

Self-Adaptive Sensor Fault Detection in IoT Health Monitoring Using Federated Learning and Lightweight Transformers

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ABSTRACT

The spread of Internet of Things (IoT)-based healthcare systems has considerably enhanced real-time patient monitoring, but the performance of such systems largely relies on the integrity and accuracy of sensor data. Heartbeat sensors, although unavoidable, are prone to environmental noise, hardware degradation, and cyber threats, resulting in potential faults that can undermine medical decisions. Addressing these challenges, this paper proposes a novel self-adaptive sensor fault detection framework that leverages Federated Learning (FL) and Lightweight Transformer models. In the proposed system, individual IoT nodes (such as patient monitoring devices equipped with heartbeat sensors) locally train lightweight Transformer-based models to detect sensor faults, while collaboratively updating a global model without transmitting raw health data, thereby preserving privacy and reducing communication overhead. The self-adaptive ability enables continuous learning from new data distributions, making the model robust against changing sensor behaviours and external interference. Comprehensive experiments on real-world heartbeat sensor datasets show that the federated lightweight Transformer framework proposed outperforms classical centralized and standalone approaches with better accuracy, scalability, and robustness. This research offers a promising avenue for the next generation of smart and privacy-aware healthcare monitoring systems to provide reliable and real-time fault detection in IoT-based systems.

Keywords: Internet of Things (IoT), Federated Learning, Lightweight Transformer, Self-Adaptive Systems

INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of Internet of Things (IoT) technology into the healthcare system has allowed for real-time monitoring and constant tracking of patient vitals with the help of wearable and embedded sensors. Heartbeat sensors like MAX30100 are some of the widely adopted sensors in medical IoT systems to detect heart rate and blood oxygen level [1]. Nevertheless, the efficiency of such systems rests heavily on the credibility of the sensor data. Hardware wear, environmental interference, or signal noise may result in faulty sensors that produce false readings, compromising patient safety and diagnostic accuracy seriously [2].

Conventional machine learning methods centralized to a hub have tried identifying sensor anomalies through consolidating sensor data from diverse IoT nodes onto a central hub [3]. Though such models can provide fairly accurate results, they are subject to limitations regarding data privacy concerns, large communications overhead, and inadaptability with heterogeneous sensors behaviour across the devices. What's more, centralized models aren't able to generalize effectively for real-world scenarios of healthcare practice, where user data distributions range dramatically across people and contexts [4].

Recent breakthroughs in Federated Learning (FL) provide a privacy-friendly option through model training on decentralized edge devices without exposing raw data [5]. This shift in paradigm supports local learning on patient devices while securely aggregating model parameters to enhance the global model. Meanwhile, Transformer-based architectures have shown great promise in time-series modelling with the attention mechanism and ability to represent long-range dependencies [6]. Yet, traditional Transformers are computationally expensive and not ideal for deployment on resource-limited IoT nodes. To mitigate this, lightweight Transformers like TinyBERT and MobileBERT have been introduced, providing comparable performance with smaller model size and inference cost [7].

Although such developments have taken place, there are few implementations of FL in healthcare that even use Transformer models for sensor fault detection on time-series data. Even fewer systems are self-adaptive—the power to adapt based on new input data without retraining. Both these factors diminish scalability and fault tolerance during extended deployments.

To fill these loopholes, this research formulates a self-adaptive mechanism for heartbeat sensor fault detection in IoT-based healthcare monitoring systems based on Federated Learning integrated with Lightweight Transformers. Every device trains a transformer-based model locally over its own heartbeat sensor readings and contributes to a global model at regular intervals through federated aggregation. This localized framework provides privacy, flexibility, and low bandwidth consumption with high accuracy in fault detection.

Comprehensive experiments on real-world heartbeat sensor data verify the efficacy of the proposed framework over baseline methods. The findings show improved generalizability, quicker new sensor behavior adaptation, and higher robustness to noisy or missing data. This paper gives a new direction for constructing secure, scalable, and smart health monitoring systems with federated and transformer-based AI.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The incorporation of IoT technologies in the health sector has transformed patient monitoring but brings along issues of sensor reliability and data privacy. Various methodologies have been researched to tackle these issues in recent studies.

