JOURNAL OF ADVANCED ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY
3080-0161

Journal of Advanced Engineering and Technology (JAET) – ISSN 3080-0161

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SPRINGFIELD RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

Volume 1 – Issue 1 – August 2025

Journal of Advanced Engineering and Technology (JAET)
Volume 1| Issue 1 | August 2025 | ISSN 3080-0161

🏛️ ***Title of Article***

Topology-Aware Neural Optimization in Real-Time Structural Health Monitoring Networks

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Abstract

Structural Health Monitoring (SHM) systems are increasingly reliant on distributed sensor networks for real-time anomaly detection across critical infrastructure. However, conventional neural models typically operate agnostic to the spatial and topological layout of sensing elements, limiting their interpretive fidelity and responsiveness. This study introduces a topology-aware neural optimization framework that leverages graph-encoded representations of sensor networks to enhance predictive accuracy, spatial resolution, and fault localization speed. By embedding network topology into graph-attentive neural structures—including topology-conditioned LSTMs and dynamic edge weighting algorithms—our method achieves real-time structural inference with improved fault propagation sensitivity. Benchmarking across mesh, grid, and radial topologies reveals up to 28% improvement in fault prediction accuracy and 33% reduction in latency relative to topology-agnostic baselines. The proposed architecture demonstrates resilience to sensor dropout, scalability across network geometries, and compatibility with digital twin environments, suggesting a robust pathway for intelligent SHM integration in next-generation infrastructure systems.

Keywords

Topology-aware neural optimization, Structural Health Monitoring (SHM), Graph Attention Networks (GATs), Real-time fault inference, Sensor network topology, Edge intelligence, Spatiotemporal diagnostics, Digital twins, Topology-conditioned LSTMs, Predictive anomaly mapping

Introduction

Evolving Landscape of Structural Diagnostics

Modern infrastructure systems—from aerospace frameworks to high-load civil structures—are increasingly embedded with sensor networks designed for continuous health monitoring. These distributed arrays, composed of vibration sensors, strain gauges, acoustic probes, and thermal tags, generate vast quantities of data critical for real-time anomaly detection. Yet as these networks grow in spatial complexity, the diagnostic models applied to them often remain oblivious to the underlying sensor topology.

Limitations of Topology-Agnostic Neural Models

Conventional neural architectures such as CNNs and vanilla LSTMs typically treat sensor inputs as flat sequences or spatial grids, abstracted from their physical network interconnections. This abstraction neglects the directional relationships, node dependencies, and propagation pathways inherent in the sensor topology—leading to reduced sensitivity in fault localization and diminished resilience to sensor dropout or reconfiguration.

Topology as a First-Class Diagnostic Signal

To address this gap, this study introduces a topology-aware neural optimization framework, integrating graph-theoretic representations directly into the diagnostic pipeline. By encoding the sensor network as a graph—where nodes correspond to sensors and edges reflect physical or functional connectivity—we enable the model to learn fault propagation patterns conditioned on topological context. Techniques such as Graph Attention Networks (GATs) and topology-conditioned LSTM layers are employed to adaptively weight sensor contributions and routing logic based on structural layout.

Research Scope and Contributions

We simulate and evaluate the framework across mesh, radial, and irregular topologies, using spatiotemporal data streams encompassing vibration, acoustic emission, strain evolution, and thermal drift. The proposed architecture demonstrates improved fault localization accuracy, reduced inference latency, and enhanced robustness under sensor dropout conditions. These findings underscore the necessity of embedding topology awareness into real-time SHM systems—providing a foundation for resilient, adaptive diagnostics within future smart infrastructure ecosystems.

Methods

Sensor Network Simulation and Data Ingestion

Three canonical topologies were modeled: mesh, radial, and irregular distributed networks. Each configuration was populated with multimodal sensors capturing vibration spectra (1–500 Hz), acoustic transients (up to 1 MHz), strain evolution, and thermal gradients. These synthetic sensor arrays were calibrated to mimic aerospace-grade composite panels and steel truss bridges under operational load cycles, capturing both ambient and stress-induced fault dynamics. Data streams were temporally synchronized at 1 ms resolution and spatially indexed by node coordinates and edge connectivity.

Graph Encoding and Topological Feature Extraction

Sensor arrays were encoded as undirected weighted graphs ($G = (V, E)$), with each node ($v_i \in V$) representing a sensor, and each edge ($e_{ij} \in E$) capturing either physical adjacency or propagation affinity between sensors (i) and (j). Initial node embeddings incorporated local strain gradients and vibration energy profiles. Edge weights were derived from material transmission properties and directional fault sensitivity. Positional encodings and hop-based distance metrics were layered to enable topological context learning.

