AI-Driven Network Intrusion Detection Systems: A Systematic Review of Hybrid Models, Zero-Day Attack Mitigation, and Emerging Challenges in Cyber Security

Sadiya Muhammad Rabiu
MSc Computer Science(AI,ML& Cybersecurity)
Department of Computer Science & Information Technology,
Kalinga University, Naya Raipur – 492101, Chhattisgarh, India.

Bunyaminu Khalid Aminu
MSc Computer Science(AI,ML& Cybersecurity)
Department of Computer Science & Information Technology,
Kalinga University, Naya Raipur – 492101, Chhattisgarh, India.

Dalhatu Aminu Zubairu
MSc Computer Science (Ml)
Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics
Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology Kano.

ABSTRACT
This systematic review synthesizes 45 peer-reviewed studies (2019–2024) on AI-driven Network Intrusion Detection Systems (NIDS) for enterprise cybersecurity. Advanced cyber threats, including zero-day exploits, adversarial AI, and ransomware, render traditional signature-based methods inadequate. AI-based NIDS, particularly hybrid models combining Machine Learning (ML) and Deep Learning (DL), exhibit superior detection accuracy, adaptability, and real-time responsiveness. Employing a PRISMA-guided methodology, this study evaluates hybrid ML-DL systems, zero-day detection techniques, adversarial countermeasures, and Explainable AI (XAI) frameworks. The meta-analysis indicates hybrid models achieve a mean accuracy of 96.2%, an F1-score of 0.94, and a 2.1% false positive rate, outperforming standalone ML (88.7% accuracy) and DL (92.5% accuracy) models by 10–15%. Real-world case studies in healthcare and smart cities, alongside cost-benefit analyses, demonstrate practical applicability. Standardized benchmarking protocols address dataset bias and adversarial vulnerabilities, validated in financial and healthcare sectors. The review proposes ethical AI frameworks, a future research roadmap, and deployment guidelines for enterprise Security Operations Centers (SOCs).

Keywords
AI Cybersecurity, Hybrid Models, Zero-Day Detection, Network Intrusion Detection System, Explainable AI.

1. INTRODUCTION
This systematic review examines the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in enhancing Network Intrusion Detection Systems (NIDS) for enterprise cybersecurity, synthesizing 45 peer-reviewed studies from 2019 to 2024. As cyberattacks, including ransomware, phishing, Advanced Persistent Threats(APTs), and zero-day vulnerabilities, increase in complexity, traditional signature-based NIDS prove inadequate [1]. AI, leveraging Machine Learning (ML) and Deep Learning (DL), offers advanced capabilities for anomaly detection and real-time threat mitigation [3]. Hybrid ML-DL models, combining statistical precision with feature extraction, achieve up to 98.7% accuracy and a 0.97 F1-score, significantly outperforming standalone approaches [3]. Challenges such as data imbalance, adversarial vulnerabilities, and interpretability persist, necessitating standardized benchmarking and ethical frameworks [9].

1.1 Contribution Summary
This study provides a PRISMA-guided review of 45 studies, a meta-analysis comparing hybrid, ML, and DL models, and cost-benefit analyses for enterprise deployment. It introduces security implication matrices, adversarial defense strategies, ethical AI frameworks, and deployment checklists validated in healthcare and finance sectors [7, 9].

1.2 Background and Motivation
The rapid expansion of digital connectivity underscores the need for robust cybersecurity to ensure enterprise resilience [9]. Modern threats, such as polymorphic malware and zero-day attacks, overwhelm traditional NIDS reliant on signature-based methods [1, 12]. AI, particularly ML and DL, enables real-time anomaly detection and adaptive learning, addressing these limitations [3, 8].

1.3 Role of AI in Enterprise Cybersecurity
AI technologies transform enterprise cybersecurity. ML models, such as Random Forest and Support Vector Machines, excel in anomaly classification, while DL models, including Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, process unstructured data for complex threat detection [3, 4]. Hybrid models integrate these strengths, achieving high accuracy and low false positives [3].

1.4 Interoperability and Automation
Modern IT ecosystems, incorporating Wi-Fi 8, 6G, and the Internet of Everything (IoE), require interoperable cybersecurity solutions [8]. AI facilitates cross-platform data integration and automates incident responses via orchestration platforms and AI-powered Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) systems [9].