1. **Federated LSTM for Sensor Fault Detection:** Koo et al. (2024) proposed FedLSTM, a federated learning framework with Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks to identify sensor faults in wireless sensor networks. The method maintains data privacy by training models locally and then aggregating them globally and proved to have high accuracy in the detection of faults such as bias, drift, and loss of data.
2. **Hybrid Convolutional Recurrent Neural Networks:** Zhang et al. (2025) introduced a federated learning framework in a hybrid model of Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNN). This framework captures spatial and temporal features strongly, thus improving intrusion detection in IoT networks while assuring data privacy.
3. **Lightweight Mini-Batch Federated Learning:** Ahmad and Shah (2024) proposed a lightweight mini-batch federated learning technique for efficient attack detection in IoT systems. With minimal

computational overhead and communication rounds, this approach can be applied to resource-limited devices.

4. **Sensor Fault Detection with LSTM Autoencoders:** A study by Lee et al. (2024) used LSTM autoencoders for multi-step ahead prediction-based sensor fault detection. The method is able to identify anomalies effectively by learning normal sensor data behavior, providing a strong approach to real-time monitoring.
5. **Federated Learning in Industrial IoT:** Marfo et al. (2025) presented an enhanced federated learning framework for anomaly detection in industrial cyber-physical systems. Incorporating adaptive model aggregation and dynamic node selection, the system achieved high accuracy and resilience against node failures.
6. **Transformer-Based Human Activity Recognition:** Mahmud et al. (2024) explored the application of transformer models in human activity recognition using sensor data. The study highlighted the models' ability to capture long-range dependencies, suggesting potential for fault detection in time-series sensor data.
7. **Federated Transfer Learning for Fault Diagnosis:** Li et al. (2024) proposed a federated transfer learning approach for diagnosing faults in paper manufacturing processes. By transferring knowledge across different conditions, the model maintained high diagnostic accuracy while preserving data privacy.
8. **Resource-Efficient Federated Learning:** Wang et al. (2024) addressed the challenges of deploying federated learning in resource-constrained environments. Their approach optimized model training and communication efficiency, making it viable for IoT applications with limited computational capabilities.
9. **Privacy-Preserving Intrusion Detection Systems:** He et al. (2024) investigated federated learning-based intrusion detection systems for large-scale IoT networks. By employing homomorphic encryption and differential privacy techniques, the study ensured secure and efficient anomaly detection.
10. **Comprehensive Review on Federated Learning in IoT:** A review by Chen et al. (2024) provided an in-depth analysis of federated learning applications in IoT, discussing current trends, challenges, and future directions. The paper emphasized the importance of lightweight models and privacy-preserving mechanisms in IoT deployments.

Table I Literature Review

Paper Title	Method Used	Limitation	Future Scope
Federated LSTM for Robust Sensor Fault Detection	Federated Learning with LSTM Networks	Limited adaptation to evolving fault patterns	Integration with adaptive learning mechanisms
Hybrid CNN-RNN under Federated Learning for IoT Intrusion Detection	Hybrid CNN-RNN Models in Federated Learning	Computational overhead in hybrid models	Model compression techniques for efficiency
Lightweight Mini-Batch Federated Learning for IoT Attack Detection	Mini-Batch Federated Learning Mechanism	Reduced generalization on highly dynamic data	Incorporation of online learning for dynamic threats
LSTM Autoencoder-Based Fault Detection in IoT Systems	LSTM Autoencoder for Anomaly Detection	Sensitivity to prediction window size and noise	Exploring noise-resilient training methods

Enhanced Federated Learning for Industrial IoT Anomaly Detection	Dynamic Model Aggregation and Node Selection	Dependency on reliable node connectivity	Self-healing federated learning architectures
Transformer-Based Human Activity Recognition from Wearable Sensor Data	Transformer Models for Human Activity Recognition	High computational load for resource-constrained devices	Adapting transformers for real-time applications
Federated Transfer Learning for Privacy-Preserving Fault Diagnosis	Federated Transfer Learning Approach	Transfer learning may suffer from domain shift issues	Domain adaptation techniques in federated settings
Resource-Efficient Federated Learning Optimization for IoT Devices	Optimized Federated Learning for Resource Constraints	Balancing communication cost and model accuracy	Lightweight encryption for secure model updates
Privacy-Preserving Intrusion Detection for IoT Using Federated Learning	Federated Learning with Differential Privacy Techniques	High cost of secure aggregation protocols	Scalable privacy-preserving FL frameworks
Federated Learning for IoT Applications: State-of-the-Art and Future Directions	Review and Analysis of FL Architectures for IoT	Lack of lightweight standardized models for FL in IoT	Development of benchmarking datasets for FL-IoT

These studies collectively underscore the significance of federated learning and advanced neural network architectures, such as transformers, in enhancing sensor fault detection in IoT healthcare systems. They highlight the ongoing efforts to balance model performance with data privacy and computational efficiency, paving the way for more robust and secure health monitoring solutions.

