ISSN (Print): 2957-9325, ISSN (Online): 2957-9333

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF APPLIED ENGINEERING RESEARCH TRANSACTION

(Open Access-Referred-Peer-Reviewed Journal)

Journal homepage:https://ijaer-transaction.com/

Research Article

AI BASED RISK MANAGEMENT SAFETY IN CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

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Article History	**Received:** 27.03.2025	**Accepted**: 18.04.2025	**Published:** 20.04.2025

Abstract

The construction industry faces persistent challenges related to safety and risk management due to its dynamic, high-risk, and resource-intensive nature. Traditional risk mitigation approaches, while effective to an extent, are limited in adaptability, scalability, and real-time responsiveness. With recent advancements in digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative solution capable of enhancing risk identification, accident prediction, and safety monitoring in construction projects. This review critically examines existing literature on conventional risk management methods and explores how AI techniques such as machine learning, natural language processing, computer vision, and Internet of Things (IoT)-based systems are being leveraged for improved safety outcomes. It further highlights the advantages of AI integration, implementation challenges, organizational barriers, and ethical concerns. The paper also discusses the future of AI-enabled safety systems, including integration with Building Information Modeling (BIM) and digital twins, and identifies key research gaps for future exploration. Overall, AI has the potential to shift construction safety management from a reactive to a predictive and preventive paradigm, contributing to safer and more efficient project delivery.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI); Construction Safety; Risk Management; Machine Learning; Computer Vision; Predictive Analytics; Internet of Things (IoT); BIM; Digital Twin; Occupational Safety; Construction Technology; Safety Monitoring Systems

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Risk Management in Construction

Risk management in construction refers to the systematic process of identifying, assessing, and mitigating risks that may negatively impact project objectives such as cost, time, quality, and safety. Construction projects are inherently complex and dynamic, involving various stakeholders, environments, and activities that contribute to high uncertainty (Zou, Zhang, & Wang, 2007). These risks range from financial and legal issues to technical failures and safety hazards on-site. Effective risk management is therefore essential to avoid delays, reduce cost overruns, and ensure project success. Traditional approaches to risk management rely heavily on manual processes, expert judgment, and static risk registers, which may lack accuracy and real-time responsiveness (Tah & Carr, 2000).

1.2 Importance of Safety in Construction Projects

Safety in construction is a major concern worldwide due to the industry's high rate of fatalities and injuries. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021), the construction industry accounts for a significant proportion of occupational accidents globally. Ensuring safety is not only a moral and legal responsibility but also a key factor influencing productivity, employee well-being, and project performance. Unsafe practices can lead to severe consequences, including human loss, litigation, reputational damage, and increased costs. Consequently, the integration of effective safety protocols and proactive safety planning has become a critical component of construction project management (Hinze, 2006).

1.3 Emergence of Artificial Intelligence in Risk Mitigation

With the advancement of digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative tool for enhancing risk management and safety in construction. AI technologies such as machine learning, computer vision, natural language processing, and predictive analytics enable the automation and enhancement of traditional risk assessment processes (Li, Becerik-Gerber, & Calis, 2020). These technologies provide the ability to analyze vast amounts of real-time data, identify patterns, and predict potential hazards before they occur. For instance, AI-powered tools can detect unsafe behavior from site surveillance footage or predict machinery failure based on sensor data. As a result, AI offers a proactive, data-driven approach to risk mitigation, significantly improving decision-making and overall project safety (Zhou, Ding, & Chen, 2013).

2. Literature Review on Risk Management in Construction

2.1 Traditional Risk Assessment Methods

Traditional risk assessment in construction involves qualitative and quantitative approaches such as risk matrices, checklists, fault tree analysis, and expert judgment. These methods are commonly used to evaluate potential hazards and prioritize risks based on severity and likelihood (Flanagan & Norman, 1993). While these tools have been effective to some extent, they are often time-consuming, rely heavily on subjective evaluation, and lack the ability to dynamically respond to changing site conditions (Aven, 2011).

2.2 Common Types of Risks in Construction Projects

Construction projects are exposed to various types of risks, which can be broadly categorized into financial, technical, environmental, safety-related, and organizational risks. Financial risks include inflation and cost overruns, while technical risks involve design errors and equipment failures. Safety risks stem from hazardous working conditions and improper procedures, whereas environmental risks may arise from weather disturbances or regulatory changes (Choudhry, Aslam, & Hinze, 2012). Human factors and poor communication often exacerbate these issues, leading to project delays and failures.

2.3 Safety Challenges and Accidents in Construction

The construction sector has one of the highest rates of occupational injuries and fatalities. Key safety challenges include working at heights, exposure to heavy machinery, poor site layout, and lack of protective equipment (Toole, 2002). Many accidents result from unsafe acts, inadequate training, and absence of hazard identification mechanisms. Moreover, subcontracting and labor fragmentation further complicate safety enforcement and accountability (Zhang, Teizer, Lee, Eastman, & Venugopal, 2013).

2.4 Limitations of Conventional Risk Mitigation Techniques

Conventional safety management relies on lagging indicators such as accident reports and site inspections. These techniques are reactive and fail to provide early warnings or real-time insights (Zhou, Goh, & Li, 2015). Paper-based records, static plans, and delayed decision-making hinder proactive safety interventions. Consequently, the industry demands smarter, more predictive systems to anticipate and control risks effectively.

3. Applications of Artificial Intelligence in Risk and Safety Management

3.1 AI Techniques Used in Construction Safety (ML, NLP, CV, etc.)

AI encompasses a suite of technologies—such as machine learning (ML), natural language processing (NLP), and computer vision (CV)—that are increasingly being adopted in construction. ML models analyze large datasets to detect patterns and predict risks. NLP algorithms process textual data from reports or communication logs to extract safety insights. CV enables image-based risk detection by analyzing surveillance footage for unsafe acts (Akintoye, Oyedele, & Oke, 2020).

