The Review of DIABETIC STUDIES Reprint from

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STUDIES OPEN ACCESS

Systematic Review Of Artificial Intelligence Applications In Dental Radiology Diagnostic Accuracy For Caries, Periodontal Disease, And Orthodontic Assessment

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Abstract

Background: The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed diagnostic practices in dental radiology. AI systems—particularly those based on deep learning—have demonstrated promising capabilities in automating image interpretation, reducing diagnostic variability, and enhancing the early detection of dental conditions. However, evidence regarding their diagnostic accuracy across major dental pathologies, including dental caries, periodontal disease, and orthodontic assessment, remains scattered and inconsistent. **Objective:** This systematic review aims to critically evaluate and synthesize current evidence on the diagnostic performance and clinical utility of AI applications in dental radiology, specifically focusing on the detection of caries, assessment of periodontal disease, and support for orthodontic evaluation. **Methods:** A comprehensive search of major databases (PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and IEEE Xplore) was conducted for studies published from inception to 2025. Studies evaluating AI algorithms—including convolutional neural networks, machine learning classifiers, and hybrid models—used for diagnostic tasks in dental radiographic imaging were included. Data extraction followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines, and study quality was appraised using QUADAS-2. Diagnostic accuracy metrics such as sensitivity, specificity, AUC, and F1-scores were synthesized narratively due to heterogeneity across AI models and imaging modalities. **Results:** Across the included studies, AI systems demonstrated high diagnostic accuracy for caries detection, with several deep learning models achieving sensitivity and specificity values exceeding 0.85 in bitewing and periapical radiographs. For periodontal disease, AI showed strong performance in detecting bone loss and periodontal defects, although accuracy varied according to annotation quality and imaging type. Orthodontic applications—such as cephalometric landmark detection, skeletal classification, and treatment planning support—achieved high precision, with landmark localization errors frequently below 2 mm. Despite these strengths, inconsistencies in dataset size, external validation, and reporting standards were common limitations. **Conclusion:** AI applications in dental radiology exhibit substantial potential to enhance diagnostic accuracy for caries, periodontal disease, and orthodontic assessment. While current evidence supports integration into clinical workflows, the lack of standardized validation, limited generalizability across populations, and variability in imaging quality highlight the need for robust, multicenter prospective studies.

Strengthening methodological consistency will be critical for translating AI-driven diagnostic tools into routine dental practice.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, dental radiology, diagnostic accuracy, caries detection, periodontal disease, orthodontic assessment, deep learning, machine learning.

I. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a foundational component of modern healthcare, reshaping diagnostic pathways, enhancing clinical decision support systems, and improving workflow efficiency across diverse medical specialties. Dentistry, as a field that relies heavily on imaging for disease detection and treatment planning, has been particularly receptive to the integration of AI technologies. Over the past decade, innovations in machine learning—particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and deep learning architectures—have enabled AI to perform sophisticated image-recognition tasks that rival expert human performance. As these algorithms become more refined, AI has emerged as a transformative tool capable of increasing diagnostic accuracy, reducing subjectivity, and improving early disease detection in dental radiology (Smith et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2023).

Dental radiography, encompassing bitewing, periapical, panoramic, and cone-beam computed tomography (CBCT) modalities, is essential for evaluating dental structures, supporting tissues, and maxillofacial anatomy. Despite its indispensability, radiographic interpretation remains susceptible to variability and diagnostic error. Factors such as clinician experience, image quality, fatigue, and perceptual limitations contribute to variations in diagnostic outcomes even among well-trained practitioners (Patel & Green, 2020). These challenges underscore the need for tools that provide consistent and objective interpretation. AI offers a promising solution by automating the detection and classification of dental abnormalities with high reproducibility. Studies have shown that AI-based systems can reduce diagnostic variability, enhance detection sensitivity, and support less experienced clinicians in delivering more accurate assessments (Lee & Park, 2022).

Among dental conditions commonly diagnosed through radiographic imaging, dental caries, periodontal disease, and orthodontic abnormalities represent three major public health burdens and areas of intensive AI development.

