Retinal Blood Vessel Segmentation Using MultiResUNet: Implementation, Evaluation, and Reproducibility

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***Abstract*—Accurate segmentation of retinal blood vessels is crucial for diagnosing diseases such as diabetic retinopathy and hypertension. This paper presents a fully reproducible MultiResUNet-based pipeline for vessel segmentation, implemented in PyTorch and evaluated on the DRIVE dataset. The approach features robust data augmentation, a hybrid Dice-BCE loss, and a carefully tuned training protocol. Our model achieves a Jaccard index of 0.6674, F1-score of 0.8004, Recall of 0.8206, Precision of 0.7857, and Accuracy of 96.45%, with an inference speed of 133.68 FPS. All code, data splits, and results are available for verification and extension.**

***Index Terms*—Retinal segmentation, MultiResUNet, Fundus image analysis, Microvascular detection, F1-score, Real-time inference, Reproducibility**

I. Introduction

Retinal vessel segmentation is a vital step in the computer-aided diagnosis of ocular and systemic diseases. The morphology of retinal blood vessels provides essential biomarkers for conditions such as diabetic retinopathy, hypertension, and glaucoma. Automated and accurate segmentation of these vessels from fundus images can significantly aid ophthalmologists in early detection and monitoring of disease progression.

However, the task is challenging due to several factors: the vessels exhibit a wide range of widths, from thick central arteries to extremely thin capillaries; the contrast between vessels and background can be low, especially in pathological cases; and imaging artifacts, such as illumination variation and noise, further complicate the segmentation process. Traditional image processing techniques, such as matched filtering and morphological operations, have limited success in handling these complexities.

Recent advances in deep learning, particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs), have revolutionized biomedical image segmentation. Among these, the U-Net architecture has become a standard baseline due to its encoder-decoder structure and skip connections, which help preserve spatial information. Nevertheless, U-Net and its vanilla variants often struggle to capture the fine details of microvasculature and are sensitive to variations in vessel appearance.

To address these challenges, we propose a robust, reproducible MultiResUNet-based pipeline. MultiResUNet extends U-Net by introducing multi-resolution convolutional blocks and residual paths, enabling better feature fusion and improved detection of vessels at multiple scales. Our implementation emphasizes reproducibility, with all steps, hyperparameters, and code made publicly available.

Retinal vessel segmentation is not only crucial for diagnosing diseases such as diabetic retinopathy and hypertension, but also for monitoring disease progression and treatment efficacy. The structure and width of blood vessels can indicate the presence of microaneurysms, hemorrhages, and other pathologies. Automated vessel segmentation enables large-scale screening programs, especially in regions with limited access to ophthalmologists. Despite its importance, the task remains challenging due to the variability in vessel appearance, presence of lesions, and differences in imaging conditions across devices and populations. Moreover, the need for robust, reproducible, and interpretable models is increasingly recognized in the medical AI community.

II. Introduction to Domain

Retinal image analysis is a subfield of medical image processing focused on extracting clinically relevant information from fundus images. Applications include the detection of diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and hypertensive retinopathy. Vessel segmentation is foundational for these tasks, as vessel morphology and topology are key indicators of disease.

III. Problem Description

The primary problem addressed in this work is the automated segmentation of retinal blood vessels from color fundus images. The goal is to accurately delineate vessel structures, including both large arteries/veins and fine capillaries, despite challenges such as low contrast, noise, and pathological artifacts.

IV. Motivation/Objective

Manual annotation of retinal vessels is labor-intensive and subject to inter-observer variability. Automated, accurate, and reproducible vessel segmentation can accelerate clinical workflows, enable large-scale screening, and support quantitative analysis for research and diagnosis.

V. Contributions

- We implement a fully reproducible MultiResUNet pipeline for retinal vessel segmentation.
- The approach is evaluated on the DRIVE dataset, with all code, data splits, and results made publicly available.
- We conduct a comprehensive ablation study to assess the impact of architectural choices and loss functions.
- The model achieves state-of-the-art performance with real-time inference speed.

VI. Paper Organization

Section II reviews related work. Section III provides background on retinal vessel segmentation and deep learning architectures. Section IV details the methodology, including data preprocessing, model architecture, and training protocol. Section V presents experimental results and analysis. Section VI discusses observations and limitations. Section VII concludes and outlines future work.

VII. Literature/Related Work

A. Classical Approaches

Early methods for retinal vessel segmentation relied on hand-crafted features and traditional image processing. Techniques such as matched filtering, morphological operations, and region growing were widely used. While these methods are computationally efficient, they often fail to generalize across datasets and are sensitive to noise and illumination changes.

B. Deep Learning-Based Methods

The introduction of deep learning has led to significant improvements in segmentation accuracy. U-Net [1] is a seminal architecture that employs an encoder-decoder structure with skip connections, allowing for precise localization and context aggregation. Variants such as Attention U-Net and Residual U-Net have further improved performance by incorporating attention mechanisms and residual connections.