3.2 Predictive Analytics for Accident Prevention

Predictive analytics powered by AI can forecast potential safety incidents by learning from historical data. These systems can analyze equipment usage, weather patterns, and worker behavior to identify correlations with past accidents (Fang, Ding, Zhong, Love, & Luo, 2020). For instance, logistic regression and decision tree models are used to assess the likelihood of future safety breaches, allowing project managers to intervene before incidents occur.

3.3 AI-Based Monitoring Systems (Drones, Sensors, IoT)

AI-integrated monitoring systems combine drones, wearable sensors, and Internet of Things (IoT) devices to collect and analyze real-time site data. Drones equipped with cameras capture aerial images that are processed using AI for site mapping and hazard detection. Wearables monitor workers' vital signs and location, while IoT sensors detect environmental risks like gas leaks or structural stress (Zhou, Irizarry, & Li, 2016). These technologies enable continuous risk tracking and automated alerts.

3.4 Decision Support Systems Using AI for Risk Control

AI-powered decision support systems assist project stakeholders in identifying, evaluating, and mitigating risks efficiently. These systems integrate data from multiple sources to provide real-time dashboards, risk heat maps, and recommended actions (Bilal, Oyedele, Munir, Qadir, & Ajayi, 2016). Such tools enhance situational awareness, optimize resource allocation, and support timely decisions that minimize safety hazards and improve compliance.

4. Benefits, Challenges, and Implementation Barriers

4.1 Advantages of AI Integration in Safety Management

The adoption of AI in construction safety management offers significant advantages over traditional approaches. One of the primary benefits is the ability to **predict and prevent accidents** using real-time data analysis and machine learning algorithms (Park et al., 2021). AI systems can monitor vast volumes of data from sensors, images, and historical reports to detect unsafe conditions before incidents occur. Additionally, AI enables **automation of safety monitoring** through drones and computer vision, reducing manual effort and human error (Kim, Park, & Kim, 2020). It also supports **decision-making** by providing risk-based prioritization and actionable insights for safety managers.

4.2 Technological and Ethical Challenges

Despite its advantages, AI implementation faces **technological limitations**, such as poor data quality, lack of interoperability between systems, and limited generalizability of models across different sites (Zhang et al., 2020). Ethical concerns also arise with the **use of AI in surveillance**, where constant monitoring of workers may raise issues of privacy and consent. Furthermore, algorithmic bias in AI models could lead to inaccurate risk assessments if training datasets are not diverse or representative (Rahimian et al., 2019).

4.3 Organizational Readiness and Workforce Adaptation

The success of AI in safety management depends heavily on an organization's **digital maturity and culture**. Many construction firms, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), lack the **infrastructure and skilled workforce** required for AI deployment (Bilal et al., 2016). There is also **resistance to change**, as workers and managers may be hesitant to adopt unfamiliar technologies. Training and capacity-building are essential to enhance workforce adaptability and ensure effective use of AI systems.

4.4 Data Security, Accuracy, and Reliability Issues

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AI systems depend on the **availability and integrity of large datasets**. Ensuring data security is critical, as breaches could expose sensitive project or personnel information. There are also concerns regarding **model reliability**—AI predictions may not always be accurate due to data gaps, noise, or overfitting. Inaccurate outputs can compromise safety decisions, potentially increasing risks instead of mitigating them (Irizarry & Gill, 2019). Hence, robust validation and continuous model updating are necessary.

5. Future Prospects and Research Directions

5.1 Integration with BIM, Digital Twin, and Smart Construction

The future of AI in construction safety lies in its **integration with advanced digital systems**, such as Building Information Modeling (BIM) and digital twins. Combining AI with BIM enables real-time safety risk visualization in 3D environments (Lu et al., 2021). Digital twins, which create real-time virtual replicas of construction sites, allow continuous monitoring and scenario simulation for proactive risk mitigation. This synergy fosters smarter and safer construction practices aligned with Industry 4.0 principles.

5.2 Potential for Autonomous Risk Assessment Systems

There is growing interest in developing **fully autonomous risk assessment systems** capable of independently collecting, processing, and responding to data from construction sites. These systems could use AI to dynamically adjust safety protocols and notify workers in real-time, enhancing responsiveness and reducing human workload (Nasirzadeh et al., 2022). Such systems have the potential to transform safety management into a predictive, self-correcting process.

5.3 Research Gaps and Areas for Innovation

Current research primarily focuses on **technical feasibility**, with limited exploration of **implementation strategies, human factors, and long-term impact**. There is a need for interdisciplinary studies that combine construction engineering, data science, ethics, and organizational behavior. Additionally, AI models should be trained on **diverse and real-world datasets** to enhance generalizability. More research is required to develop **explainable AI** systems, ensuring transparency and trust in automated decisions.

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5.4 Conclusion and Strategic Recommendations

AI technologies hold transformative potential for improving safety and risk management in construction projects. However, to fully realize this potential, a **strategic approach is essential**—one that includes investment in infrastructure, upskilling of personnel, ethical frameworks, and rigorous validation of AI tools. Stakeholders must work collaboratively to **integrate AI into existing workflows**, support data standardization, and ensure that AI systems are inclusive, secure, and aligned with safety goals. Ultimately, AI should be viewed as an **augmentative tool** that empowers human decision-makers to create safer and more efficient construction environments.

6. Author(S) Contribution

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

7. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

8. Plagiarism Policy

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will taken care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

9. Sources of Funding

The authors received no financial aid to support for the research.

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ISSN (Print): 2957-9325, ISSN (Online): 2957-9333

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Journal homepage:https://ijaer-transaction.com/

Cambridge University Press.

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