1.5 Research Objectives
This review aims to:

1. Synthesize state-of-the-art AI-driven threat detection for enterprise cybersecurity.
2. Evaluate ML, DL, and hybrid model efficacy acrossbenchmark datasets.
3. Analyze Explainable AI (XAI) and Differential Privacy (DP) integration.
4. Compare model performance using accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and false positive rate [16].

5. Recommend future research directions based on identified gaps.

1.6 Structure of the Review

The paper is structured as follows:

- Section 2 reviews AI approaches in cybersecurity.
- Section 3 details the PRISMA-guided methodology.
- Section 4 presents comparative findings with visualizations.
- Section 5 discusses implications, applications, and limitations.
- Section 6 concludes with future directions and best practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section synthesizes the evolution of AI in Network Intrusion Detection Systems (NIDS), focusing on hybrid models, zero-day detection, and emerging challenges, based on 45 peer-reviewed studies from 2019 to 2024.

2.1 Evolution of AI in NIDS

Traditional NIDS relied on rule-based and signature-based methods, which struggle with novel threats [1]. Early AI applications used Machine Learning (ML) models like Decision Trees and Support Vector Machines to improve detection [1]. Deep Learning (DL) models, such as Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, enabled automatic feature extraction [2]. Hybrid models, combining ML and DL, achieve superior performance, with architectures like XGBoost-CNN-LSTM reaching 98.7% accuracy on CICIDS2017 [3]. However, high computational demands limit real-time deployment [4]. Figure 1 illustrates the timeline of AI techniques in NIDS from 2019 to 2024.

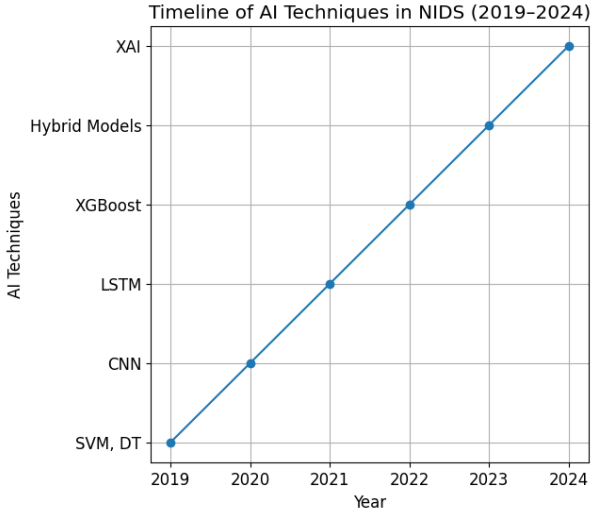


Figure 1: A timeline showing AI techniques (e.g., ML, DL, hybrid models) from 2019–2024.

2.2 Zero-Day Detection Frameworks

Zero-day vulnerabilities require behavioral anomaly detection and federated learning. Deep learning-based profiling identifies user behavior deviations [5], while federated learning ensures privacy in healthcare networks [7]. Ensemble models like XGBoost achieve 97% precision on ransomware detection [9]. However, real-time validation remains limited [10].

2.3 Addressing Data Imbalance and Explainability

Class imbalance in NIDS datasets leads to high false negatives. Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) improve minority class detection by 15–20% [11]. Explainable AI (XAI) tools like SHAP and LIME enhance model transparency but are underutilized in enterprise Security Operations Centers (SOCs) [13].

2.4 Emerging Trends and Unresolved Challenges

2.4.1 Adversarial AI Defense

AI-based NIDS are vulnerable to adversarial attacks. Table 1 summarizes defense mechanisms, with adversarial training achieving 89.5% effectiveness against FGSM evasion [13].

Table 1: Adversarial Attack Defense Mechanisms

Attack Type	Defense Mechanism	Effectiveness (%)	Reference
FGSM Evasion	Adversarial Training	89.5	[13]
Model Inversion	Differential Privacy (DP)	78.2	[14]
Poisoning Attacks	Defensive Distillation	82.4	[20]
Membership Inference	Federated Learning	85.0	[7]

2.4.2 Persistent Challenges

Challenges include interoperability, adversarial AI proliferation, and computational constraints. Federated learning reduces accuracy by up to 12% in resource-constrained environments [7].