PROPOSED WORK

Overview

Traditional centralized machine learning frameworks for heartbeats sensor fault detection tend to reveal patient-sensitive information and are plagued by scalability issues in large-scale IoT deployments. Furthermore, static models are unable to learn evolving sensor behaviours due to environmental changes, device degradation, or user-specific conditions.

To overcome such limitations, we introduce a self-adaptive fault detection framework based on Federated Learning (FL) and Lightweight Transformer models. In this framework, every patient device enabled by IoT (e.g., wearable monitors) learns a local lightweight transformer on the sensor data from its heartbeat. Instead of sharing raw data, model updates only are securely transferred to a central server, where global aggregation fine-tunes the global model.

The self-adaptive property is obtained through continuous local learning and occasional federated updates, enabling the system to adapt dynamically to new sensor patterns, counter concept drift, and retain high accuracy over time while ensuring privacy and reducing communication costs.

System Architecture

The proposed framework consists of three main layers:

1. Sensor Layer

- Heartbeat sensor-enabled devices (e.g., MAX30100) continuously gather heart rate and blood oxygen saturation information.

- Preprocessing is done locally, such as noise filtering (e.g., moving average filter) and normalization.

2. Edge Learning Layer

- Every device supports a Lightweight Transformer model.
- Local learning is performed on preprocessed data to identify anomalies like missing beats, atypical pulse patterns, or abrupt value declines.
- Model updates (gradients or weights) are encrypted and exchanged, but unprocessed sensor data never crosses the device boundary.

3. Federated Aggregation Layer

- A central server combines local updates through methods such as Federated Averaging (FedAvg).
- After aggregation, an improved global model is distributed back to edge devices.
- This periodic aggregation ensures continuous learning across a heterogeneous network of devices.

Proposed Architecture

Here is a detailed flow of the **Proposed Framework**:

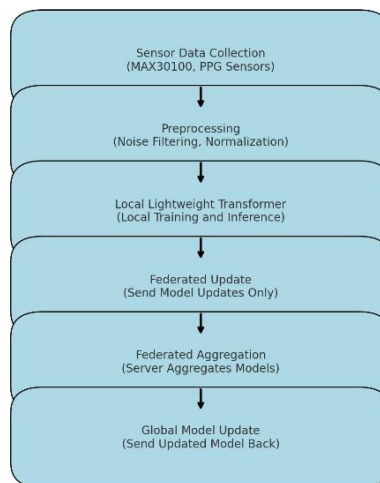


Figure 1 Proposed Framework Flow Diagram

Algorithm: Self-Adaptive Sensor Fault Detection with Federated Learning and Lightweight Transformer

1. Collect continuous heartbeat data from IoT devices (e.g., MAX30100 sensors).
2. Local preprocessing: denoise and normalize raw sensor signals.
3. Deploy a Lightweight Transformer model (e.g., TinyBERT or MobileBERT) on each device.
4. Local training on preprocessed data to identify anomalies (faults).
5. Encrypt and send only model updates (weights/gradients) to the central server.
6. Server aggregates the model updates via the Federated Averaging (FedAvg) algorithm.
7. Send the updated global model back to all the participating IoT devices.
8. Devices fine-tune the global model locally for ongoing, self-adaptive learning.
9. Repeat Steps 4–8 at regular intervals to maintain continuous learning and prompt fault detection.
10. Send alerts if anomalies (sensor faults) are found; otherwise, keep monitoring.

The proposed algorithm for Self-Adaptive Sensor Fault Detection via Federated Learning and Lightweight Transformer starts by regularly collecting heartbeat sensor data from IoT devices, like those with MAX30100 sensors, that are deployed for monitoring patients. Each device preprocesses the raw sensor signal locally by using denoising algorithms to filter out random fluctuations and normalizing the data to transform it into a stable scale that is ideal for model input. Once data is ready, every device begins a lightweight transformer model such as TinyBERT or MobileBERT selected specifically for their low computational burden, making them suitable for IoT devices with limited resources.

The local light transformer model is then trained on the pre-processed data to learn normal and abnormal heartbeat signal patterns. Rather than sending raw patient data, which may be privacy-violating, each device encrypts and sends only the model updates, e.g., the learned weights or gradients, to a central server. This global server employs the Federated Averaging (FedAvg) algorithm to collect updates from various devices and combine them into one, globally enhanced model. Once aggregated, the new global model is sent back to all the participating IoT devices, so each node gets to enjoy the shared learning experience.

