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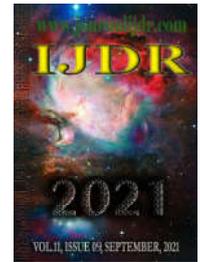
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MORPHOMETRIC CLASSIFICATION OF SOIL AGGREGATES USING DEEP LEARNING WITHIN THE CONCEPT OF PRECISION AGRICULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The Within the concepts of precision agriculture, this research sought to develop and evaluate an artificial neural network model capable of identifying and classifying different morphometric classes of aggregates through images. The methodology developed used a Convolutional Neural Network, with the application of MobileNetV2 architecture transfer learning in three experiments, Training with 5 morphometric classes (prismatic, angular, subangular, rounded and rounded), Training with 4 classes (prismatic, angular, subangular and rounded) and Training with 3 classes (prismatic, angular, rounded). During network development and data_set processing, sampling and data cleaning methods were used. The MobileNetV2 performance results for the three Trainings showed an average accuracy of 79%, with the Training with 3 classes performing best with an accuracy of 87%. In all three experiments, the morphometric classes with the highest accuracy were round, rounded and angular, while for prismatic and subangular classes the network showed a lower accuracy. It can be concluded that the preparation of the data set, the preprocessing in general, is a very important phase, as it can influence and make a difference in the performance of the network. For this it is necessary to have a robust dataset, in quality and quantity of images per class, in addition to hardware and software configurations, the more optimized this set is, the greater the likelihood of improvement in the accuracy of the classification of aggregates. This research constitutes a starting point for research related to the development of technologies and innovations for soil analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

The process of soil degradation is linked mainly to human pressure, such as population growth and the need to produce more food to maintain the population, thus presenting itself today, in most of the world, an intensive agriculture, which is causing structural and functional changes in the soil that condition its productivity (Anghinoni, Carvalho & Costa; 2013). Soil structure refers to the pattern of arrangement of primary particles (sand, silt, and clay) into structural units (peds or aggregates). Adhesion and cohesion forces and cementing agents are responsible for binding the primary particles together (BRADY & WEIL, 2009; RABOT et al., 2018). GUERRA et al. (2009), describes soil structure as a structural unit with a coherent set of primary soil particles with defined shape and size. Thus, different types of aggregates can exist within the same soil horizon, their presence can vary both horizontally and vertically.

Well aggregated soils offer better conditions for plant development, hence the importance of obtaining information about soil aggregates, such as size, shape, and stability (KOHN, 2017). In this scope, the analysis of the structural condition of the soil can be determined by the degree of aggregation of the primary soil particles, evaluating as one of the indicators the shape of the aggregates. The hierarchical organization of soil, has five groups of parameters: morphometric, geometric, physical, chemical and energetic (GERVASIO PEREIRA et al., 2019). At the morphometric level, soil aggregates range from the micro level (less than 0.25 mm in diameter) to the macro level (more than 0.25 mm in diameter). In addition, aggregates they can resemble various shapes: Round, round, prismatic, angular (SALTON et al., 2008; STEINBECK, 2006). These varied shapes allow healthy soil to have porous spaces for air and water, which are necessary for healthy plant growth (CASTRO FILHO et al., 1998; SALTON et al., 2008). According to FAUSTINO (2018), the morphometric analysis of aggregates is important because the geometry of aggregates interferes with pore diameter distribution, which modifies air, water,

and soil nutrient dynamics and consequently affects plant root growth. There are different ways to evaluate the morphometry of aggregates mainly developed in pedology and civil engineering (LEÓN & RAMÍREZ, 2010), but little developed in the area of agriculture, the process is basically in three steps, the acquisition of images by scanner or cameras; then the analysis of the images to obtain morphometric characteristics or parameters; and finally, the interpretation of the results generated. In recent years the development of intelligent systems has become a very important tool to optimize the processes of evaluation of behaviors and patterns capable of assisting in decision making (CHITERO *et al.*, 2020). Thus, in the present research to evaluate and classify the shape of aggregates from digital images, Convolutional Neural Network was used, a class of deep artificial neural networks (*Deep Learning*), the most developed currently in the field of image classification, because they are the widely adapted for image classification and demonstrated high performance compared to other methodologies proposed so far (QUINTERO *et al.*, 2018, AZIZI *et al.*, 2020).

A Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) is a type of bio-inspired network that simulates the way human vision works (SHARMA *et al.*, 2018). The name "convolution neural network" indicates that the network employs a mathematical operation called convolution instead of general matrix multiplication in at least one of its layers (TRAORE *et al.*, 2018, DHILLON & VERMA, 2020). Soil structure refers to the pattern of arrangement of primary particles (sand, silt, and clay) into structural units (peds or aggregates). Adhesion and cohesion forces and cementing agents are responsible for binding the primary particles together (BRADY & WEIL, 2009; RABOT *et al.*, 2018). GUERRA *et al.* (2009), describes soil structure as a structural unit with a coherent set of primary soil particles with defined shape and size. Thus, different types of aggregates can exist within the same soil horizon, their presence can vary both horizontally and vertically. Well aggregated soils offer better conditions for plant development, hence the importance of obtaining information about soil aggregates, such as size, shape, and stability (KOHN, 2017). In this scope, the analysis of the structural condition of the soil can be determined by the degree of aggregation of the primary soil particles, evaluating as one of the indicators the shape of the aggregates. The hierarchical organization of soil, has five groups of parameters: morphometric, geometric, physical, chemical and energetic (GERVASIO PEREIRA *et al.*, 2019). At the morphometric level, soil aggregates range from the micro level (less than 0.25 mm in diameter) to the macro level (more than 0.25 mm in diameter). In addition, aggregates they can resemble various shapes: Round, round, prismatic, angular (SALTON *et al.*, 2008; STEINBECK, 2006). These varied shapes allow healthy soil to have porous spaces for air and water, which are necessary for healthy plant growth (CASTRO FILHO *et al.*, 1998; SALTON *et al.*, 2008). According to FAUSTINO (2018), the morphometric analysis of aggregates is important because the geometry of aggregates interferes with pore diameter distribution, which modifies air, water, and soil nutrient dynamics and consequently affects plant root growth.

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name "convolution neural network" indicates that the network employs a mathematical operation called convolution instead of general matrix multiplication in at least one of its layers (TRAORE *et al.*, 2018, DHILLON & VERMA, 2020). The architecture of a CNN is composed of several two-dimensional planes, and each plane consists of several independent neurons (SHARMA *et al.*, 2018). By the rapid development of CNNs, many powerful architectures have emerged, such as the classical LeNet model for AlexNet, ZFNet, GoogleNet, VGGNet, MobileNet, ResNet, SENet, DenseNet, etc., each with different levels of development and complexity, and the number of parameters used (MAEDA-GUTIÉRREZ *et al.*, 2020; SUDEEP & PAL, 2017). Its main elements, are the *input layer (Input image)*, *output layer (Output layer)* and several hidden layers, where the hidden layer mainly consists of three types, the convolutional layer (*Convolutional layer*), pooling layer (*Pooling layer*) and fully connected layer (*Dense layers*) a (GUO *et al.*, 2017; TRAORE *et al.*, 2018; DHILLON & VERMA, 2020). For developing a CNN, the Keras module provides a convolutional layer for images, called Conv2D, and other *layers (or layers)* to use in sequential combination, such as *MaxPooling2D, Dropout, Flatten, Dense, and Activation*. The pooling layer is used to reduce dimensionality by associating the output of the cluster of neurons in a layer with the single neuron. And the fully connected layer's main function is to classify the input images into various classes based on the training datasets (DHILLON & VERMA, 2020). In this scope, to perform soil evaluation through images within the concepts of *deep learning* applicability, developing a convolutional neural network model to detect and classify the different forms of soil aggregates, is to optimize the soil evaluation process for its management, within the concept of precision agriculture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research was developed in 2020. For the development of the methodology steps, a notebook computer with a 64-bit Windows 10 operating system and an Intel Core i5 processor was used.

Data Set Generation: The database, digital images of the soil aggregates, were made available through the visual analysis database conducted by PECHE FILHO (2018). The aggregates are of agricultural origin and were photographed using a digital microscope, Dino Lite, model AM211. A survey of image properties was performed, these were standardized, organized and then evaluated with ImageJ software to obtain quantitative data, such as Feret diameter, roundness, area and circularity. Considering for example the roundness, in equidistant intervals, and assigning a range of values for shape classes (0 to 0.2 - prismatic; 0.2 to 0.4 - angular, 0.4 to 0.6 - subangular, 0.6 to 0.8 - rounded, 0.8 to 1.0 - round). The visual evaluation method was also employed, according to the shape pattern, to make the necessary adjustments to the different folders of previously classified images. The dimensions of the original images were checked, then the images were resized to the size 480 x 480 x 3, thus standardizing all the images in the database and the segmentation (to exclude the background). To add the database from the training set, the *data augmentation* procedure was performed, mirroring the original and rotated images (90, 180 and 270 degrees). With the procedure, from 4350 unique images 30450 images were generated.