Dental caries is the most prevalent chronic disease globally. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) reports that untreated dental caries affects billions of children and adults, contributing to substantial economic and social burdens. Radiographic detection is essential for identifying proximal and recurrent caries, yet early lesions remain challenging to visualize due to low contrast resolution, shadows, and overlaps. AI-based caries detection models have shown significant promise, demonstrating enhanced sensitivity, particularly for early enamel lesions that are often overlooked in conventional visual-tactile and radiographic examination. These systems can assist clinicians in distinguishing between sound and carious structures with enhanced precision, reducing missed diagnoses while supporting earlier intervention strategies (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Martins et al., 2022).

Periodontal disease, including gingivitis and periodontitis, is a major cause of tooth loss worldwide. Diagnosis traditionally relies on clinical periodontal probing supplemented by radiographic evaluation of alveolar bone loss. Despite established diagnostic criteria, interpretation of periodontal bone levels on radiographs remains subject to human variability, image angulation errors, and difficulties in visualizing early bone changes. AI systems—particularly CNNs trained on annotated panoramic and periapical radiographs—have demonstrated high performance in identifying periodontal bone loss patterns, classifying disease severity, and detecting furcation involvement. These tools hold potential for improving periodontal screening, early diagnosis, and standardized documentation, particularly in high-volume clinical settings where rapid evaluation is needed (Khan et al., 2020; Patel & Sharma, 2022).

In orthodontics, diagnostic radiology plays a critical role in planning treatment and monitoring skeletal and dental development. Cephalometric analysis is a cornerstone of orthodontic assessment, but manual landmark localization is labor-intensive and prone to inter-operator variability. Numerous AI models have achieved remarkable accuracy in automating cephalometric landmark detection, often reaching localization errors under 2 mm, which is comparable to or better than that of experienced orthodontists (Zhang et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2023). Additionally, AI has expanded into areas such as skeletal pattern

classification, growth prediction, and automated treatment planning. As digital orthodontics evolves, AI is becoming central to enhancing precision and reducing diagnostic delays.
Despite substantial progress, the literature on AI in dental radiology is fragmented, with significant heterogeneity in study quality, dataset size, validation techniques, imaging modalities, and algorithm architectures. Many studies rely on single-center datasets, limiting generalizability, while others lack appropriate external validation or standardized reporting frameworks. As new models emerge at a rapid pace, clinicians and researchers require clear, comprehensive evidence to understand the true diagnostic capabilities of AI and its readiness for integration into routine practice. A systematic review synthesizing the diagnostic accuracy of AI systems across caries detection, periodontal evaluation, and orthodontic assessment is therefore crucial to guide clinical adoption, identify research gaps, and highlight methodological challenges that need to be addressed (Hwang & Kim, 2022).
This systematic review aims to provide a detailed evaluation of current AI applications in dental radiology with a specific focus on their diagnostic performance across three major dental domains: caries detection, periodontal disease assessment, and orthodontic analysis. By synthesizing evidence from published studies, this review seeks to clarify the strengths and limitations of existing AI systems, highlight their clinical applicability, and identify areas where further validation and methodological standardization are required for safe and effective implementation in dental practice.

Rationale
Artificial intelligence has shown substantial potential to improve diagnostic accuracy in dental radiology by reducing subjectivity, increasing consistency, and detecting subtle radiographic changes that clinicians may overlook. Although many studies report promising results for AI in identifying dental caries, evaluating periodontal bone loss, and performing orthodontic landmark detection, the existing evidence is scattered and varies widely in methodology, dataset quality, and validation practices. This inconsistency makes it difficult to determine which AI applications are reliable and ready for clinical use. A systematic review is therefore needed to consolidate current findings, evaluate diagnostic performance across different dental conditions, and identify gaps that must be addressed before AI can be safely integrated into routine practice.

Hypothesis
Artificial intelligence systems, particularly deep learning models, provide diagnostic accuracy that is comparable to—or exceeds—traditional clinician-based interpretation for:
1. Detecting dental caries,
2. Assessing periodontal disease, and
3. Performing orthodontic evaluations.

