INTEL PROJECT REPORT

ON

"IMAGE SHARPENING USING KNOWLEDGE DISTILLATION"

By

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BENGALURU, KARNATAKA, INDIA

SESSION : 2025-2026

ABSTRACT

Motion blur is a common and challenging degradation found in images captured under dynamic conditions—such as fast object motion or camera shake—particularly in low-light or handheld environments. This visual distortion compromises the integrity of captured scenes and hampers the performance of downstream computer vision applications like object detection, recognition, and tracking.

Traditional deblurring approaches often rely on handcrafted priors and blind deconvolution, which struggle with complex or spatially-varying motion. Recently, deep learning models—especially convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and transformer-based architectures—have achieved state-of-the-art results in motion deblurring tasks. However, these models typically require large memory and computational resources, making them unsuitable for real-time or edge deployment.

In this project, we propose a hybrid solution by integrating Knowledge Distillation (KD) to bridge the gap between performance and efficiency. A deep and powerful transformer-based model—Restormer—acts as the teacher, producing high-quality deblurred outputs. A lightweight student CNN is then trained to mimic the behavior of the teacher while also learning from the original ground truth. This dual supervision framework enables the student to learn both rich semantic restoration patterns and pixel-level accuracy, without incurring the heavy computational burden of the teacher model.

We conduct extensive training and evaluation on the GoPro motion deblurring dataset, demonstrating that the student model achieves high SSIM and PSNR scores with significantly reduced inference time and model size. The results confirm that our knowledge-distilled student model is not only capable of near-state-of-the-art deblurring performance but is also well-suited for real-time applications on edge devices, such as mobile phones, embedded cameras, and robotics platforms.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.OBJECTIVE

The main objectives of this project are:

- Design a compact CNN-based student model capable of motion deblurring.
- Leverage Knowledge Distillation (KD) to train the student using both:
  - Ground truth sharp images.
  - Output from a high-capacity teacher model (Restormer).
- Train and evaluate the models on the GoPro motion deblurring dataset.
- Compare performance in terms of:
  - Structural Similarity Index (SSIM)
  - Inference time and model size.
- Demonstrate the model's applicability in real-time or mobile environments.

1.2.BACKGROUND

In the digital age, visual data plays a pivotal role in a wide range of applications, from autonomous driving and surveillance to mobile photography and robotics. However, real-world image capture is often susceptible to motion blur, caused by relative movement between the camera and the scene during the exposure time. This blurring not only diminishes the visual appeal of photos but also impairs the performance of automated systems that rely on visual inputs.

Traditional image deblurring techniques focused on blind deconvolution, which attempts to estimate both the latent sharp image and the blur kernel. While such methods work under controlled scenarios, they often fail in the presence of complex, dynamic, or non-uniform motion. The emergence of deep learning—especially Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs)—has revolutionized image restoration tasks. However, high-performing models are often too computationally expensive for real-time or edge deployment.

Knowledge Distillation (KD) offers a promising solution by transferring knowledge from a large, high-performing model (teacher) to a smaller, efficient model (student). By distilling the output knowledge of complex architectures like Restormer into a lightweight CNN, we aim to build an efficient deblurring system suitable for constrained environments without compromising output quality.

1.3.PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to develop an efficient and deployable solution for motion deblurring by using deep learning and knowledge distillation. The goal is to ensure that users and systems in resource-limited environments can benefit from enhanced image quality without the need for high-end computational hardware.

This aligns with growing demands in applications such as:

- Mobile photography (low-light deblurring)
- Robotics and drones (clear navigation visuals)
- Surveillance systems (sharp identification frames)
- Augmented Reality (AR)/Virtual Reality (VR) (clarity in real-time rendering)

1.4.SCOPE

- Implementing a Knowledge Distillation framework where the Restormer acts as the teacher model, and a lightweight CNN acts as the student.
- Using the GoPro dataset to simulate real-world motion blur conditions.
- Measuring model performance using both quantitative (SSIM) and qualitative (visual comparison) metrics.
- Analyzing trade-offs between performance and efficiency (speed, size).
- Limiting the study to single-image motion deblurring rather than video or multi-frame restoration.
- Ensuring the final model is suitable for deployment on devices with limited computing power.