CNN Development: After acquiring the images and having them organized in *data_set*, 80% of them were used for training the neural network, 20% for the validation set, and another 200 images for the test set. The Spyder IDE was used to organize the files and develop the project and algorithm programming in Python. Also, the open source TensorFlow and Keras machine learning libraries were used. TensorFlow can train and run deep neural networks for image classification (Tensor Flow, 2020). The CNN model developed was the MobileNetV2, which uses the ImageNet *data_set*. This network makes it possible to perform transfer learning, which is a method that allows you to train your own models by reusing the network structure (PUJARA, 2020, HOWARD *et al.* 2017). In order to further evaluate the performance of the MobileNetV2 model, 3 types of training were

used, Training with 5 classes, Training with 4 classes, and Training with 3 morphometric classes of soil aggregates, each evaluated with the performance metrics of a neural network. The number of epochs for the three Trainings was 20. Regarding epochs, if there are too few, the network cannot express its maximum learning, i.e., underfitting. However, many epochs, the opposite problem can occur, overlearning also called overfitting (ARTOLA, 2019). Training was performed with 10, 15, 20 and 50 epochs, but the results were better with 20 epochs and 32 batch_size. The batch_size 32 is suitable for most systems (CPUs).

Training with 5 classes: The data set is illustrated in Figure 1, with the following values: round (1980), rounded (8500), sub-angular (9200), angular (7902), prismatic (2868). For a total of 30450 images.

Training with 4 classes: In order to improve the network performance, after evaluating the model of Training with 5 classes, it was decided to perform *Under sampling* (balancing the amount of images per class) and *data cleaning* (cleaning of data that may negatively impact the model). Thus, the data set is illustrated in Figure 2, with the following values: round (2500), sub-angular (2500), angular (2500), prismatic (2500). With a total of 10000 images.

Training with 3 classes

The *data_set* was organized into classes in an extremes condition (Figure 3), with the following values: round (2500), angular (2500), and prismatic (2500). In total 7500 images.