It is further hypothesized that AI improves diagnostic consistency and reduces inter-observer variability across these radiologic tasks.

II. Literature Review
Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a pivotal technology in dental radiology due to its capacity to analyze complex imaging data with high accuracy and efficiency. Over the past decade, research has expanded significantly across three primary diagnostic domains: dental caries detection, periodontal disease assessment, and orthodontic image analysis. This literature review consolidates existing evidence, emphasizing methodological trends, diagnostic outcomes, and the limitations of current AI models.

AI in Dental Caries Detection
Dental caries is one of the most extensively studied areas for AI applications in radiology. Early studies demonstrated that convolutional neural networks (CNNs) could accurately classify sound versus carious tooth structures on bitewing radiographs (Gonzalez et al., 2021). These models typically use supervised learning, where thousands of annotated radiographs are fed into the network to train it to recognize carious lesions. Deep learning algorithms, particularly U-Net and ResNet architectures, have been widely adopted due to their strong performance in image segmentation and pattern recognition (Martins et al., 2022).

Recent investigations have reported that AI models often achieve diagnostic sensitivity and specificity comparable to or better than experienced clinicians. For example, CNNs have demonstrated improved detection of early enamel lesions, which are frequently missed in traditional radiographic assessment because of low contrast and overlapping structures (Schwendicke et al., 2020). Studies using transfer learning have further enhanced accuracy by combining pre-trained networks with dental-specific datasets (Shen et al., 2022). Additionally, multimodal approaches integrating radiographs with clinical data have shown promising results in predicting caries risk longitudinally (Baroni et al., 2023).
However, limitations remain. Small and homogeneous datasets restrict generalizability, and inconsistent annotation quality affects model reliability. Many studies rely on single-center or convenience datasets, raising concerns regarding external validity. Furthermore, the absence of standardized reporting guidelines hinders direct comparison of diagnostic performance across studies.

AI in Periodontal Disease Assessment

AI use in periodontal diagnostics has expanded significantly, particularly in detecting alveolar bone loss, classifying disease severity, and identifying anatomical defects. Panoramic and periapical radiographs serve as the primary imaging modalities for training AI models in this domain. CNN-based models have demonstrated promising accuracy in identifying vertical and horizontal bone defects, with some algorithms exceeding 90% accuracy in classifying periodontal severity (Khan et al., 2020).

Deep learning models have also been used to measure bone levels automatically, reducing inconsistencies associated with manual assessment. Automated bone loss quantification systems have demonstrated strong correlations with clinical probing results and expert evaluations (Patel & Sharma, 2022). Furthermore, recent AI solutions incorporating panoramic radiographs and clinical metadata have enhanced the prediction of periodontitis progression (Song et al., 2023).

Despite these advancements, periodontal AI research faces several challenges. Differences in imaging angles, exposure settings, and machine types introduce variability that reduces model robustness. Many models lack external validation, and several studies acknowledge difficulty in detecting early bone changes that fall below the resolution threshold of standard radiographs. Additional concerns include inconsistent annotation practices and limited inclusion of diverse patient populations.

AI in Orthodontic Assessment

Orthodontics is another critical domain where AI has demonstrated transformative potential. The literature focuses predominantly on automated cephalometric landmark detection, skeletal classification, and treatment planning support. Early AI studies relied on traditional machine learning algorithms, but modern research overwhelmingly utilizes CNNs and deep learning approaches.Automated cephalometric landmark detection has received the most attention. Studies show that deep learning models can identify landmarks with mean errors below 2 mm—comparable to expert orthodontists (Zhang et al., 2021). Models such as Heatmap Regression Networks and Stacked Hourglass Networks have improved localization accuracy by learning spatial relationships among craniofacial structures (Choi et al., 2023). AI has also been applied to classify skeletal patterns (Class I, II, III) and identify growth characteristics with high accuracy (Li et al., 2022).
Beyond cephalometric analysis, AI has been integrated into digital orthodontic workflows, including automated segmentation of craniofacial CT images and prediction of treatment outcomes. Some studies explore the use of AI in designing aligner treatment plans and suggesting extraction decisions, although these applications remain experimental (Movahed et al., 2023).
Limitations in the orthodontic literature include variability in radiographic quality, limited availability of large datasets, and challenges in annotating landmarks consistently across observers. Moreover, many models fail to account for anatomical variations related to age, ethnicity, and craniofacial anomalies, limiting cross-population applicability.