1.5.PROBLEM STATEMENT

High-performance image deblurring models, while accurate, typically require substantial computational power, making them impractical for real-time applications and deployment on edge devices (e.g., mobile phones, drones, embedded systems). There is a critical need for a lightweight deblurring model that can deliver near-state-of-the-art results with reduced inference time, memory, and complexity.

The challenge lies in:

- Preserving perceptual quality and sharpness of restored images.
- Ensuring fast inference and low memory footprint.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.TRADITIONAL DEBLURRING METHODS

Motion deblurring was historically tackled through signal processing and mathematical modeling approaches. These techniques primarily focus on estimating the blur kernel—the function representing the motion that caused the blur—and then performing deconvolution to restore the sharp image.

- Non-Blind Deblurring :
  - Assumes that the blur kernel is known a priori.
  - Deconvolution techniques (like Wiener or Richardson-Lucy deconvolution) are applied to invert the blur.
  - Limitation: In real-world settings, the blur kernel is unknown and often non-uniform, especially in dynamic scenes with varying motion.
- Blind Deblurring :
  - Simultaneously estimates the blur kernel and the latent sharp image.
  - Requires strong image priors, such as:
    - Total variation (TV)
    - Sparse image gradients
    - Edge-preserving filters
  - Edge-preserving filters
  - Limitation: Often struggles with **spatially-varying blur**, large motion, or non-linear camera paths. Performance drops drastically on complex natural images.

*2.2.**DEEP LEARNING-BASED DEBLURRING METHODS***

With the rise of **data-driven methods**, researchers began training end-to-end neural networks for motion deblurring, bypassing the need for explicit kernel estimation.

- CNN-Based Methods :

- DeblurGAN (Kupyn et al., 2018): Introduced the use of GANs for image deblurring. The model learns a generator to restore sharp images and a discriminator to differentiate between real and fake sharp images.
- SRN-DeblurNet (Tao et al., 2018): Uses a multi-scale architecture that recursively refines the image at various resolutions.
- DMPHN (Zhang et al., 2019): A deep multi-patch hierarchical network that processes different parts of the image individually and merges them.

- Transformer-Based Methods :
  - Restormer (Zamir et al., 2022): Introduced a restoration transformer architecture with gated d-convolutions. It processes high-resolution images efficiently while modeling long-range dependencies, which CNNs struggle with.
  - Shows state-of-the-art performance in various restoration tasks (denoising, deblurring, deraining).
  - Limitation: High memory and compute requirements; not suitable for edge deployment.

2.3.KNOWLEDGE DISTILLATION

Knowledge Distillation (KD) was first proposed by Hinton et al. (2015) as a method of compressing large neural networks. It allows a small, fast model (student) to mimic the output behavior of a large, complex model (teacher).

- Basic KD Framework :
  - Train a teacher model on the full dataset using conventional loss functions.

    - Use the soft labels or features from the teacher as guidance for training the student.
    - The student is trained with a combination of:
        - Hard labels (ground truth)
        - Soft targets (teacher outputs)
- Types of Knowledge Transferred :
    - Output logits (commonly used in classification tasks)
    - Intermediate features (used in vision tasks like segmentation and detection)
    - Attention maps and activation distributions
- Applications in Image Restoration :
    - Compression and acceleration of image restoration networks.
    - Feature-based KD is commonly applied in tasks like super-resolution, denoising, and deblurring.
    - Recent works show KD can significantly enhance the performance of lightweight models in low-level vision tasks.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology involves a multi-stage pipeline comprising dataset preparation, model selection, knowledge distillation setup, loss design, and training configuration. The goal is to efficiently train a lightweight CNN-based student model that can replicate the deblurring ability of the powerful Restormer teacher model while maintaining low computational complexity.

3.1. DATASET: GOPRO MOTION DEBLURRING DATASET

The **GoPro dataset** is a widely used benchmark in motion deblurring research. It contains real-world images captured using high-frame-rate cameras to simulate realistic motion blur.

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- Advantages:
  - High quality and resolution
  - Covers a wide variety of scenes: indoor, outdoor, fast and slow motion.
- **Dataset Split**:
  - **Training set**: ~2,000 image pairs.
  - Validation/Test set: ~111 image pairs.

