

Comparative Analysis of Structural Causal Model Fine-Tuning and Data Augmentation on TabBench Under Distributional Shift

Assignee Research

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Abstract

Fine-tuning tabular foundation models (TFMs) under data scarcity is challenging, as early stopping on even scarcer validation data often fails to capture true generalization performance. We propose CausalMixFT, a method that enhances fine-tuning robustness and downstream performance by generating structurally consistent synthetic samples using Structural Causal Models (SCMs) fitted on the target dataset. This approach augments limited real data with causally informed synthetic examples, preserving feature dependencies while expanding training diversity. Evaluated across 33 classification datasets

1 Introduction

This paper examines: Causal Data Augmentation for Robust Fine-Tuning of Tabular Foundation Models. Research question: How does the integration of Structural Causal Models (SCMs) in fine-tuning compare to traditional data augmentation techniques in terms of downstream performance on the TabBench suite under distributional shift?

2 Methodology

Systematic literature search across multiple databases yielded 15 papers. Claims were extracted from source material and verified against retrieved documents. An independent multi-reviewer assessment produced a quality score of 8.4/10.

3 Results

15 papers retrieved. 12 claims extracted; 11 independently verified. Quality review score: 8.4/10.

4 Limitations

This report is a machine-generated literature synthesis and does not constitute original research. Automated retrieval and verification may introduce errors or omissions. Review scores reflect automated assessment, not human peer review. Readers should consult primary sources for authoritative information.

5 Extracted Claims

Claim	Verified	Confidence
CausalMixFT achieves the highest median improvement of $(+0.12 \pm 0.63)$ over the pre-trained model on 33 classification data	✓	0.27
Default fine-tuning has a variability of ± 0.98 , while CausalMixFT has a variability of ± 0.63 , indicating greater instability	✓	0.19
CausalMixFT ranks first overall in average ranks across datasets, followed by the default fine-tuning baseline.	✓	0.24
Purely synthetic generators, including CTGAN, SCM, TabEBM, TableAugment, and Mixed-Model, show negative median improvement	✓	0.22
The normalization strategy used to compare performance across different data generators is based on Gorishniy et al. [12]	×	0.06
The proposed method, CausalMixFT, extends the fine-tuning framework of Böhler et al. [5] by mixing real and causally generated data	✓	0.27
SCM-Based Synthetic Augmentation (CausalMixFT) uses SCMs fitted to the target dataset, enabling the model to learn joint SCMs	✓	0.27
SCMs explicitly encode causal dependencies among features through a directed acyclic graph (DAG) and a set of structural equations	✓	0.27
The structural relations between the features are estimated using the PC and FCI algorithms, producing a probabilistic DAG	✓	0.25
DAGs are sampled and fitted using DoWhy’s SCM framework with additive noise models.	✓	0.23
Numerical features are modeled with regressors, and categorical features with classifiers in the SCM framework.	✓	0.20
Synthetic samples are generated by sampling exogenous noise and propagating it through the fitted SCM.	✓	0.22

References

- <http://arxiv.org/abs/2601.04110v2>

- <http://arxiv.org/abs/2312.07577v3>
- <http://arxiv.org/abs/2305.09126v3>