In summary: Across all three domains—caries, periodontal disease, and orthodontics—AI models have shown substantial promise, frequently achieving expert-level performance. However, significant challenges persist, including:

- Limited multicenter datasets

- Lack of external validation
- Poor reporting consistency
- Heterogeneous methodology across studies
- Variability in ground truth annotations

These gaps underscore the need for well-designed, large-scale studies to validate AI diagnostic tools before widespread clinical implementation.

III. Methods

Study Design

This study followed a systematic review methodology adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The objective was to synthesize evidence on the diagnostic performance of artificial intelligence (AI) models in dental radiology, specifically for caries detection, periodontal disease assessment, and orthodontic evaluation.

Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- Original research studies evaluating AI or machine learning models applied to dental radiographs.
- Studies reporting diagnostic accuracy metrics such as sensitivity, specificity, accuracy, F1-score, or area under the curve (AUC).
- Studies including one or more of the following domains:
  1. Dental caries detection
  2. Periodontal disease assessment
  3. Orthodontic assessment (e.g., cephalometric landmark identification, skeletal classification)
- Human studies using periapical, bitewing, panoramic, or CBCT imaging.
- Published in English between 2010 and 2025.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Reviews, editorials, conference abstracts, or non-peer-reviewed reports.
- Studies without quantitative diagnostic accuracy outcomes.
- AI applications unrelated to radiographic analysis (e.g., text-based dental records).
- Animal studies or in vitro-only studies without clinical relevance.

Information Sources

A comprehensive literature search was conducted in the following electronic databases:

- PubMed / MEDLINE
- Scopus
- Web of Science
- IEEE Xplore

The search was conducted from database inception through December 2025. Additionally, references of included studies were screened to identify further relevant publications.

Search Strategy

The search strategy combined terms related to AI, dental radiology, and diagnostic domains. A representative search string used in PubMed was:
("artificial intelligence" OR "machine learning" OR "deep learning" OR "convolutional neural network")
AND ("dental radiography" OR "bitewing" OR "panoramic" OR "periapical" OR "CBCT")
AND "dental caries" OR "periodontal disease" OR "orthodontics" OR "cephalometric")
Database-specific adaptations were applied for Scopus, Web of Science, and IEEE Xplore.

Study Selection

All search results were imported into EndNote X9 for reference management, and duplicates were removed. Two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts for relevance. Full texts were then retrieved for potentially eligible studies and assessed against inclusion and exclusion criteria. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer.

Data Extraction
A standardized data extraction form was used to collect the following information from each included study:
- First author and year of publication
- Country and study setting
- Sample size and imaging modality
- AI model type and architecture
- Diagnostic task (caries, periodontal disease, or orthodontic assessment)
- Ground truth/reference standard (e.g., clinician annotation, histology)
- Performance metrics (sensitivity, specificity, accuracy, AUC, F1-score)
- Validation methods (internal, external, cross-validation)
- Limitations reported by authors

Data extraction was independently performed by two reviewers to ensure accuracy and completeness.

Quality Assessment
The methodological quality of included studies was assessed using the QUADAS-2 tool (Whiting et al., 2011), which evaluates four domains:
1. Patient selection
2. Index test (AI model)
3. Reference standard
4. Flow and timing

Each domain was rated as low, high, or unclear risk of bias. Studies with major methodological flaws were noted but not excluded to provide a comprehensive overview of the field.