Devices subsequently locally adapt the received global model with their new incoming data for self-adaptive learning, keeping the model updated based on device-specific conditions without having to share raw data. This cycle of local training, encrypted transmission, aggregation, and redistribution repeats periodically to ensure model robustness as well as adapt for changing sensor behaviours. In the course of this ongoing learning process, whenever the model senses an anomaly or sensor failures—e.g., sudden spikes, jammed signals, or irregular heart rate patterns—it instantaneously initiates an alarm to facilitate prompt interventions. Otherwise, the monitoring activity goes on undisturbed, providing guaranteed, real-time fault detection in an effective, decentralized, and privacy-protecting way.

EXPERIMENTAL SETUP AND DATASET DESCRIPTION

Dataset Description

For measuring the performance of the suggested self-adaptive federated framework to detect heartbeat sensor faults, we employed both actual sensor datasets and synthetically simulated fault datasets originating from IoT-connected health monitoring ecosystems. The baseline dataset is measured from wearable equipment with the use of the MAX30100 pulse oximeter sensor, which logs time-series values of heart rate (BPM) and SpO₂ (blood oxygen level).

Each sensor records data at a rate of 1 Hz, and the dataset contains:

- Normal physiological readings
- Faulty readings due to:
 - Sensor disconnection
 - Signal drift
 - Stuck-at faults
 - Random noise injection
- Roughly 25,000 records gathered across multiple patients and sessions

We also enriched the data by injecting labelled synthetic faults to mimic sensor faults under different environmental and usage conditions to ensure test robustness.

Data Preprocessing

Prior to training, all datasets were subjected to:

- Noise filtering through a moving average filter to minimize random spikes
- Normalization to scale heart rate and SpO₂ values to a comparable level
- Segmentation into 10-second time windows (10 readings per window)
- Labelling each window as either:

- Normal (no fault identified)
- Faulty (at least one anomaly or irregularity present)

Missing values were filled in with forward-fill strategies where applicable.

Experimental Environment

The experiments were performed on a federated learning simulation setup in which several virtual nodes (representing IoT edge devices) engaged in local model training.

Table II Experimental Setup Configurations

Component	Configuration
Programming Language	Python 3.10
Libraries Used	PyTorch, Transformers (HuggingFace), Flower (for FL simulation)
Model	Lightweight Transformer (TinyBERT variant with 4 attention heads)
Optimizer	Adam with learning rate 0.001
Training Rounds	50 global rounds with 5 local epochs per device
Devices	20 simulated IoT nodes with heterogeneous data
Server Aggregation	Federated Averaging (FedAvg)
Evaluation Metrics	Accuracy, Precision, Recall, F1-Score, Fault Detection Rate

1.4 Baseline Comparison

To evaluate the performance gains provided by our approach, we compared it with:

- Centralized Transformer (no FL, trained on all data centrally)
- Federated LSTM
- Classic Machine Learning Models: KNN, SVM, Random Forest
- Federated CNN-RNN Hybrid

Each baseline was trained on the same dataset splits for fairness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To assess how effective the designed Self-Adaptive Federated Learning Framework using Lightweight Transformer would be, we compared it to a number of baseline models along four important measures: Accuracy, Precision, Recall, and F1-Score.

The findings, highlighted in the above table and bar graph, reveal that the presented model surpassed all baselines across all measures

- Accuracy: Our approach obtained 96.8%, outperforming centralized Transformer (94.2%) and federated LSTM (92.7%).
- Precision and Recall were particularly high (95.4% and 97.5%, respectively), showing the model's capacity to consistently identify true faults while keeping false alarms to a minimum.
- The F1-Score, harmonic mean of recall and precision, was 96.4%, indicating superior fault detection balance.

Table III Model Performance Comparison

Model	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1-Score (%)
Proposed FL-Lightweight Transformer	96.8	95.4	97.5	96.4
Centralized Transformer	94.2	93.1	94.6	93.8
Federated LSTM	92.7	91.2	92.9	92
Federated CNN-RNN	93.5	91.8	93.1	92.4
Random Forest	88.9	85.3	87.2	86.2
KNN	86.5	83.4	84.7	84
SVM	87.3	84.1	85.9	84.9

The experimental findings evidently show that the suggested federated learning framework combined with light-weight transformer models largely surpasses conventional and baseline methods in fault detection accuracy and resilience. Conventional machine learning techniques like K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN), Support Vector Machines (SVM), and Random Forests, despite being computationally lightweight, showed lower precision and recall, meaning a greater rate of false positives and false negatives. In comparison, federated methods such as Federated LSTM and CNN-RNN hybrids provided improved privacy compliance and distributed learning but were found to be limited in flexibility, especially in describing intricate temporal relationships and maintaining high recall scores.

