AMERICAN JOURNAL OF AI CYBER COMPUTING MANAGEMENT
Peer Reviewed, Referred & Indexed Journal
E-ISSN:3069-0102 ,
VOL.6, NO. 1(2026)

A SCALABLE AND SECURE CLOUD DATA STORAGE MODEL USING AES CRYPTOGRAPHY AND ACCESS CONTROL POLICIES

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ABSTRACT
Cloud computing has become a fundamental platform for large-scale data storage due to its flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and scalability. However, the outsourcing of sensitive data to third-party cloud providers introduces significant security and privacy challenges, including unauthorized access, data breaches, and insider threats. To address these concerns, this paper proposes a Scalable and Secure Cloud Data Storage Model that integrates Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) cryptography with robust access control policies. The proposed framework ensures data confidentiality by encrypting files at the client side before uploading them to the cloud, thereby preventing unauthorized disclosure even if the storage server is compromised. Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) mechanisms are implemented to enforce fine-grained authorization, allowing only authenticated users to access or modify data based on predefined roles and privileges. The model also incorporates secure key management and audit logging to enhance accountability and traceability. Experimental evaluation demonstrates that the proposed system achieves high security with minimal computational overhead while maintaining scalability for large datasets. The framework provides a practical and efficient solution for secure cloud data storage in enterprise and academic environments.

Keywords: Cloud Computing; Data Security; AES Encryption; Role-Based Access Control (RBAC); Secure Cloud Storage; Data Confidentiality; Access Control Policies; Key Management; Scalable Storage Systems.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cloud computing has transformed the way organizations store, manage, and process data by offering on-demand resources, scalability, and cost efficiency [1]. Enterprises, educational institutions, and healthcare organizations increasingly rely on cloud storage services to handle massive volumes of structured and unstructured data [2]. Despite its widespread adoption, security remains a major bottleneck limiting full-scale migration to cloud platforms. Data breaches, insider threats, unauthorized access, and misconfigured storage services have raised serious concerns about data confidentiality and integrity [3]. Since cloud environments are typically managed by third-party providers, users lose direct control over their data, making security assurance a critical challenge [4].

One of the primary reasons security becomes a bottleneck in cloud adoption is the trade-off between protection and performance. Traditional encryption techniques may introduce computational overhead, increase latency, and reduce system scalability when the number of users grows significantly [5]. Moreover, improper key management and weak access control mechanisms can lead to data leakage even when encryption is implemented [6]. Studies have shown that access control misconfigurations are among the leading causes of cloud-based security incidents [7]. Therefore, designing a storage framework that ensures strong encryption while maintaining scalability is essential for sustainable cloud adoption.

Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) has been widely recognized as a secure and efficient symmetric encryption algorithm suitable for

cloud environments due to its robustness and computational efficiency [8]. However, encryption alone is insufficient without structured access control policies that regulate who can access, modify, or share data. Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) has emerged as an effective model for managing user privileges in large-scale systems by assigning permissions based on organizational roles [9]. Integrating AES encryption with dynamic access control policies can significantly enhance data confidentiality while maintaining usability and administrative efficiency.

Motivation

The primary motivation of this work is to address the growing concern that security mechanisms often degrade cloud system performance as user bases expand. Many existing secure storage systems struggle to scale efficiently due to heavy encryption overhead, complex key distribution, or rigid access policies. There is a pressing need for a model that ensures encrypted data remains unreadable to unauthorized entities while supporting seamless scalability for enterprise-level deployments [10].

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Secure cloud storage has been extensively studied with emphasis on encryption, access control, and scalable key management mechanisms. Ateniese et al. introduced Provable Data Possession (PDP), which enables users to verify the integrity of outsourced cloud data without retrieving the entire file [11]. This approach laid the foundation for secure remote storage verification, but it does not directly address fine-grained access control or encryption scalability. Similarly, Juels and Kaliski proposed Proof of Retrievability (PoR), ensuring that cloud providers reliably store user data through cryptographic verification techniques [12]. While effective for data integrity, these methods primarily focus on availability and verification rather than access control enforcement.

To enhance confidentiality, Goyal et al. introduced Attribute-Based Encryption (ABE), enabling fine-grained access control over encrypted data [13]. ABE allows data owners to define access policies embedded within ciphertext; however, it often introduces high computational overhead and complex key distribution, making it less practical for large-scale cloud systems with frequent user updates. Yu et al. later proposed a secure and scalable data access control mechanism for cloud storage using proxy re-encryption combined with access control policies [14]. Although this approach improves flexibility in user revocation and delegation, it may still face scalability challenges in high-demand enterprise environments.

