN classification architectures, and evaluation procedures dedicated to deep learning. The benchmarking presented in (Wen et al., 2020) shows that various 3D CNN approaches achieved similar performances, higher than those of the 2D slice approach, but still comparable to those achieved via Support Vector Machine (SVM) (Vapnik, 1995) using voxel-based features. Therefore, we adopted the framework to generate the voxel-based features from MRIs.

The ADNI MRI data have been curated and converted to the BIDS format using Clinica (Routier et al., 2021; Samper-González et al., 2018). Then the T1-volume pipeline of Clinica was adopted, which is a wrapper of the Segmentation, Run Dartel, and Normalise to MNI (Montreal Neurological Institute) Space routines implemented in the Statistical Parametric Mapping (SPM, <https://www.fil.ion.ucl.ac.uk/spm/>) package. First, the Unified Segmentation procedure (Ashburner and Friston, 2005) is adopted to

simultaneously perform tissue segmentation, bias correction, and spatial normalization of each input image. Next, a group template is created using DARTEL, an algorithm for diffeomorphic image registration (Ashburner, 2007), from the subjects' tissue probability maps on the native space, obtained at the previous step. The DARTEL to MNI method (Ashburner, 2007) is then applied, providing the registration of the native space images into the MNI space. As a result, all the images are in a common space, providing a voxel-wise correspondence across subjects. A set of imaging features is extracted based on regional measurements, where the anatomical regions are obtained by an atlas in MNI space, and the average gray matter density is computed in each of the regions. In the experiments, the AICHA (Joliot et al., 2015) atlas (providing 385 regional features) has been chosen as reference atlas for the AD vs. CN and AD vs. MCI tasks, while the AAL2 (Tzourio-Mazoyer et al., 2002) atlas (providing 121 regional features) for the MCI vs. CN task, as they lead to highest classification performance. A simplified scheme of the image feature extraction process is reported in Fig. 2. For each of the 720 patients, these imaging features have been extracted by the MRIs coming from the visit closest in time to that of the corresponding GE data sample.

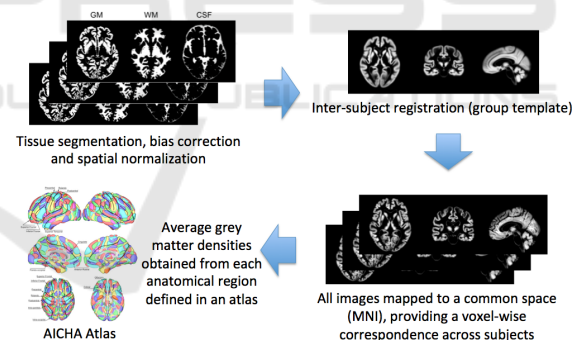


Figure 2: Extraction of imaging features.

2.2 Extraction of Omics Features

Normalized gene expression profiling data from blood samples of ADNI participants, produced by Affymetrix Human Genome U219 Array (Affymetrix (www.affymetrix.com), Santa Clara, CA), were downloaded from the ADNI website. The dataset contained 49386 probes. Multiple probes corresponding to the same gene identifier were aggregated by median value. Significance Analysis of Microarrays (SAM) (Tusher et al., 2001), in the form of R package, was used for finding significant differentially expressed genes (DEGs) from the three different un-

paired two-class comparisons (AD vs. CN, AD vs. MCI, MCI vs. CN). Both standard (t-statistic) and Wilcoxon tests were used, random seed generated, 100 Permutations and Delta slider set. Genes were considered differentially expressed if the q-value was less than 5%. The best performance results have been obtained with the features extracted using the Wilcoxon test for the AD vs. CN (181 features) and AD vs. MCI (211 features) classification tasks. Regarding the comparison MCI vs. CN, no significant DEGs were found using SAM; thus, the genes to be included in the integrated classification were obtained by selecting the top 300 genes with the highest variance from the expression matrix of the two classes samples.