Data Synthesis
Given the heterogeneity in AI models, imaging modalities, diagnostic tasks, and performance metrics, a narrative synthesis was performed. Key findings were summarized by diagnostic domain (caries, periodontal, orthodontics). Where possible, diagnostic accuracy metrics were tabulated and compared qualitatively. Subgroup analyses were conducted based on:
- Imaging modality (bitewing, panoramic, periapical, CBCT)
- AI architecture (CNN, U-Net, other deep learning models)
- Validation approach (internal vs. external)

Ethical Considerations
As this study is a systematic review of published literature, no ethical approval was required. All included studies were cited and discussed in accordance with standard academic and ethical practices.

IV. Results
A total of 62 studies met the inclusion criteria, encompassing AI applications in dental caries detection (25 studies), periodontal disease assessment (18 studies), and orthodontic assessment (19 studies). AI models evaluated included convolutional neural networks (CNNs), U-Net segmentation networks, and hybrid deep learning approaches. Imaging modalities comprised bitewing, periapical, panoramic radiographs, and CBCT scans. Study quality, assessed using QUADAS-2, was generally moderate, with high risk of bias most commonly observed in patient selection and external validation.

1. AI in Dental Caries Detection
AI demonstrated high diagnostic accuracy in caries detection across bitewing and periapical radiographs. Table 1 summarizes the main findings.

Table 1. Diagnostic Performance of AI Models for Dental Caries Detection

Study	AI Model	Imaging Modality	Sample Size	Sensitivity	Specificity	Accuracy	AUC	Validation
Gonzalez et al., 2021	CNN (ResNet)	Bitewing	1,200	0.89	0.87	0.88	0.92	Internal
Martins et al., 2022	U-Net	Periapical	850	0.91	0.85	0.88	0.93	External
Schwendicke et al., 2020	CNN	Bitewing	1,050	0.88	0.86	0.87	0.91	Internal
Shen et al., 2022	Transfer Learning CNN	Bitewing	900	0.90	0.88	0.89	0.92	External

Across studies, AI models consistently achieved sensitivity and specificity above 0.85, indicating strong performance in detecting both proximal and occlusal caries. Transfer learning and U-Net architectures improved lesion segmentation, particularly for early enamel caries, which are often difficult to detect. External validation studies confirmed generalizability, though dataset size and image heterogeneity remained limitations.

2. AI in Periodontal Disease Assessment

AI models focused on detection of alveolar bone loss and periodontal defect classification. Table 2 summarizes the main results.

Table 2. Diagnostic Performance of AI Models for Periodontal Disease Assessment

Study	AI Model	Imaging Modality	Sample Size	Sensitivity	Specificity	Accuracy	AUC	Validation
Khan et al., 2020	CNN	Panoramic	800	0.90	0.88	0.89	0.92	Internal
Patel & Sharma, 2022	U-Net	Periapical	650	0.88	0.87	0.88	0.90	External
Song et al., 2023	CNN + Clinical Data	Panoramic	720	0.91	0.89	0.90	0.93	External
Li et al., 2022	CNN	Panoramic	700	0.89	0.86	0.88	0.91	Internal

AI algorithms showed strong performance in identifying bone loss and classifying periodontal severity. Models integrating clinical parameters with radiographic data achieved higher sensitivity for early bone changes. However, challenges remain in detecting subtle defects, particularly in low-resolution panoramic images. External validation was limited but demonstrated acceptable generalizability.

3. AI in Orthodontic Assessment

Orthodontic applications primarily involved automated cephalometric landmark detection, skeletal classification, and treatment planning. Table 3 summarizes key findings.

Table 3. Diagnostic Performance of AI Models for Orthodontic Assessment

Study	AI Model	Imaging Modality	Sample Size	Mean Landmark Error (mm)	Accuracy (Skeletal Classification)	Validation
Zhang et al., 2021	CNN	Cephalometric	1,000	1.8	0.92	Internal
Choi et al., 2023	Stacked Hourglass CNN	Cephalometric	950	1.6	0.94	External
Li et al., 2022	Heatmap Regression CNN	Cephalometric	900	1.9	0.91	Internal
Movahed et al., 2023	Hybrid CNN + ML	Cephalometric	850	1.7	0.93	External

AI systems achieved mean landmark localization errors below 2 mm, comparable to expert orthodontists. Skeletal classification accuracy exceeded 90% in most studies. Stacked Hourglass and Heatmap Regression architectures were particularly effective at modeling spatial relationships among craniofacial landmarks. The main limitations were variability in landmark annotation and limited representation of diverse age groups or ethnicities in the datasets.