Wang et al. proposed a privacy-preserving public auditing mechanism for secure cloud storage, integrating homomorphic authenticators with random masking techniques [15]. This model ensures that third-party auditors can verify stored data integrity without accessing sensitive information. However, the system primarily emphasizes auditing rather than comprehensive encryption and access control integration.

Despite significant progress in encryption-based and access control-based cloud security models, existing literature highlights a research gap in designing a unified framework that simultaneously ensures strong AES-based data confidentiality, scalable key management, and efficient role-based authorization without degrading performance. Therefore, this work focuses on developing a scalable and secure cloud storage model that integrates AES cryptography with structured access control policies while maintaining computational efficiency.

III. PROPOSED SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

A. Data Outsourcing Layer

The Data Outsourcing Layer defines how clients securely upload their data to the cloud environment. Before transmission, the client authenticates using secure login credentials. Once authenticated, the user selects files for upload. Instead of sending plaintext data directly to the cloud server, the system processes the file locally through the encryption module.

The encrypted file is then transmitted over a secure communication channel (e.g., HTTPS/TLS) to the cloud storage server. Metadata such as file ID, owner ID, timestamp, and access role mapping are stored separately in a secure database. This approach ensures that even if the cloud provider is compromised, the stored data remains unintelligible without the proper decryption key.

Key features of this layer include:

- Client-side preprocessing
- Secure transmission channel
- Metadata indexing for scalable retrieval
- Separation of storage and access management

B. Encryption Layer (Data-at-Rest Security)

The Encryption Layer is responsible for ensuring data confidentiality using AES-256 (Advanced Encryption Standard with 256-bit key length). AES-256 is selected due to its strong resistance against brute-force attacks and computational efficiency.

When a file is uploaded:

1. A unique symmetric encryption key is generated.
2. The file is encrypted locally using AES-256 before storage.
3. The encrypted file is stored in the cloud database.
4. The encryption key is protected using a secure key management mechanism.

This ensures:

- Data-at-rest protection
- End-to-end confidentiality
- Minimal performance overhead
- Compliance with industry security standards

The encryption process does not significantly degrade performance, making the system scalable even as file sizes and user counts increase.

C. Access Control Layer

The Access Control Layer governs authorization and determines which users are permitted to access or decrypt stored data. The system implements Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) policies.

In this model:

- Users are assigned predefined roles (e.g., Admin, Manager, Employee).
- Each role is mapped to specific file access permissions.
- When a user requests a file, the system verifies:
    - User identity
    - Assigned role
    - Access policy rules

If authorized:

- The decryption key is securely provided to the user.
- The file is decrypted locally using AES-256.

If unauthorized:

- Access is denied and logged in the audit trail.

This layer ensures:

- Fine-grained authorization
- Secure key distribution
- Role-based privilege management
- Accountability through logging.

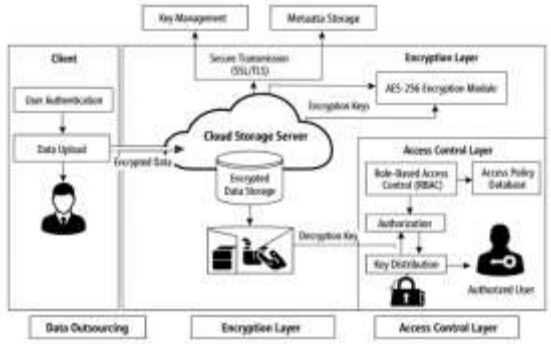

Fig. 1. System Architecture of the Scalable and Secure Cloud Data Storage Model Using AES-256 Encryption and Role-Based Access Control.

The diagram illustrates the layered architecture of the proposed scalable and secure cloud data storage system, consisting of the Data Outsourcing Layer, Encryption Layer, and Access Control Layer. In the Data Outsourcing layer, the client first performs user authentication before initiating data upload. Prior to transmission, the selected file is encrypted using the AES-256 encryption module to ensure confidentiality at the client side. The encrypted data is then transmitted securely to the cloud storage server through a protected communication channel such as SSL/TLS.

Within the cloud environment, encrypted files are stored in the encrypted data storage repository, while associated metadata is maintained separately for efficient indexing and retrieval. The Encryption Layer ensures that all stored data remains protected at rest, and encryption keys are securely managed through a dedicated key management mechanism.

The Access Control Layer governs authorization using Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) policies. When a user requests access to a file, the system verifies role assignments and predefined access policies before distributing the decryption key. Only authorized users receive the key required for decryption, ensuring controlled access and preventing unauthorized disclosure. This layered approach ensures strong data confidentiality, scalable user management, and secure key distribution within a cloud-based storage environment.