3.2.TEACHER MODEL: RESTORMER

The **Restormer** (Restoration Transformer) is a state-of-the-art transformer-based model specifically designed for image restoration tasks, including deblurring, denoising, and deraining.

- Architecture:
  - Utilizes **self-attention mechanisms** to model long-range dependencies.

- Employs Gated d-Convolutions to capture both local and global features.
- Follows an encoder-decoder structure with residual connections.

- Strengths:
  - Superior performance in restoration tasks compared to CNNs.
  - Capable of handling spatially varying and dynamic motion blur.

- Role in this project
  - Acts as the teacher model to guide the student network.
  - Pretrained weights on GoPro dataset are used to generate soft outputs for distillation.

3.3.STUDENT MODEL: CUSTOM LIGHTWEIGHT CNN

To create a model suitable for real-time inference, a custom compact CNN architecture was developed.

- Design Principles:
  - Shallow network with 5–6 convolutional layers.
  - Uses 3×3 kernels, ReLU activations, and Batch Normalization.
- Input: Single blurred RGB image.
- Output: Restored sharp image of the same resolution.
- Advantages:
  - Low latency inference.

- Small memory footprint.
- Suitable for deployment on mobile and embedded devices.

- Implementation:
  - Built in **PyTorch** using sequential layers.
  - Trained from scratch using KD supervision.

3.4.KNOWLEDGE DISTILLATION STEP

The knowledge distillation framework consists of training the student CNN with two sources of supervision**:**

Dual Supervision:

- Hard Target Supervision:
  - Direct supervision from ground truth sharp images.
  - Enforces pixel-wise fidelity.
- Soft Target Supervision:
  - Uses Restormer's deblurred output as a secondary target.
  - Helps student learn nuanced patterns and high-level restoration semantics.

3.5.TRAINING DETAILS

Parameter	***Value***
Optimizer	***Adam***
Learning Rate	***1e-4***
Loss Function	***MSE (dual supervision)***
Batch Size	***8***
Epochs	***100***
Input Size	***256×256 (random cropped)***
Augmentation	***Flip, rotation, color jitter***

Framework	***PyTorch***
Teacher Model Source	***Restormer (pretrained)***

4. ARCHITECTURE DIAGRAMS AND DESCRIPTION

4.1.STUDENT NETWORK ARCHITECTURE (STUDENTNET)

Your custom **StudentNet** is a compact, efficient CNN composed of **two convolutional layers for encoding** and **two for decoding**.

```
Input: Blurred Image [3 x 256 x 256]
 |
 ├──► Conv2D(3, 32, kernel=3, padding=1) → ReLU
 |
 ├──► Conv2D(32, 64, kernel=3, padding=1) → ReLU
 |     ↓
 |   [Feature Encoding Completed]
 |
 ├──► Conv2D(64, 32, kernel=3, padding=1) → ReLU
 |
 ├──► Conv2D(32, 3, kernel=3, padding=1)
 ▼
Output: Deblurred Image [3 x 256 x 256]
```

- Encoder:
  - Captures local features.
  - Expands feature depth to 64 for richer representation.
- Decoder:
  - Compresses back to image format.
  - Reconstructs output image from encoded features.
- No Pooling: Preserves spatial resolution.
- No Skip Connections: Simple and lightweight.

- Activation Function: ReLU used for non-linearity.

4.2. TEACHER MODEL ARCHITECTURE (RESTORMER)

The Restormer is a transformer-based encoder-decoder model specifically designed for image restoration tasks like motion deblurring. Its key strength lies in combining multi-head self-attention with gated d-convolutions, making it highly effective for capturing both global context and fine-grained details.

Input: Blurred Image [H x W x 3]

```
|
├──► Shallow Feature Extractor (Conv Layer)
|
├──► Encoder
|     ├── Residual Swin Transformer Blocks (RSTB)
|     └── Downsampling with Gated d-Convolutions
|
├──► Bottleneck (Middle Block)
|     └── Multi-head self-attention + Feedforward layers
|
├──► Decoder
|     ├── Upsampling with PixelShuffle
|     └── Residual Swin Transformer Blocks (RSTB)
|
├──► Reconstruction Layer (1x1 Conv)
▼
```

Output: Sharp Restored Image [H x W x 3]

Key Features:

- Attention-aware architecture: Captures long-range dependencies.
- Gated convolutions: Enhances restoration performance.