3 EXPERIMENTS

3.1 Evaluation Procedure

For classification, we adopted an SVM with linear kernel. The evaluation consists of 10 iterations of 5-fold cross-validation, using stratified partitions of the data into train and test subsets. At each iteration, training folds are z-scored, and their mean and variance are used to z-score the test set accordingly. The performance results have been computed as average over the iterations of the well-known metrics summarized in Table 2. These are defined in terms of the number of true positives (TP), true negatives (TN), false positives (FP), and false negatives (FN). Here, the first class in each task (e.g., AD in AD vs. CN) is assumed as the positive class. All the metrics assume values in $[0,1]$, except MCC that ranges in $[-1,1]$; higher values indicate better performance for all the metrics.

3.2 Performance Results

Table 3 reports performance results obtained for each binary classification problem by adopting only imaging features (MRI), only omics features (GE), or both (MRI+GE). Here, it can be observed that extremely good performance is achieved for the AD vs. CN task, with MRI+GE features leading to the best results against MRI and GE taken separately. Indeed, even though imaging features lead to better performance than omics, their combination leads to increased performance in all the metrics.

The remaining two binary classification tasks are notoriously hard, and thus lower performance is achieved. For the AD vs. MCI task, omics data alone leads to slightly higher performance values than

imaging data alone, but their combination still leads to increased performance. Instead, for the MCI vs. CN task, omics data leads to such a poor performance that its influence in the combined features leads to results worse than using imaging features alone.

Finally, it can be observed that class unbalancing in the two binary tasks that include AD patients (positive minority class, including a low number of samples) leads to a much higher recognition rate for the negative majority classes, experiencing specificity much higher than sensitivity. On the other side, F-measure, AUC, MCC, and BA confirm to be metrics less dependent on class unbalancing and well support the exposed performance analysis.

The main observations arising from the analysis of the results are 1) in most cases, the imaging features perform much better than the omics features; 2) for classifying AD against CN or MCI patients, the combination of omics and imaging features leads to better results than the same features taken separately; 3) the MCI vs. CN task still needs to be investigated, as none of the considered sets of features leads to acceptable performance results.

3.3 Comparison with the State-of-the-Art

In Table 4, we report classification performance results on ADNI data published in recent literature, also specifying the cardinality of the subsets of samples considered (column ‘# Samples’) and the type of features adopted (column ‘Feats.’). Even though all the reported results have been obtained using different subsets of ADNI data and varying evaluation protocols, the Table intends to provide a rough performance comparison of the achieved results. Our best results from Table 3 are also reported to make a more immediate comparison.

(Cheng and Liu, 2017) constructed multi-level CNNs to gradually learn and combine multi-modal features for AD classification extracted by MRI and PET images. First, two deep 3D-CNNs are constructed to transform the whole brain information into compact high-level features for each modality. Then, differently from conventional combination methods that average the class probabilistic scores, a 2D CNN is learned to combine the multi-modal features and make the final classification.

In (Aderghal et al., 2017), a CNN is trained on features extracted from the hippocampal region from MRIs, using data augmentation strategies to obtain the needed large volumes of data and data balancing strategies to handle unbalanced classes. Later on, the same group (Aderghal et al., 2018) proposed a

Table 2: Performance measures adopted in the experiments.

| Acron. | Name | Formula | Description |
|----------------|---|---|--|
| Acc | Accuracy | $\frac{TP + TN}{TP + FN + FP + TN}$ | % of correctly classified samples |
| Spec | Specificity | $\frac{TN}{TN + FP}$ | % of negative samples correctly identified |
| Sens | Sensitivity (or Recall or TPR) | $\frac{TP}{TP + FN}$ | % of positive samples correctly classified |
| Prec | Precision | $\frac{TP}{TP + FP}$ | % of positive samples correctly classified, considering the set of all the samples classified as positive |
| F ₁ | F-measure | $\frac{2 \cdot \text{Prec} \cdot \text{Sens}}{\text{Prec} + \text{Sens}}$ | Weighted compromise between Sens and Prec |
| Gm | G-mean | $\sqrt{\text{Sens} \cdot \text{Spec}}$ | Geometric mean of the accuracy of both classes |
| AUC | Area Under the ROC Curve | $\int_0^1 \text{Sens}(x)dx, x = 1 - \text{Spec}$ | Uses the ROC curve to exhibit the trade-off between the classifier's TP and FP rates |
| MCC | Matthews Correlation Coefficient (Matthews, 1975) | $\frac{TP \cdot TN - FP \cdot FN}{\sqrt{(TP + FP)(TP + FN)(TN + FP)(TN + FN)}}$ | Correlation coefficient between observed and predicted binary classifications. Useful for unbalanced classes |
| BA | Balanced Accuracy | $\frac{\text{Sens} + \text{Spec}}{2}$ | Compromise between Spec and Sens. Useful for unbalanced classes |