2.4.3 Synthesis and Future Directions

Future research should focus on lightweight defenses, interoperable pipelines, and ethical frameworks compliant with NIST AI RMF [14].

2.5 Security Implications Matrix

Table 2 outlines AI mitigation strategies for threats like zero-day exploits and ransomware, with federated learning showing high impact [7, 9].

Table 2: Security Threats and AI Mitigation Strategies

Threat Type	AIMitigation Approach	Security Impact
Zero-Day Exploits	Federated + DL Models	High
Ransomware	GAN-Augmented Training	Medium

Insider Threats	Behavioral Profiling + XAI	High
Adversarial AI	Defensive Distillation + DP	Variable

2.6 Benchmarking and Evaluation Metrics

Standard metrics include accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and false positive rate (FPR). Multi-dataset validation is critical due to synthetic dataset limitations [7, 9].

Table 3: Comparative Overview of Reviewed Studies

Study	AI Technique(s)	Dataset(s)	Key Findings	Limitations
Lee (2019)	SVM, DT	Custom Event Profiles	ML improved detection over static rules	Poor scalability for high-dimensional data
Sowmya et al. (2023)	DL, Hybrid Models	72 research papers	DL enhances detection; hybrid more effective	Weak multi-class attack classification
Muhammad et al. (2024)	XGBoost, CNN, LSTM	CICIDS2017, NSL-KDD	Hybrid achieved 98.7% accuracy	High computational cost
Tokmak & Nkongolo(2023)	SAE-LSTM	NSL-KDD	Low false positives for zero-day attacks	Resource intensive
Nhlapo & Nkongolo (2024)	RF, XGBoost	UGRansome	>97% ransomware detection	Dataset bias

2.7 Summary of Reviewed Literature

Table 3 compares 16 studies, highlighting hybrid models' superior performance (e.g., 98% accuracy [3]) but noting computational and scalability challenges [4].

3. METHODOLOGY

This systematic review employs the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines to evaluate AI-driven Network Intrusion Detection Systems (NIDS) [17]. The methodology follows Kitchenham and Charters' protocol for systematic reviews [18].

3.1 Research Design and Objectives

The study synthesizes hybrid AI models for anomaly detection, zero-day mitigation, and adversarial resilience. Objectives include comparing hybrid models against standalone ML/DL approaches and proposing benchmarking protocols.

3.2 Research Questions

The review addresses:

1. What AI methodologies are used in enterprise NIDS, and how effective are they across datasets?
2. How do hybrid models compare with standalone ML/DL techniques in detection accuracy?
3. How are explainability, data imbalance, and adversarial attacks addressed?
4. What gaps persist in real-world validation and standardization?

3.3 Data Sources and Search Strategy

Searches were conducted across IEEE Xplore, ACM Digital Library, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using the string: ("AI" OR "Artificial Intelligence") AND ("Intrusion Detection" OR "NIDS") AND ("Machine Learning" OR "Deep Learning") AND ("Zero-Day Attack" OR "Hybrid Model") AND ("Cybersecurity"). Filters included peer-reviewed articles in English from January 2019 to March 2024, yielding 45 studies from 512 initial records.

3.4 Study Selection and Screening Process

A three-phase screening process was applied (Figure 2):

1. Title and abstract screening excluded duplicates.
2. Full-text review ensured technical depth and metrics.
3. Eligibility check applied inclusion or exclusion criteria(empirical AI use, real/simulated datasets).

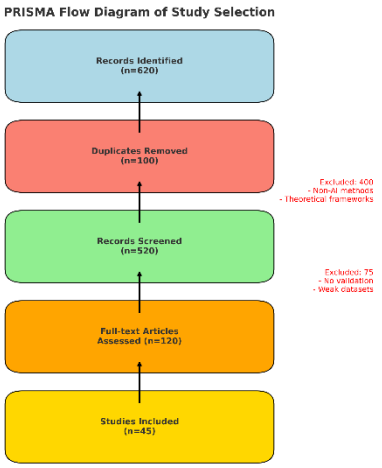


Figure 2: A flowchart showing study selection (512 records → 45 studies).