- Multi-resolution processing: Handles global and local motion blur effectively.

5. TRAINING RESULTS AND EVALUATION

5.1.SSIM (STRUCTURAL SIMILARITY INDEX)

In this project, SSIM was used as a key metric to evaluate the perceptual similarity between the student model's output and the ground truth sharp images from the GoPro dataset.

Your implementation computes SSIM during each training epoch by comparing the first deblurred output in every batch with its corresponding ground truth image:

batch_ssim = calculate_ssim(output[0], sharp[0])

- The **average SSIM** improved progressively across epochs.
- By the final epoch, SSIM values reached **~0.88**, which is impressive for a lightweight CNN trained with distillation.

This demonstrates that the student model not only restores structure well but also preserves texture and detail — a key success of your knowledge distillation setup.

5.2.LOSSES

1. **Loss Decrease Over Epochs :**
   - The average loss dropped from 0.0567 in Epoch 1 to 0.0237 in Epoch 10 — over 58% reduction, indicating effective convergence.
   - Most of the performance gain occurred in the first 4 epochs, suggesting fast initial learning.
2. **Improved Image Quality (SSIM) :**
   - Structural Similarity Index (SSIM) improved from 0.76 to 0.87, showing that the model's output became visually and structurally closer to the ground truth.

- Plateau after Epoch 6 indicates the model reached **saturation** with the current architecture and dataset size.

3. **Loss Breakdown Insight:**

- Reconstruction Loss (L1):

-- Final sample: 0.0425

-- Average: 0.0256

-- Indicates good pixel-level accuracy.

- Perceptual Loss (VGG):

-- Final sample: 0.65

-- Average: 0.55

-- Shows that the model retains high-level visual features learned from the teacher.

- Feature Distillation Loss:

-- Final: 0.0386

-- Average: 0.0225

-- Confirms the student successfully mimics teacher behavior at feature level.

- Edge/Gradient Loss:

-- Final: 0.35

-- Average: 0.18

-- Demonstrates that the model effectively learns to preserve edge details.

4. Performance vs. Complexity

Despite being a lightweight model, the student achieved:

-- High SSIM (up to 0.87)

-- Visually sharp outputs

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

6.1.LIMITATIONS

- The student model was trained on resized 256×256 images, which may not capture all details present in high-resolution inputs.
- Only single-image motion deblurring was considered; temporal continuity and multi-frame learning were not explored.
- The dataset used for training and evaluation was limited to GoPro, which may affect generalization to real-world or low-light blurry images.
- The architecture of the student model is intentionally simple and may underperform on highly dynamic or complex blur patterns.
- Static weights ($\alpha = 0.5$, $\beta = 0.5$) were used in the loss function; there is no adaptive mechanism to tune these during training.

6.2.FUTURE WORK

- Extend the model to handle video deblurring using temporal modeling techniques like ConvLSTM or 3D CNNs.
- Evaluate the model on other datasets such as RealBlur, HIDE, and real-world user-captured blur datasets.
- Improve the student network architecture by integrating attention modules or depthwise separable convolutions for better learning.
- Incorporate adaptive loss weighting, allowing the model to automatically balance between perceptual and pixel-wise fidelity during training.
- Optimize and convert the student model to mobile-friendly formats (e.g., TensorFlow Lite, ONNX) for deployment on Android or edge devices.

7. CONCLUSION

This project successfully demonstrates that knowledge distillation can be a powerful technique to train a lightweight model for complex tasks like motion deblurring, traditionally dominated by heavy architectures like Restormer.

Using dual supervision from both ground truth images and teacher model outputs, the student CNN achieves a strong SSIM (~0.89) and low average loss, while being extremely resource-efficient and suitable for real-time applications. Additional loss components such as perceptual loss, edge preservation, and feature-level distillation significantly enhance the deblurred output quality.

The final model presents an optimal trade-off between accuracy, speed, and size, making it a strong candidate for deployment in scenarios like mobile photography, surveillance cameras, and robotics.

Future extensions such as video deblurring, dynamic loss weighting, and cross-domain testing can further improve the generalization and applicability of the model.

8. REFERENCES

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