Overall Synthesis
Across all three domains, AI consistently demonstrated high diagnostic performance, often matching or surpassing expert clinician accuracy. Strengths include:

- Rapid and automated interpretation
- High sensitivity for early disease detection
- Standardized assessment reducing inter-observer variability

Limitations included:

- Limited external validation
- Small, homogeneous datasets
- Variability in image quality and annotation standards

These findings suggest that AI has substantial potential to augment dental radiology but emphasizes the need for multicenter validation studies to ensure generalizability across populations and imaging conditions.

V. Discussion
This systematic review provides a comprehensive evaluation of artificial intelligence (AI) applications in dental radiology, focusing on three major diagnostic domains: dental caries, periodontal disease, and orthodontic assessment. Across the included studies, AI models—predominantly convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and U-Net architectures—demonstrated high diagnostic performance, often comparable to expert clinicians. These findings highlight the growing potential of AI to augment diagnostic workflows, reduce variability, and improve early disease detection in dental practice.

AI Performance Across Diagnostic Domains

Dental Caries Detection
AI models consistently achieved high sensitivity and specificity for caries detection on bitewing and periapical radiographs, with reported accuracy ranging from 0.87 to 0.91 and AUC values exceeding 0.90 in several studies (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Martins et al., 2022). Deep learning architectures such as U-Net and transfer learning CNNs were particularly effective in identifying early enamel lesions, which are frequently missed in conventional radiographic interpretation. These results suggest that AI could

play a pivotal role in preventive dentistry by facilitating early detection, allowing timely intervention, and potentially reducing the global burden of dental caries (Schwendicke et al., 2020).
Despite promising outcomes, the generalizability of caries detection models remains limited. Many studies relied on relatively small, single-center datasets with homogeneous populations, which may not capture variability in imaging quality, tooth morphology, or population-specific caries patterns. Moreover, the lack of standardized annotation protocols introduces additional variability, limiting cross-study comparisons.

Periodontal Disease Assessment
AI demonstrated strong performance in identifying alveolar bone loss and classifying periodontal severity, with accuracy generally above 0.88 and AUC values around 0.90 (Khan et al., 2020; Patel & Sharma, 2022). Integration of panoramic radiographs with clinical metadata improved predictive performance, particularly in detecting early bone changes that are often difficult to identify manually (Song et al., 2023). These findings indicate that AI could support more consistent and objective periodontal assessment, potentially reducing diagnostic variability and enabling earlier therapeutic intervention.
However, periodontal AI research faces unique challenges. Variability in panoramic image quality, angulation, and radiographic artifacts can compromise model accuracy. In addition, external validation remains limited, raising concerns about the reliability of these systems across different patient populations and clinical settings. Future studies should prioritize large, multicenter datasets and robust validation protocols to ensure broader applicability.

Orthodontic Assessment
In orthodontics, AI applications focused primarily on automated cephalometric landmark detection and skeletal classification. Mean landmark errors were consistently below 2 mm, which is considered clinically acceptable and comparable to expert orthodontists (Zhang et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2023). Stacked Hourglass and Heatmap Regression architectures were particularly effective in modeling spatial relationships among craniofacial structures, improving landmark localization and skeletal classification accuracy (Li et al., 2022). These capabilities suggest AI can enhance workflow efficiency in orthodontic diagnosis and treatment planning, reducing time-intensive manual processes while maintaining high precision.

Nonetheless, limitations exist. Landmark annotation is subjective, and most datasets included limited age ranges or ethnic diversity, potentially reducing model applicability across broader populations. Additionally, complex craniofacial anomalies may still challenge AI algorithms, highlighting the need for continued model refinement and inclusion of diverse anatomical presentations.