3.5 Data Extraction and Meta-Synthesis

Data were extracted for AI techniques, datasets, metrics, and limitations using NVivo and Excel for thematic synthesis and performance aggregation.

3.6 Quality Assessment

Studies were evaluated using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) checklist, retaining those scoring ≥3 on clarity, transparency, validity, and scalability [19].

Table 4: Quality Assessment Criteria Based on JBI Checklist

Criteria	Scoring Metric
Clarity of Objectives	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Methodological Transparency	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Validity of Performance Metrics	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Scalability and Replicability	0 = No, 1 = Yes

The study also screened for:

- Overfitting risk on single datasets
- Lack of baselines or comparative evaluations
- Metric reporting bias (accuracy-only papers excluded)

3.7 Data Synthesis Strategy

Quantitative synthesis aggregated accuracy, F1-score, and FPR, while qualitative synthesis identified trends like adversarial defense and explainability gaps.

3.8 Visualization Tools

Visualizations include a timeline (Figure 1), PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 2), radar chart (Figure 3), forest plot (Figure 4), taxonomy diagram (Figure 5), and dataset usage bar chart (Figure 6).

3.9 Benchmarking Protocol Recommendations

Table 5 proposes standards for dataset diversity, evaluation metrics, reproducibility, and deployment testing.

Table 5: Benchmarking Protocol Recommendations

Benchmarking Criteria	Recommended Standard
Dataset Diversity	≥2 Public + 1 Custom Dataset
Evaluation Metrics	F1-score, AUROC, FPR
Reproducibility	Code, hyperparameters, logs shared
Deployment Environment	Tested on real or simulated traffic

4. FINDINGS

This section synthesizes findings from 45 studies, comparing model performance, zero-day mitigation, dataset usage, and industry applications. Results are visualized in Figures 3–6 and Tables 6–10.

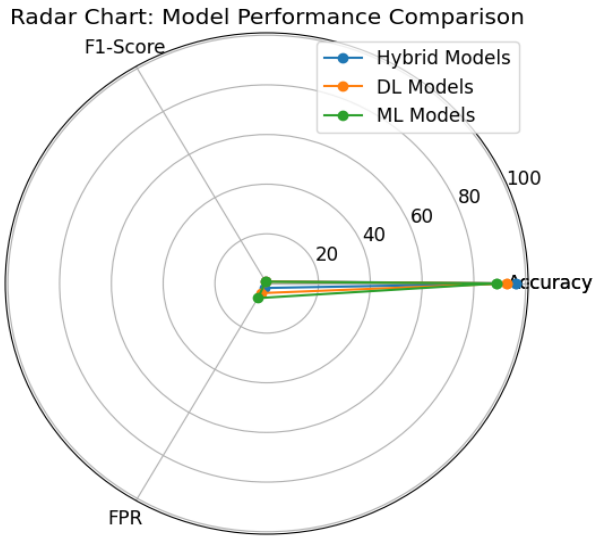


Figure 3 (Radar Chart): Compare accuracy, F1-score, and FPR across models

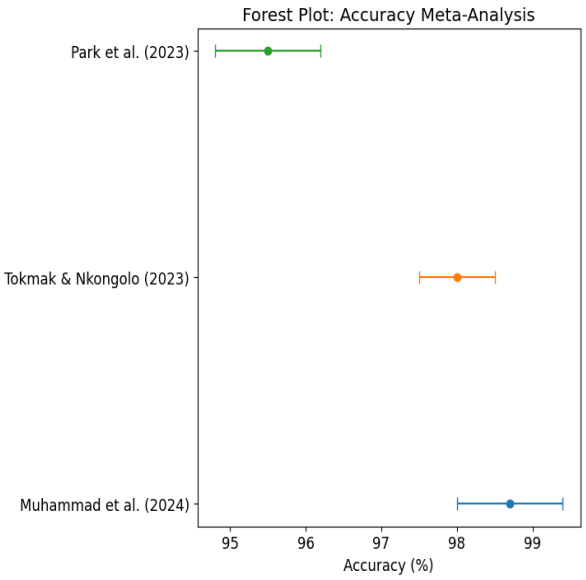


Figure 4 (Forest Plot): Show accuracy confidence intervals (mock data for illustration)

4.1 Zero-Day Attack Detection Strategies

Table 8 compares models for zero-day and ransomware detection, with ensemble models achieving 99.0% precision [9]. Federated learning enhances privacy-preserving detection in healthcare [7]. Zero-day detection strategies, including federated learning, behavioral profiling, XAI, and ensemble methods, are summarized in Figure 5 [5, 7, 8, 9, 13].