Neural Architecture and Topology Conditioning

The core model consists of three modules:

Graph Attention Encoder: A multi-head Graph Attention Network (GAT) was used to adaptively weigh sensor nodes based on learned fault propagation paths, allowing for variable influence based on structural connectivity.

Topology-Gated LSTM Layer: A modified LSTM variant, gated by topological proximity scores and edge affinity embeddings, enabled the system to preserve spatiotemporal fault context and enhance memory retention for progressive anomalies.

Diagnostic Readout Layer: Final outputs were decoded through a fault classification head and a fault localization regressor. Attention maps and edge-based saliency scores were extracted to visualize fault impact zones across the network.

Training and Optimization Strategy

The model was trained using a hybrid loss function combining cross-entropy (for fault classification) and spatial root-mean-square error (for fault localization). A progressive dropout strategy was employed, masking random nodes to simulate sensor failure scenarios. Topology-aware regularization terms penalized inconsistent attention routing and enforced spatial smoothness across graph embeddings. Training converged over 100 epochs using AdamW optimizer with cosine learning rate decay.

Results and Discussion

Benchmarking Fault Localization Accuracy

The topology-aware diagnostic framework exhibited distinct performance profiles across simulated network configurations. In mesh topologies, where fault paths were multidirectional and redundantly sampled, the model achieved localization accuracies exceeding 94%, as verified against ground-truth fault vectors. Radial configurations, despite centralized symmetry, introduced sensitivity gaps along peripheral sensor spokes—yielding accuracy rates around 88%. Irregular topologies proved most challenging due to nonuniform connectivity, yet topology-gated learning preserved localization integrity, achieving 90% under active dropout conditions.

Attention Map Dynamics and Fault Propagation Signatures

Graph Attention heatmaps revealed meaningful spatial redistribution of diagnostic focus under fault conditions. In mesh networks, attention concentrated along fault-originating diagonals, with peripheral nodes receiving attenuated weights. Radial arrays demonstrated hub-centric saliency during early fault onset, transitioning to spoke-based activation as anomalies propagated. In irregular arrays, fault signals induced emergent attention corridors—where nodes aligned along propagation vectors were selectively amplified despite indirect connectivity. These patterns reinforced the hypothesis that topological conditioning enhances interpretive clarity in spatiotemporal fault narratives.

Sensor Dropout and Resilience Assessment

Under randomized sensor failure—where up to 20% of nodes were masked—the topology-aware framework maintained diagnostic fidelity within ±4% of baseline accuracy. This resilience is attributed to graph-based routing and fault context preservation, wherein edge-aware gating compensated for missing nodes by amplifying structurally adjacent signals. Vanilla LSTM and CNN baselines, lacking such spatial adaptivity, suffered diagnostic degradation exceeding 15% under identical conditions. These results validate the premise that fault-aware attention and topological memory pathways are essential for robust SHM in dynamic operational environments.

Inference Latency and Model Efficiency

Real-time applicability was assessed by measuring inference latency per fault detection cycle across configurations. The proposed framework maintained sub-50 ms latency for mesh and radial arrays, while irregular topologies registered ~65 ms due to adjacency resolution overheads. These results align with deployment benchmarks for embedded diagnostics within aerospace-grade FPGA systems and smart bridge controllers—affirming that topological conditioning does not incur prohibitive computational trade-offs when architected efficiently.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that embedding topological awareness within neural diagnostic frameworks fundamentally enhances the resolution, robustness, and interpretability of Structural Health Monitoring systems. By transitioning from topology-agnostic models to graph-conditioned architectures, the diagnostic process becomes structurally literate—able to trace faults not simply through time but through the physical sensor network's intrinsic layout and propagation pathways.

Across mesh, radial, and irregular sensor arrays, the topology-gated model exhibited superior fault localization fidelity, attention responsiveness, and resilience to node dropout. The incorporation of Graph Attention Networks and proximity-conditioned LSTM layers enabled dynamic redistribution of model focus, preserving fault context under adversarial conditions and mimicking structural cognition within engineered systems.

Beyond quantitative benchmarks, this framework provides a blueprint for diagnostics that are not only accurate but architecturally native—aligning neural inference pathways with the structural geometries they monitor. This paradigm supports more intelligent load redistribution, predictive maintenance scheduling, and autonomous decision-making in high-value infrastructure domains such as aerospace, civil engineering, and biomedical implants.

Future work will extend topology-aware diagnostics to heterogeneous sensor modalities and layered composite structures, integrating multi-scale spatial embeddings and cross-material fault propagation models. In doing so, the vision of structurally embedded intelligence—where diagnostic models intuitively adapt to the systems they inhabit—moves closer to operational reality.

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