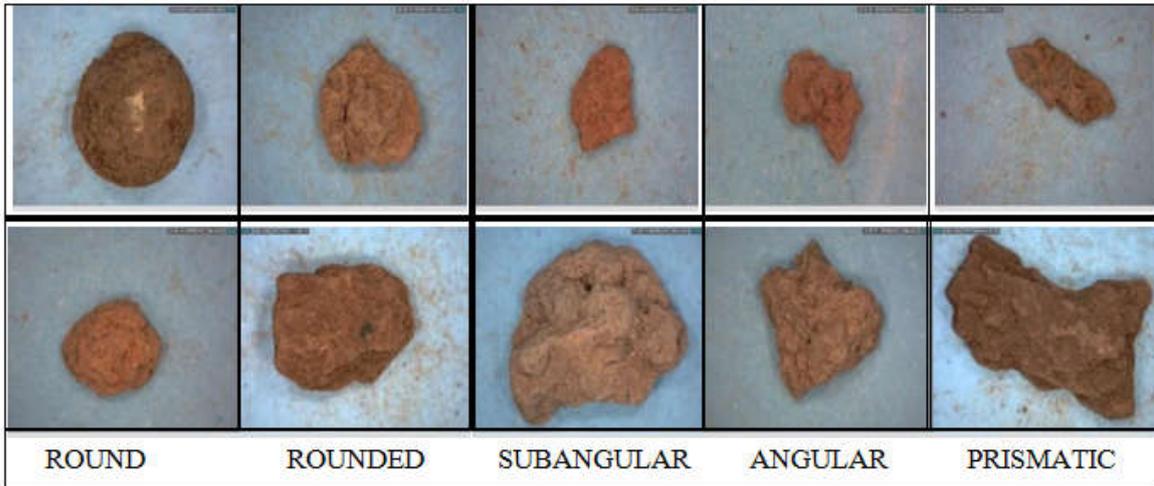


Figure 1. Classification of aggregates in 5 classes

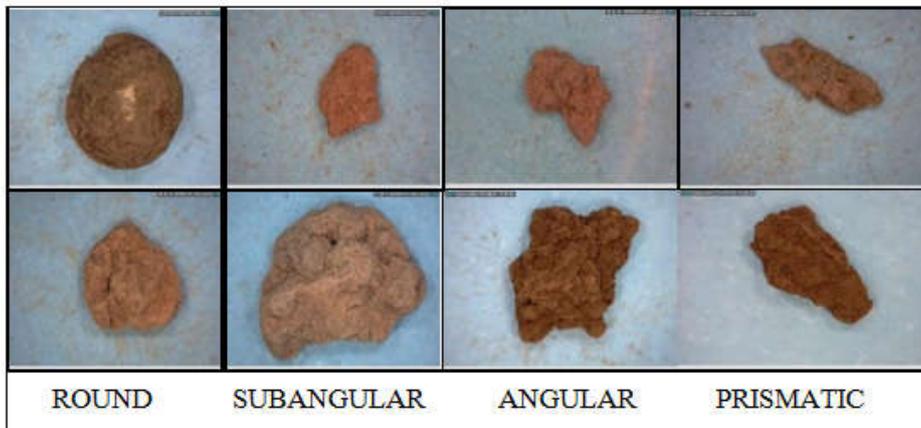


Figure 2. Classification of aggregates in 4 classes



Figure 3. Classification of aggregates in 3 classes

After selecting, implementing, and training a neural network model, the next step was to evaluate how good the network would be at predicting future values. The performance evaluation was done using a confusion matrix. The confusion matrix relates the prediction to the actual or true answer. The elements of the matrix represent the relationships between prediction and classification reality for each class: A true positive (VP) happens when the real, class was predicted correctly. A false positive (FP) happens when the prediction was incorrect with the actual class is true and in reality, it is false; a false negative (FN) happens when the prediction is false and in reality, it is true; a true negative (VN) happens when the prediction is false and so is the reality so that the rows indicate what the predicted patterns, while the columns indicate the actual responses (ARTOLA, 2019). Table 1 shows a confusion matrix.

Table 1. Confusion matrix

	Expected	Positive	Negative
Value			
True Value			
Positive		True Positive (VP)	False Negative (FN)
Negative		False Positive (FP)	True Negative (TN)

The quadrants in blue are the hits, and the ones in white are the misses. From these 4 values the other important metrics are calculated, such as *Accuracy*, *Precision*, *Recall*, and *F1 score* (ARTOLA, 2019).

Accuracy measures the percentage of cases where the model has been correct.

$$Accuracy = \frac{VP+VN}{VP+FN+FP+VN} \tag{1}$$

The *Precision* metric represents the ratio between the actual positives predicted by the algorithm and all positive cases.

$$Precision = \frac{VP}{VP+FP} \tag{2}$$

The *Recall* metric is the proportion of positive cases that were correctly identified by the algorithm.

$$recall = \frac{VP}{VP+FN} \tag{3}$$

The *F1 score* metric combines *Precision* and *Recall* into a single measure.

$$F1\ score = \frac{2 * Precision * Recall}{Precision + Recall} \tag{4}$$

The "loss", on the other hand, is a sum of the errors made for each example in training or validation sets. It shows how far you are from the 'ideal' solution. The smaller the loss, the better the model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the neural network learning metrics for the cluster shape classification in Training with 5 classes, Training with 4 classes, and Training 3 with classes are presented in Figure 4. The *accuracy* for Training with 5 classes was 73% and a loss of 0.87. The performance of this first Training was affected by the problem of image heterogeneities and the unbalanced number of images per class. As for the Training with 4 balanced classes, using the *Under-Sampling* and *data cleaning* methods, a significant improvement in the classification performance is noticed, with an *accuracy* of 79%, but with a loss of 0.99, a value higher than the Training with 5 classes.