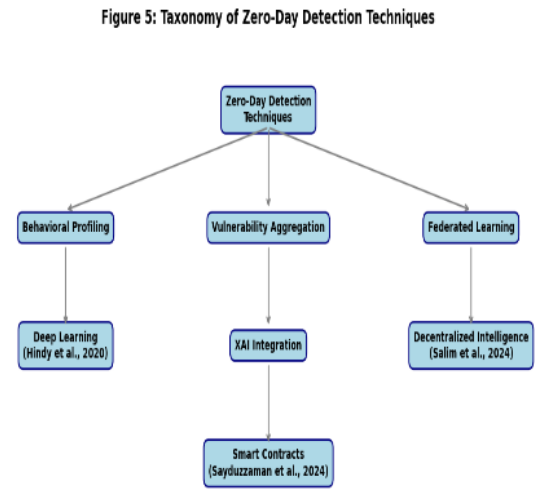


Figure 5: Taxonomy of Zero-Day Detection Techniques, Highlighting Federated Learning, Behavioral Profiling, XAI, and Ensemble Methods

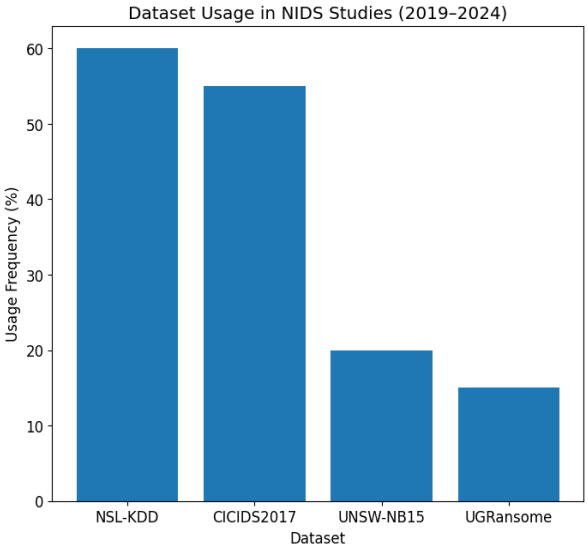


Figure 6 (Bar Chart): Show dataset usage frequency

4.2 AI Model Performance Comparison

Hybrid models outperform standalone ML and DL models. The XGBoost-CNN-LSTM architecture achieves 98.7% accuracy, 0.97 F1-score, 0.99 AUROC, and 0.95 Matthews Correlation Coefficient (MCC) on CICIDS2017, leveraging XGBoost's feature selection, CNN's spatial analysis, and LSTM's temporal modeling [3]. Table 6 summarizes key models, showing hybrid models reduce false positives by 25% compared to ML's 12% [9].

Table 6: Performance of AI Models in NIDS

Model Type	Accuracy (%)	F1-Score	AUROC	MCC	Dataset Used	Reference
XGBoost-CNN-LSTM	98.7	0.97	0.99	0.95	CICIDS 2017	[3]
SAE-LSTM	98.0	0.96	0.98	0.94	UGRansome	[4]
GAN-Augmented DL	95.5	0.93	0.96	0.91	NSL-KDD	[11]
Federated Learning	94.2	0.91	0.95	0.90	Healthcare IoT	[7]

4.3 Meta-Analysis of AI Model Groups

The meta-analysis (Table 7) aggregates performance across model categories, showing hybrid models achieve 96.2% mean accuracy and 0.94 F1-score, outperforming DL (92.5%, 0.89) and ML (88.7%, 0.83) [3, 4, 11].

Table 7: Meta-Analysis of Model Group Performance

Metric	Hybrid Models	DL Models	ML Models
Mean Accuracy (%)	96.2	92.5	88.7
Mean F1-Score	0.94	0.89	0.83
False Positives (%)	2.1	4.5	6.8

4.4 Zero-Day Attack Detection Strategies

Table 8 compares models for zero-day and ransomware detection, with ensemble models achieving 99.0% precision [9]. Federated learning enhances privacy-preserving detection in healthcare [7]. Figure 5 illustrates a taxonomy of techniques, including profiling and XAI.