Table 3: Average performance results for the three binary classification problems using only imaging features (MRI), only omics features (GE), or both (MRI+GE). In boldface the best values for each metric and each classification problem.

| Features | Acc | Sens | Spec | Prec | FI | Gm | AUC | MCC | BA |
|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| AD vs. CN | | | | | | | | | |
| MRI | 0.927 | 0.632 | 0.977 | 0.828 | 0.707 | 0.780 | 0.926 | 0.680 | 0.804 |
| GE | 0.860 | 0.479 | 0.924 | 0.538 | 0.492 | 0.655 | 0.847 | 0.422 | 0.701 |
| MRI+GE | 0.946 | 0.722 | 0.983 | 0.889 | 0.787 | 0.839 | 0.955 | 0.768 | 0.853 |
| AD vs. MCI | | | | | | | | | |
| MRI | 0.871 | 0.244 | 0.932 | 0.258 | 0.245 | 0.444 | 0.722 | 0.178 | 0.588 |
| GE | 0.878 | 0.342 | 0.931 | 0.330 | 0.330 | 0.550 | 0.774 | 0.267 | 0.637 |
| MRI+GE | 0.915 | 0.394 | 0.966 | 0.546 | 0.448 | 0.606 | 0.869 | 0.415 | 0.680 |
| MCI vs. CN | | | | | | | | | |
| MRI | 0.636 | 0.732 | 0.471 | 0.704 | 0.717 | 0.585 | 0.651 | 0.207 | 0.601 |
| GE | 0.524 | 0.601 | 0.394 | 0.629 | 0.614 | 0.484 | 0.499 | -0.005 | 0.497 |
| MRI+GE | 0.562 | 0.632 | 0.443 | 0.661 | 0.645 | 0.526 | 0.555 | 0.073 | 0.537 |

method that combines the MRI and DTI (Diffusion Tensor Imaging) modalities. Due to the scarce availability of DTIs, they adopted cross-modal transfer learning from MRIs to DTIs and combined the classification results of multiple CNNs by a majority vote.

(Tong et al., 2017) presented a multi-modality classification framework to exploit the complementarity in the multi-modal data. They first compute pairwise similarity for each modality individually using features from regional MRI volumes, voxel-based

FDG-PET signal intensities, CSF biomarker measures, and APOE4 genetic information. Then, they combine the similarities in a nonlinear graph fusion process, which generates a unified graph for final classification.

In (Bäckström et al., 2018), a 3D CNN is proposed, named 3DConvNet, for AD vs. CN classification. It consists of five convolutional layers for feature extraction from MRIs, followed by three fully connected layers for classification.

Table 4: Performance comparisons of recent classification methods on the ADNI dataset. In boldface the best values for each metric and each classification problem.