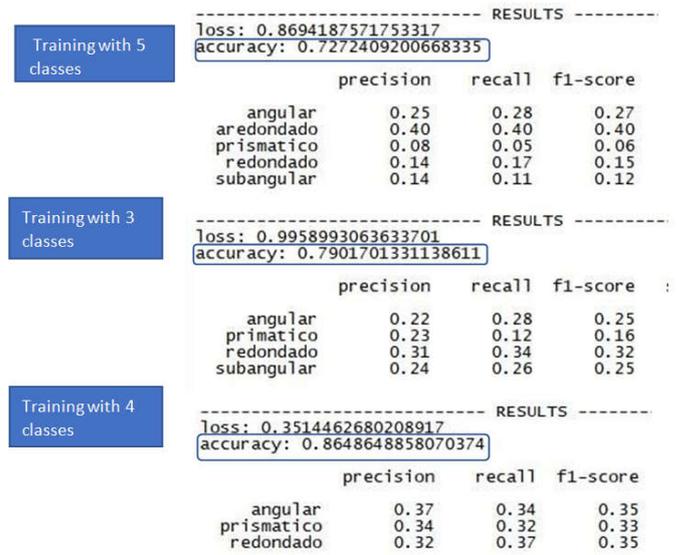


Figure 4. Neural network performance metrics from the three Trainings

However, the quantification metric of accuracy for each class also resulted with more similar percentages, being higher for the rounded class and lower for the prismatic class. The network performance of Training 3 with 3 classes performed better compared to Training 5 classes and Training 4 classes, with an *accuracy* of 86% (Figure 4). For Training with 3 classes, it was possible to graph the network's performance, relating *loss* and *accuracy* to the training epochs (Figure 5). The biggest difference was in the loss rate, which was 0.36, a value lower than the loss rate of previous trainings. This improvement may be due to the better quality of the *data set*, but the decrease in the number of images per class may have influenced the net learning process.

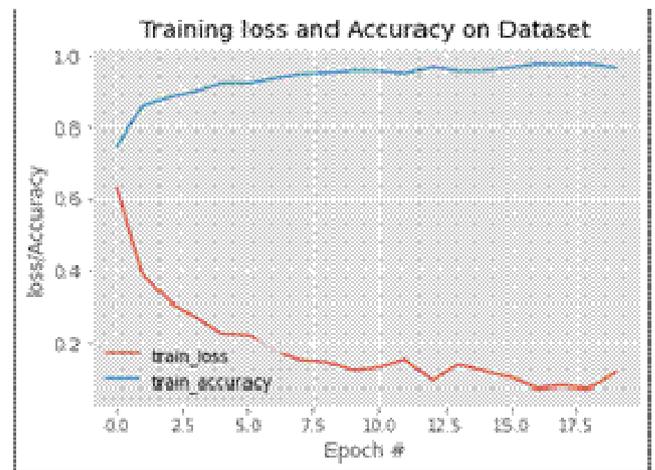


Figure 5. Graph of the neural net training with 3 classes

The analysis of the learning performance in the confusion matrix metrics of the 5-class training (Figure 6), shows a better performance (accuracy) of the network in the classification of the Rounded and Angular classes, which were the classes with the highest number of images. The class that showed lower accuracy was the prismatic class, this may be related to the fact that the class had the fewest number of images for training and validation with respect to the other classes. The learning performance of the CNN with 5 classes was low, due to the unbalanced amounts of images for each class. For the best performance of the network, it is ideal that all classes are balanced, for uniform learning based on the same metrics, for this it is important to use the *Under-Sampling* method. However, there may be the need for a larger number of images, because the use of morphometric classes of similar aggregates with the visual analysis

methodology, requires more information for a better classification and learning of the network (RODRIGUEZ, 2018).