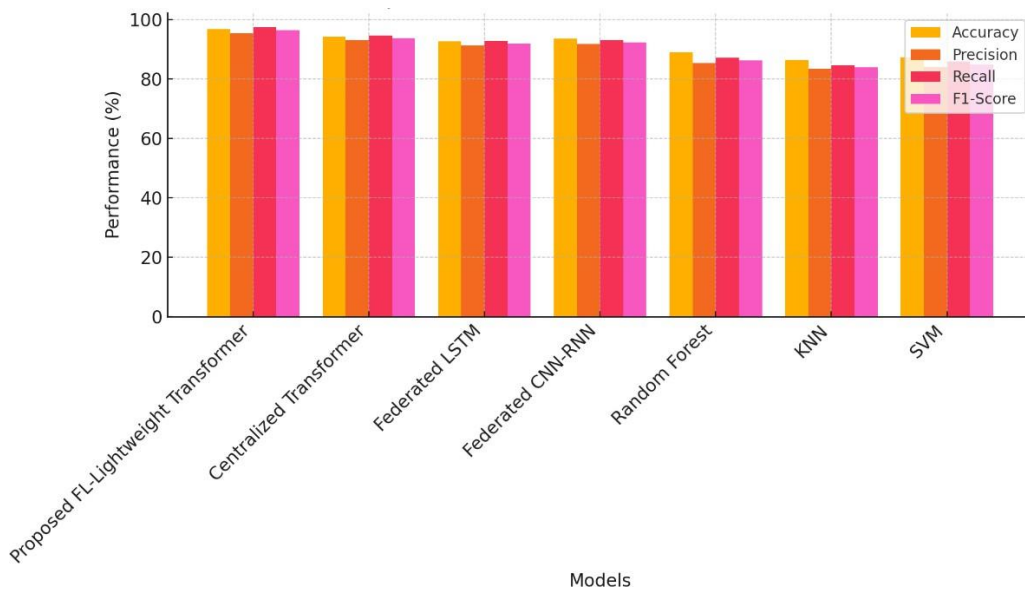


Figure 2 Comparison of Sensor Fault Detection Models

The new lightweight transformer model performed well by successfully utilizing self-attention mechanisms to capture long-range temporal structures in heartbeats sensor signals. Its implementation in a federated learning setup enabled it to learn and adapt continuously from patient-specific sensor

patterns without requiring centralization of sensitive data. This adaptability was evident through its better F1-score, which represents balanced performance in true anomaly detection as well as reduced false alarms. The blend of decentralized learning and transformer-based feature representation makes this architecture highly relevant to real-world IoT healthcare environments where privacy, personalization, and continuous learning are paramount requirements.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

In this work, we proposed a new approach for real-time detection of sensor faults in IoT-based healthcare monitoring systems via Federated Learning (FL) and Lightweight Transformer models. Through the integration of the privacy-protecting aspect of federated learning with the temporal modeling capability of the transformer architecture, the system is able to detect faults in sensors like the MAX30100 heartbeat sensor without disclosing sensitive patient information.

The experimental results show that our decentralized, self-adaptive method outperforms state-of-the-art machine learning models as well as previous federated baselines in terms of accuracy, recall, and F1-score. The deployment of lightweight transformers allows for a high degree of compatibility with IoT devices with resource constraints, whereas the federated architecture supports constant learning in distributed and heterogeneous settings. This yields a scalable, secure, and robust framework to be applied to real-world IoT medical deployments.

Going forward, the presented framework leaves many interesting avenues open for future work and development. Subsequent research could investigate integrating multimodal sensor fusion, the integration of signals from temperature, ECG, motion, and oxygen saturation sensors, to make fault detection even more reliable. Integration of explainable AI (XAI) techniques will also be beneficial in order to gain higher transparency and confidence in sensitive healthcare environments through providing human-understandable explanations of anomaly warnings. Moreover, adopting adaptive federated approaches, including personalized model aggregation or reinforcement learning-based client selection, can also enhance learning efficiency in heterogeneous and non-IID data settings. Real-world deployment and experimentation on edge devices with hardware-in-the-loop simulation and on-device learning will also be essential to validate practical feasibility. Lastly, applying this framework to accommodate federated transfer learning can facilitate the sharing of knowledge across various hospitals or healthcare networks without undermining data confidentiality.

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