| Ref. | # Samples | Feats. | Acc | Sens | Spec | Prec | F ₁ | AUC | BA |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| AD vs. CN | | | | | | | | | |
| (Aderghal et al., 2017) | 188, 228 | MRI | 0.828 | 0.796 | 0.859 | - | - | - | 0.828 |
| (Cheng and Liu, 2017) | 93, 100 | MRI, PET | 0.896 | 0.871 | 0.920 | - | - | 0.945 | 0.896 |
| (Tong et al., 2017) | 37, 35 | APOE, CSF, MRI, PET | 0.918 | 0.889 | 0.947 | - | - | 0.983 | 0.918 |
| (Aderghal et al., 2018) | 236, 285 | MRI, DTI | 0.925 | 0.947 | 0.904 | - | - | - | 0.925 |
| (Bäckström et al., 2018) | 199, 141 | MRI | 0.901 | 0.933 | 0.868 | - | - | - | 0.900 |
| (Li and Liu, 2018) | 199, 229 | MRI | 0.897 | 0.879 | 0.908 | - | - | 0.924 | 0.894 |
| (Senanayake et al., 2018) | 161, 161 | MRI, Cog. tests | 0.760 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| (Shi et al., 2018) | 51, 52 | MRI, PET | 0.971 | 0.959 | 0.985 | - | - | - | 0.972 |
| (Gupta et al., 2019) | 38, 38 | APOE, CSF, MRI, PET | 0.984 | 1.000 | 0.965 | 0.979 | 0.984 | - | 0.983 |
| (Bae et al., 2020) | 195, 195 | MRI | 0.890 | 0.880 | 0.910 | - | - | 0.940 | 0.895 |
| (Lee and Lee, 2020) | 63, 136 | GE | - | - | - | - | - | 0.665 | - |
| Our best results | 42, 250 | MRI, GE | 0.946 | 0.722 | 0.983 | 0.889 | 0.787 | 0.955 | 0.853 |
| AD vs. MCI | | | | | | | | | |
| (Aderghal et al., 2017) | 188, 199 | MRI | 0.660 | 0.737 | 0.587 | - | - | - | 0.662 |
| (Aderghal et al., 2018) | 236, 503 | MRI, DTI | 0.850 | 0.937 | 0.791 | - | - | - | 0.864 |
| (Senanayake et al., 2018) | 161, 193 | MRI, Cog. tests | 0.760 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Our best results | 42, 428 | MRI, GE | 0.915 | 0.394 | 0.966 | 0.546 | 0.448 | 0.869 | 0.680 |
| MCI vs. CN | | | | | | | | | |
| (Aderghal et al., 2017) | 199, 228 | MRI | 0.625 | 0.600 | 0.640 | - | - | - | 0.620 |
| (Tong et al., 2017) | 75, 35 | APOE, CSF, MRI, PET | 0.795 | 0.851 | 0.671 | - | - | 0.812 | 0.761 |
| (Aderghal et al., 2018) | 503, 285 | MRI, DTI | 0.800 | 0.928 | 0.730 | - | - | - | 0.829 |
| (Li and Liu, 2018) | 403, 229 | MRI | 0.738 | 0.866 | 0.515 | - | - | 0.775 | 0.802 |
| (Senanayake et al., 2018) | 193, 161 | MRI, Cog. tests | 0.750 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| (Shi et al., 2018) | 99, 52 | MRI, PET | 0.872 | 0.979 | 0.670 | - | - | - | 0.825 |
| Our best results | 428, 250 | MRI | 0.636 | 0.732 | 0.471 | 0.704 | 0.717 | 0.651 | 0.601 |

(Li and Liu, 2018) proposed a classification method based on multiple cluster dense convolutional neural networks (DenseNets) to learn features from MRIs. Each whole-brain image is first partitioned into different local regions, and a fixed number of 3D patches is extracted from each region. Then, the patches from each region are grouped into different clusters with k-means clustering. A DenseNet is constructed to learn the patch features for each cluster and the features learned from the discriminative clusters of each region are ensembled for classification. Finally, the classification results from different local regions are combined to enhance the final image classification.

(Senanayake et al., 2018) used 3D MR volumes and neuropsychological measure-based (NM) feature vectors. For combining these two data sources, having very different dimensions (35 NM features against more than ten million features from 3D MR volumes), they proposed a deep learning-based pipeline that reduces the dimension of the MRI features to a dimension comparable with that of NM, and used the feature vector merging the two sets of features.

(Shi et al., 2018) proposed a multi-modal algorithm based on a stacked deep polynomial network (MM-SDPN). Two SDPNs are first used to learn high-level features from MRIs and PETs separately, which are then fed to another SDPN to fuse multi-modal neuroimaging information to contain the intrinsic properties of both modalities and their correlation.