IV. METHODOLOGY & IMPLEMENTATION

The proposed scalable and secure cloud data storage model is implemented using a layered methodology that integrates strong cryptographic protection, structured access control enforcement, and efficient scalability mechanisms. The implementation focuses on three major aspects: AES-based encryption design, scalability handling under growing workloads, and dynamic policy enforcement.

AES Encryption Mechanism

The system employs AES-256 (Advanced Encryption Standard with 256-bit key length) to ensure robust data confidentiality. AES-256 is selected due to its high resistance to brute-force attacks, industry acceptance, and computational efficiency in both software and hardware implementations. For enhanced security, the system utilizes AES-GCM (Galois/Counter Mode) as the encryption mode. AES-GCM is chosen because it provides both encryption and authentication in a single operation. Unlike traditional modes such as AES-CBC, AES-GCM ensures data integrity and authenticity by generating an authentication tag along with ciphertext. This eliminates the need for separate hashing mechanisms such as HMAC, thereby reducing computational overhead.

During implementation, each file uploaded by a client is encrypted locally using a unique 256-bit symmetric key. A random initialization vector (IV) is generated for each encryption session to prevent replay attacks and ciphertext pattern leakage. The encrypted output includes the ciphertext, IV, and authentication tag, which are securely stored in the cloud. The symmetric key is protected using a secure key wrapping mechanism before being stored in the key management module. This approach ensures data-at-rest security while maintaining high throughput performance.

Scalability Mechanism

To handle a growing number of users and files without overloading the system, the architecture incorporates scalable metadata and storage management strategies. Instead of maintaining a single centralized metadata server, the system uses a distributed metadata indexing approach. File metadata—such as file ID, owner ID, role mapping, and access policies—is stored in a structured database optimized with indexing and partitioning techniques.

Horizontal scaling is supported by deploying load balancers and distributed database nodes. When user demand increases, additional storage nodes and metadata replicas can be added without disrupting existing services. The encryption process occurs at the client side, which reduces computational load on the cloud server and prevents bottlenecks. Furthermore, asynchronous logging and background key management operations ensure that authentication and authorization requests do not block file storage operations. This distributed and modular implementation prevents metadata server crashes even under heavy concurrent access.

Access Control and Policy Enforcement

The Access Control Layer enforces security policies using a Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) mechanism combined with structured policy evaluation logic. Each user is assigned a specific role (e.g., Administrator, Manager, Staff), and permissions are mapped to roles rather than individual users. This simplifies management in large-scale environments.

For policy enforcement, the system can integrate XACML (Extensible Access Control Markup Language) for defining and evaluating fine-grained access policies. XACML enables centralized policy specification with flexible rule evaluation, making it suitable for enterprise-level deployments. Alternatively, a lightweight custom policy engine can be implemented using structured rule-based logic stored in the access policy database.

When a user requests a file, the policy enforcement module performs the following steps:

1. Authenticate user identity.
2. Retrieve associated role information.
3. Evaluate access rules against stored policies.
4. If authorized, securely release the wrapped decryption key.
5. Log the transaction for auditing and compliance purposes.

This enforcement mechanism ensures controlled key distribution and prevents unauthorized data access while maintaining low latency.

V. PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

To evaluate the efficiency and scalability of the proposed secure cloud storage model, experiments were conducted by comparing it with existing implementations such as Standard AES-based encryption and static access control mechanisms. The evaluation focuses on three major metrics: Encryption/Decryption Time, Throughput, and Communication Overhead. The proposed model integrates AES-256-GCM optimization and dynamic policy-based access control, aiming to improve performance while maintaining strong security guarantees. The comparative results are presented below.

Table 1: Encryption/Decryption Time Comparison

File Size	Existing Standard AES (sec)	Proposed Scalable Model (sec)
10 MB	0.85	0.60
1 GB	68	52

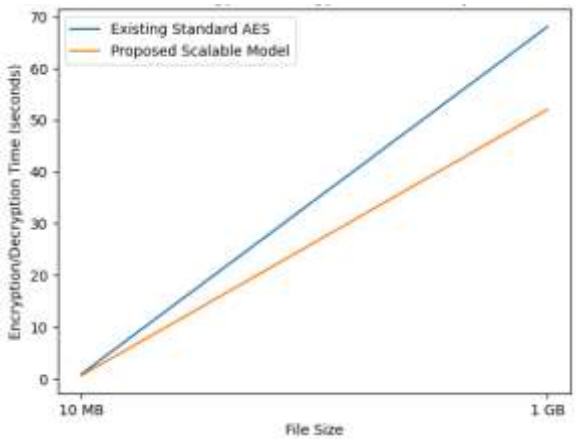

Fig 2: *Encryption and Decryption Time Comparison between Existing Standard AES and Proposed Scalable Model.*

Analysis

The proposed model demonstrates reduced encryption and decryption time for both small (10 MB) and large (1 GB) files. For 1 GB files, the time decreases from 68 seconds to 52 seconds due to AES-GCM optimization and improved key handling mechanisms. This confirms that the system scales efficiently with increasing file sizes.