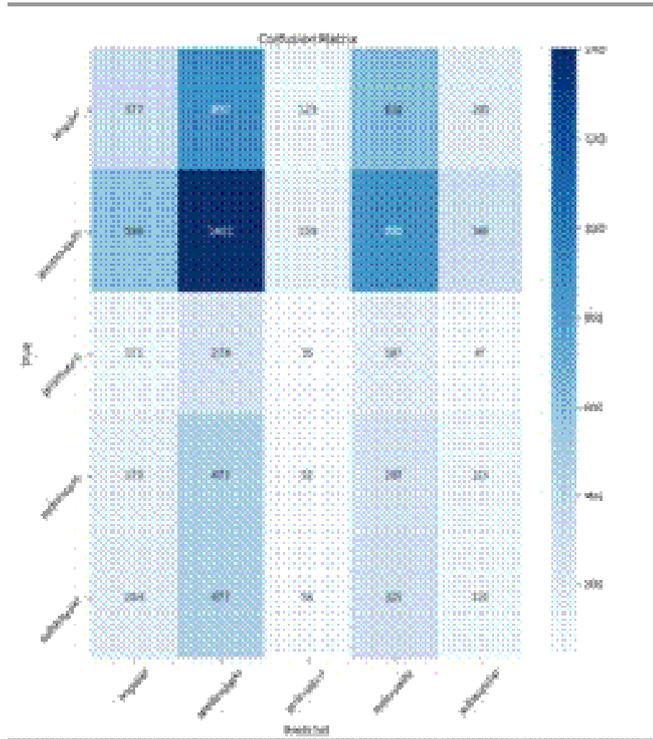


Figure 1. Confusion matrix with 5 classes

Figure 7 illustrates the CNN performance in the identification and classification of soil aggregates in the 4-class training, indicating in blue the correct answers (True Positive) and in red the no-answers (False Positive/False Negative). Within the confusion matrix analysis of the 4-class training, a better performance of the network is observed in the classification of the Round, Subangular and Angular classes. However, the accuracy for the Prismatic class is still low, because Figure 8 shows a higher amount of false positives and false negatives with the other three classes.

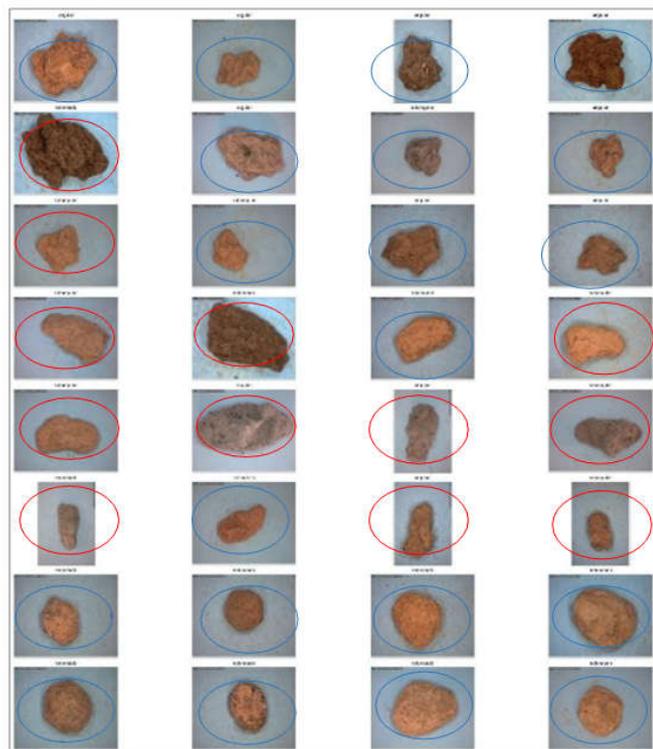


Figure 7. Identification and classification of the Training network with 4 classes

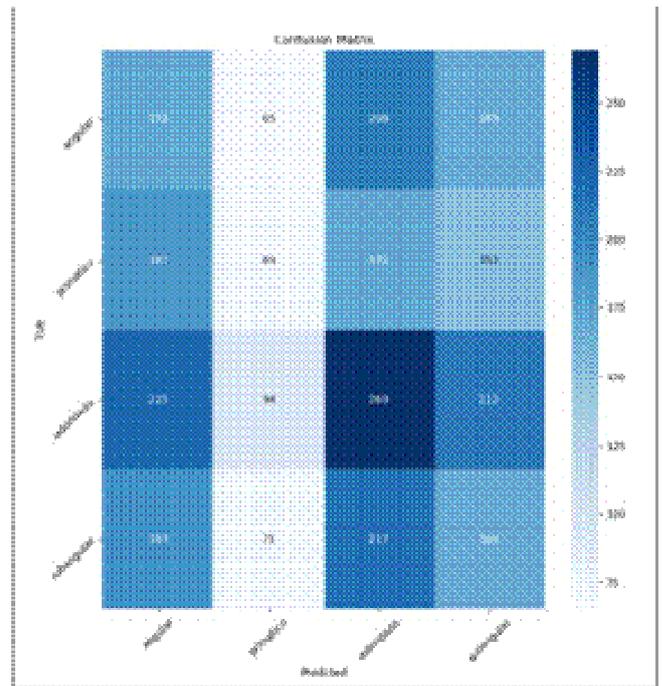


Figure 8. Confusion Matrix with 4 classes

In the confusion matrix analysis of Training with 3 classes, a better accuracy in the classification of the Round and Angular classes is observed. While for the Prismatic class there is an improvement in accuracy, Figure 9 shows a higher amount of true positives compared to Training with 5 classes and Training with 4 classes.