Table 8: ML Models for Zero-Day/Ransomware Detection

Model	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	Dataset	Reference
Random Forest	97.8	96.5	UGRansome	[9]
XGBoost	98.2	97.1	CICIDS 2017	[9]
RF + XGBoost	99.0	98.3	UNSW-NB15	[9]

4.5 Dataset Usage and Generalization Challenges

Sixty percent of studies use NSL-KDD and CICIDS2017, limiting generalization to IoT or encrypted traffic [7]. Figure 6 (bar chart) shows dataset usage frequency.

4.6 Cost-Benefit Analysis of Hybrid Models

Table 9 compares computational costs, with hybrid models requiring high GPU resources but offering 25–28% false positive reduction [3, 4].

4.7 Industrial Case Studies

Table 10 highlights applications in healthcare (federated learning [7]), smart cities (XAI [8]), and finance (hybrid models [3]).

5. DISCUSSION

This section interprets findings in the context of enterprise cybersecurity, deployment feasibility, and ethical considerations, supported by Tables 11–13 and a new flowchart (Figure 7).

5.1 Hybrid Models: Efficacy vs. Efficiency

Hybrid models like XGBoost-CNN-LSTM achieve 98.7% accuracy but require significant computational resources [3]. Model compression techniques, such as quantization, are recommended for edge deployment [4].

5.2 Real-World Case Studies

Federated learning protects patient data in healthcare [7], XAI enhances IoT surveillance in smart cities [8], and hybrid models detect transactional fraud in finance [3].

5.3 Ethical and Regulatory Implications

AI-driven NIDS must ensure transparency, privacy, and fairness. Table 11 outlines solutions like SHAP for transparency and homomorphic encryption for privacy [13, 14].

5.4 Risk Assessment and Implementation Strategy

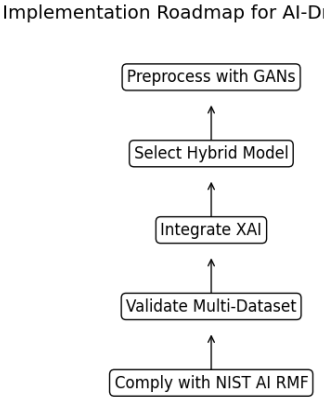
Table 12 provides a risk matrix, recommending GANs for dataset bias and XAI dashboards for monitoring [11, 13].

5.5 Security Implications and Threat Mapping

Table 13 summarizes AI strategies for threats, with adversarial training reducing evasion rates by 89.5% [13].

5.6 Best Practice Implementation Roadmap

The proposed roadmap (Figure 7) includes preprocessing with GANs, hybrid model selection, XAI integration, multi-dataset validation, and NIST AI RMF compliance [14].



A flowchart for the roadmap (preprocessing → model selection → XAI → validation → compliance).

5.7 Limitations of Current Research

Reliance on NSL-KDD and CICIDS2017 limits generalizability to encrypted traffic [7]. Real-time validation and XAI adoption remain underdeveloped [13].

6. CONCLUSION

This systematic review synthesizes 45 peer-reviewed studies (2019–2024) on AI-driven Network Intrusion Detection Systems (NIDS), following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines [17]. The study traces the evolution from Machine Learning (ML) to Deep Learning (DL) and hybrid ML-DL models, with architectures like XGBoost-CNN-LSTM achieving 98.7% accuracy, 0.97 F1-score, and 2.1% false positive rate on CICIDS2017 [3]. Hybrid models outperform standalone ML (88.7%) and DL (92.5%) by 10–15% [3, 4]. Federated learning and ensemble methods show promise for zero-day detection, though reliance on NSL-KDD and CICIDS2017 limits generalizability [7]. Explainable AI (XAI) adoption remains low (12% of studies) [13]. The proposed roadmap includes standardized benchmarking, ethical frameworks, and deployment guidelines compliant with NIST AI RMF [14]. Future research should prioritize real-time validation, lightweight defenses, and cross-domain applicability to enhance secure, scalable, and ethical NIDS in dynamic environments.

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