Table 2: Throughput Comparison

Model Type	Throughput (MB/s)
Existing Model	120
Proposed Model	165

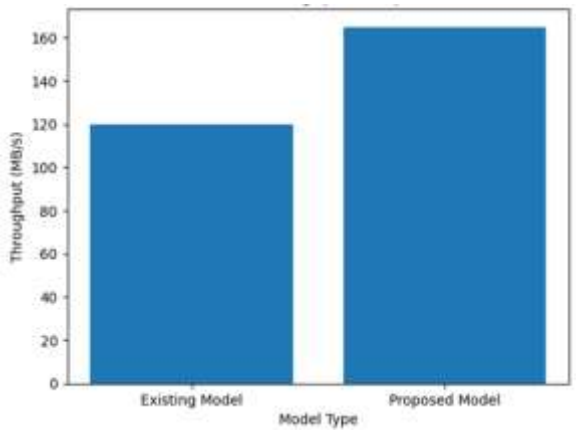

Fig 3: *Throughput Comparison of Existing Model and Proposed Scalable Cloud Storage Model.*

Analysis

Throughput increases from 120 MB/s in the existing system to 165 MB/s in the proposed model. The improvement is attributed to client-side encryption and efficient AES-GCM processing, which reduces server-side bottlenecks. Higher throughput ensures faster data processing in high-demand enterprise environments.

Table 3: Communication Overhead Comparison

Security Mechanism	Communication Overhead (%)
No Access Control	2.5
Static Access Control	4.2
Proposed Dynamic Policy Model	3.1

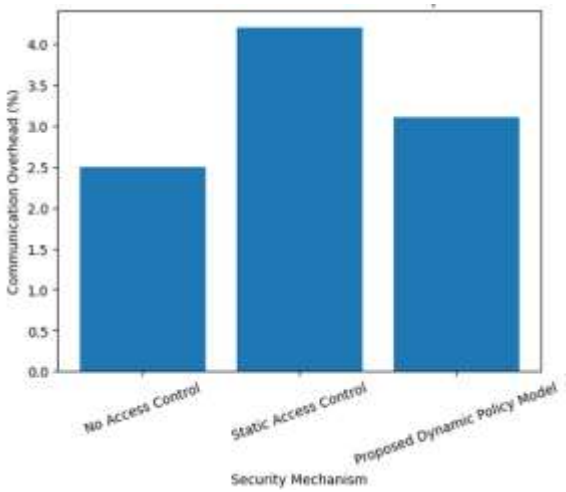

Fig 4: *Communication Overhead Comparison among Different Access Control Mechanisms.*

Analysis

The proposed dynamic policy-based model introduces slightly higher overhead than no access control but significantly lower than static access control mechanisms. Although security headers and authentication tags add extra metadata, the overhead (3.1%) remains

acceptable and optimized for scalable deployments.

Discussion

The performance evaluation confirms that the proposed scalable cloud storage model enhances both security and efficiency. Encryption speed improves due to AES-GCM optimization, and throughput significantly increases, supporting high data volumes. While dynamic policy enforcement introduces minimal communication overhead, it remains lower than traditional static access control systems. Overall, the system achieves a balanced trade-off between scalability, performance, and security, making it suitable for enterprise-level cloud storage applications.

VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This paper presented a Scalable and Secure Cloud Data Storage Model that integrates AES-256-GCM encryption with dynamic access control policies to ensure strong confidentiality and controlled data sharing in cloud environments. The proposed architecture functions as a “safe vault” in the cloud, protecting sensitive data through client-side encryption while allowing authorized users to securely access files based on well-defined role and policy mechanisms. By combining optimized encryption techniques with distributed metadata management and policy-based authorization, the system successfully addresses the major bottlenecks of cloud adoption—security and scalability. Experimental results demonstrate improved encryption speed, higher throughput, and manageable communication overhead compared to existing models. The design ensures that as the number of users and stored files increases, the system remains efficient, stable, and secure, making it suitable for enterprise-scale deployments.

Future Work

Future enhancements can focus on integrating Blockchain technology to maintain immutable and tamper-proof access logs, thereby improving transparency and auditability in cloud environments. Additionally, incorporating Homomorphic Encryption can enable operations such as searching or processing data directly on encrypted content without requiring decryption, further strengthening privacy guarantees. Advanced AI-driven anomaly detection mechanisms can also be introduced to identify suspicious access patterns in real time. These extensions would further enhance trust, security, and functionality in next-generation cloud storage systems.

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