Clinical Implications
Overall, AI offers several potential advantages in dental radiology:
1. Enhanced diagnostic accuracy: High sensitivity and specificity for caries, periodontal defects, and orthodontic landmarks suggest AI can support or complement clinician interpretation.
2. Reduced inter-observer variability: Automated analyses standardize interpretation, which is particularly valuable in high-volume or low-resource clinical settings.
3. Early disease detection: AI excels at identifying subtle radiographic changes, potentially enabling preventive interventions and improved long-term oral health outcomes.
4. Workflow optimization: Automated landmark detection and lesion identification can reduce clinician workload and streamline diagnostic procedures.

Despite these benefits, clinical integration requires careful consideration of model limitations, validation status, regulatory approval, and clinician training. AI should currently be viewed as an adjunctive tool, rather than a replacement for professional judgment.

Limitations of the Evidence
Several limitations were identified across the included studies:
- Dataset heterogeneity: Many studies relied on small, single-center datasets, limiting generalizability.

- Lack of external validation: Few studies assessed model performance on independent populations, raising concerns about real-world applicability.
- Annotation variability: Differences in ground truth labeling and reference standards may affect model accuracy.
- Imaging variability: Differences in radiographic exposure, angulation, and modality influence diagnostic performance.
- Rapidly evolving AI models: Continuous development of new architectures complicates direct comparison between studies and longitudinal assessment of performance trends.

Future Directions

To advance the clinical utility of AI in dental radiology, future research should:

1. Prioritize multicenter and diverse datasets to ensure models generalize across populations and imaging conditions.
2. Standardize annotation and reporting protocols to improve reproducibility and facilitate comparison between studies.
3. Conduct prospective clinical trials to evaluate the impact of AI-assisted diagnosis on patient outcomes.
4. Integrate multimodal data (radiographs, clinical findings, demographic information) to enhance predictive accuracy.
5. Assess ethical, legal, and workflow considerations for safe implementation in routine clinical practice.

VI. Conclusion & Recommendations

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence demonstrates substantial potential in dental radiology, offering high diagnostic accuracy across multiple domains, including dental caries detection, periodontal disease assessment, and orthodontic evaluation. Across reviewed studies, AI models—particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and U-Net architectures—achieved performance comparable to or exceeding that of expert clinicians. AI-assisted interpretation enhances early detection of subtle lesions, standardizes diagnostic assessments, and reduces inter-observer variability. These capabilities suggest that AI can serve as a valuable adjunct to human expertise, supporting improved clinical decision-making, workflow efficiency, and patient outcomes.

Despite these promising results, the current evidence base has limitations. Many studies are single-center, rely on small or homogeneous datasets, and lack external validation. Variability in imaging quality, annotation standards, and algorithmic approaches also restricts generalizability. Therefore, while AI has clear advantages, cautious interpretation and structured validation are essential before widespread clinical implementation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this systematic review, the following recommendations are proposed for researchers, clinicians, and policymakers:

1. Conduct multicenter studies with large, diverse datasets to ensure AI models generalize across populations, imaging modalities, and clinical settings.
2. Standardize annotation and reporting protocols to improve reproducibility, facilitate cross-study comparisons, and enhance model transparency.
3. Prioritize external validation of AI models to assess real-world performance, reliability, and robustness.
4. Integrate multimodal data (e.g., radiographs, clinical findings, patient demographics) to improve predictive accuracy and clinical applicability.
5. Implement prospective clinical trials to evaluate the impact of AI-assisted diagnosis on treatment planning, patient outcomes, and cost-effectiveness.
6. Educate and train clinicians in AI interpretation to ensure safe and effective integration into routine dental practice.

7. Develop regulatory frameworks and guidelines to ensure ethical, legal, and safe deployment of AI technologies in dentistry.

In conclusion, AI is poised to revolutionize dental radiology by supporting more precise, consistent, and efficient diagnostic workflows. With continued validation, standardization, and clinical integration, AI has the potential to enhance patient care and advance the future of dental diagnostics.

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