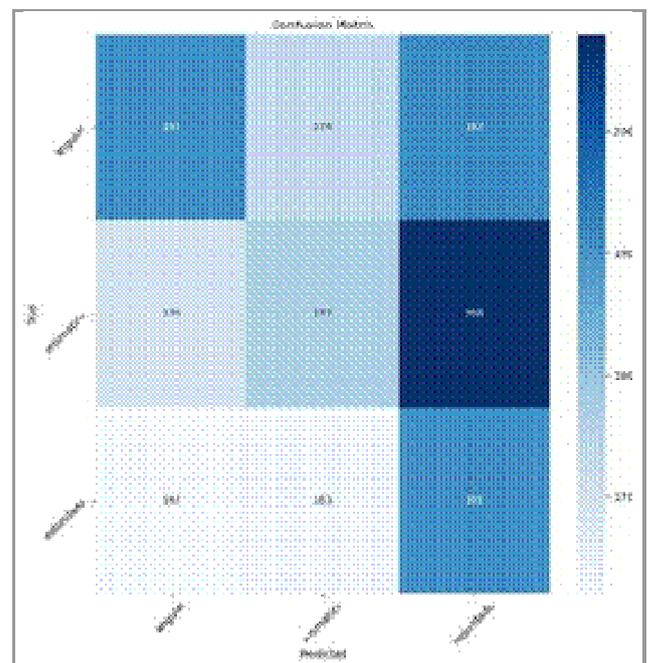


Figure 9. Confusion Matrix with 3 classes

In the three Trainings with the MobileNetV2 model the average accuracy was 79.3%, and the highest accuracy reached was with the Training with 3 morphometric classes (86%), values similar to the accuracy of 86% reached by a multilayer ANN model developed to estimate the stability index of soil aggregates with numerical data by MARACHI *et al.* (2017) and an accuracy of 73.81% of a classifier based on artificial neural networks to generate a map with different soil classes through the analysis of digital satellite images developed by CHAGAS *et al.* (2013). But the results obtained are lower compared to the accuracy achieved by the CNN models VggNet16, ResNet50 and Inception-v4, worked by AZIZI *et al.* (2020) using

stereo images to classify the aggregates by size, with an average accuracy of 95% being the highest accuracy achieved with the ResNet50 architecture (98.72%). The method used for the study of soil aggregates through digital images has its advantages and disadvantages, one advantage of this method of soil evaluation through imaging is that the aggregate, for example, does not undergo physical, chemical or biological changes compared to the analysis in traditional laboratories (Padarian, Minasnya & Mcbratney, 2018), but suffer from limitations such as software, hardware, quantity and quality of image acquisition, in addition to the degree of subjectivity in image processing protocols, the extraction of features, and the requirement of some level of user information in terms of training data and deep learning (SCHLÜTER *et al.*, 2020), thus influencing performance in the results of the neural network. CNNs have multiple uses and many potential applications in image classification in different areas of human knowledge, but it is important to note that effective machine learning techniques usually require a lot of data for training (YEN & LEE, 2006). From Training with 5 classes (30450 images) to Training with 3 classes (9220 images) the amount of images for training and validation decreased, due to processing and methods to improve the quality of the *data set*. A larger database, after pre-processing, balancing methods, and homogenization of the quantity of images per class, allows for a better quality *data set* for net training. Regardless of the low learning performance of the exemplified neural network, whether Training with 5 classes, Training with 4 classes, and Training with 3 classes, the research presents a promising future, because the neural network can be trained to recognize and analyze parameters such as aggregate roughness, shape, color, size, biogenic activity, among others, being of great contribution to the development of new technologies for soil structural management in a remote and intelligent way.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation of the MobileNetV2 model neural network learning for the three Trainings showed an average accuracy of 79%, being most satisfactory for the morphometric soil aggregate classification of the rounded and angular classes. The use of *data augmentation*, *Under sampling* and *data cleaning* methods influence the performance results, methods used for Training with 4 classes and Training with 3 classes, where the MobileNetV2 network achieved an accuracy of 86%. The preparation of the *data set* consists of a very important phase, as was analyzed in the three Trainings of the research. This preparation can make the difference in the learning performance of the network, because it is associated with the following factors: quality and quantity of images per class, pre-processing strategy in general, choice of hardware and software, and the level of knowledge of the object under study.

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