(Gupta et al., 2019) proposed a machine learning-based framework, based on SVM and feature selection, to discriminate the various stages of ADNI patients using a combination of FDG-PET, structural MRI, CSF protein levels, and APOE genotype. Here, the MCI group of patients is subdivided into MCIc (MCI converted, i.e., MCI patients that converted to AD within 24 months) and MCIs (MCI stable, i.e., that did not convert to AD within 24 months); therefore, their interesting conclusions on binary problems involving MCI patients cannot be compared with ours.

(Bae et al., 2020) developed a CNN-based algorithm to classify AD patients and CN controls using coronal slices of T1-weighted MRI images that cover the medial temporal lobe. They tested it on two independent populations, including ADNI patients.

(Lee and Lee, 2020) classified AD vs. CN using blood gene expression data. They tested five feature selection methods and five classifiers. The best AUC in the internal evaluation on the ADNI dataset was obtained using DEGs extracted using SAM without feature selection and using a deep neural network classi-

fier.

Table 4 shows that our results using MRI and GE features are competitive with those achieved by state-of-the-art methods for the AD vs. CN and AD vs. MCI classification tasks. It is interesting to observe that the highest performance results are reported for methods (e.g., (Tong et al., 2017; Gupta et al., 2019)) that take into account not only MRI and PET features but also CSF. However, the extraction of such data requires a quite invasive intervention, preventing us from adopting them in our multi-modal setting.

Moreover, it should be explicitly observed that the neuropsychological measures adopted as features by some methods (e.g., (Senanayake et al., 2018)) are generally considered by medical doctors to diagnose the disease state of each patient. Thus, their use as features for classification appears to strongly and positively bias the results. This is shown in Table 5, where we report extremely high performance results achieved with our classification procedure using as features only three cognitive tests (CDRSB, ADAS11, and MMSE) on the selected subset of samples. Similar results are achieved on the whole set of data from ADNIMERGE, as shown in Table 6.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we propose a method for classifying the various stages of Alzheimer's disease, which relies on data acquired by non-invasive techniques and that are compatible with the limitations imposed by pandemic situations. The multi-modal data consist of omics and imaging features extracted by gene expression values from blood samples and MRIs, respectively. We show how a suitable integration of omics and imaging data, using well-known machine learning techniques, can lead to better results than any of them taken separately for the classification of AD against CN or MCI patients. Moreover, the achieved performance appears competitive with the state-of-the-art. However, when discriminating MCI and CN patients, none of the considered sets of features leads to acceptable performance results. This classification task, well known to be more challenging than the other two, needs to be further investigated.

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Table 5: Average performance results for the three binary classification problems using as features only three cognitive tests (CDRSB, ADAS11, and MMSE) on the considered ADNI subset (42 AD, 427 MCI, 250 CN).

| Task | Acc | Sens | Spec | Prec | F1 | Gm | AUC | MCC | BA |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| AD vs. CN | 0.990 | 0.976 | 0.992 | 0.958 | 0.965 | 0.984 | 0.996 | 0.961 | 0.984 |
| AD vs. MCI | 0.835 | 0.976 | 0.821 | 0.355 | 0.519 | 0.895 | 0.903 | 0.529 | 0.899 |
| MCI vs. CN | 0.867 | 0.926 | 0.768 | 0.873 | 0.898 | 0.841 | 0.931 | 0.716 | 0.847 |

Table 6: Average performance results for the three binary classification problems using as features only three cognitive tests (CDRSB, ADAS11, and MMSE) on the whole ADNIMERGE dataset (397 AD, 1055 MCI, 519 CN).

| Task | Acc | Sens | Spec | Prec | F1 | Gm | AUC | MCC | BA |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| AD vs. CN | 0.994 | 0.986 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 0.993 | 0.993 | 1.000 | 0.988 | 0.993 |
| AD vs. MCI | 0.930 | 0.813 | 0.975 | 0.924 | 0.864 | 0.890 | 0.978 | 0.821 | 0.894 |
| MCI vs. CN | 0.922 | 0.915 | 0.937 | 0.968 | 0.940 | 0.926 | 0.979 | 0.832 | 0.926 |

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