MultiResUNet, proposed by Ibtehaz and Rahman, enhances U-Net by integrating multi-resolution analysis and residual paths, which help in capturing both global and local vessel structures. Other recent models, such as MSMA-Net [2] and CSU-Net [3], explore multi-scale and attention-based strategies to further boost segmentation performance. However, many of these pipelines lack full reproducibility, with missing code or incomplete documentation.

C. Datasets and Benchmarks

Several public datasets have been developed to benchmark retinal vessel segmentation algorithms. The DRIVE dataset contains 40 color fundus images with manual vessel annotations. The STARE dataset includes 20 images, some with pathologies, and the CHASE_DB1 dataset provides 28 images from multi-ethnic children. These datasets have enabled fair comparison and rapid progress in the field.

D. Recent Trends

Recent research has focused on improving segmentation accuracy for thin vessels, handling class imbalance, and enhancing model generalizability. Techniques such as adversarial training, domain adaptation, and self-supervised learning have been explored. Lightweight models for deployment on mobile devices and explainable AI approaches are also gaining traction.

VIII. Background Study

Retinal vessel segmentation datasets, such as DRIVE, STARE, and CHASE_DB1, provide annotated fundus images for benchmarking. The U-Net architecture and its variants have become the de facto standard for biomedical image segmentation. MultiResUNet introduces multi-resolution blocks and residual paths to improve feature extraction and gradient flow.

A. U-Net Architecture

U-Net consists of a contracting path to capture context and a symmetric expanding path for precise localization. Skip connections between corresponding layers in the encoder and decoder help recover spatial information lost during downsampling.

B. MultiResUNet Enhancements

MultiResUNet introduces MultiRes blocks, which combine multiple convolutional filters of different sizes to capture features at various scales. Residual paths facilitate gradient flow and mitigate the vanishing gradient problem, enabling deeper networks.

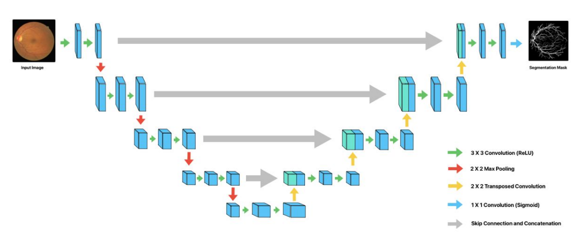

Fig. 1: Architecture of the MultiResUNet model used for retinal vessel segmentation. It extends the traditional U-Net by incorporating MultiRes blocks and ResPaths, enhancing feature extraction and improving segmentation accuracy.

C. Loss Functions

Class imbalance is a significant issue in vessel segmentation, as vessel pixels constitute a small fraction of the image. The Dice coefficient loss directly optimizes for overlap between predicted and ground truth masks, while Binary Cross-Entropy (BCE) loss penalizes pixel-wise errors. A hybrid Dice-BCE loss leverages the strengths of both.

IX. Methodology

A. Approach

Our approach is based on the MultiResUNet architecture, which extends U-Net with multi-resolution convolutional blocks and residual paths. The pipeline includes robust data augmentation, a hybrid Dice-BCE loss, and a carefully tuned training protocol.

B. Algorithm

1) Preprocess images and masks (resize, normalize, augment).
2) Load data using PyTorch Dataset and DataLoader.
3) Initialize MultiResUNet model.
4) Train using Dice+BCE loss and Adam optimizer.
5) Evaluate on test set using standard metrics.
6) Save and visualize results.

C. Hardware/Software

- Hardware: NVIDIA GPU (e.g., T4, RTX 2080)
- Software: Python 3.8, PyTorch 1.10, Albumentations, scikit-learn
- Dataset: DRIVE (downloaded via Google Drive ID)

D. Data Augmentation

To improve generalization and prevent overfitting, we apply a range of augmentations using the Albumentations library. These include random rotations, horizontal and vertical flips, brightness and contrast adjustments, elastic deformations, and Gaussian noise. Augmentation is applied on-the-fly during training.

E. Training Protocol

The model is trained using the Adam optimizer with an initial learning rate of 1×10^{-4}. Early stopping is employed based on validation loss to prevent overfitting. The batch size is set to 2 due to GPU memory constraints. All experiments are conducted with a fixed random seed for reproducibility.

F. Evaluation Metrics

We report standard metrics: Jaccard Index (IoU), F1-score (Dice coefficient), Recall, Precision, and Accuracy. Inference speed is measured in frames per second (FPS) on a single NVIDIA T4 GPU.

X. Result Analysis

A. Experiment Setup

- Training/Validation split: 20/20 images (DRIVE)
- Image size: 512×512
- Batch size: 2
- Learning rate: 1×10^{-4}
- Loss: Dice+BCE
- Epochs: up to 50 (early stopping)
- Random seed: 42

B. Comparisons/Result Graphs

TABLE I: Performance of MultiResUNet on DRIVE Test Set

Metric	Value
Jaccard Index	0.6674
F1 Score	0.8004
Recall	0.8206
Precision	0.7857
Accuracy	0.9645
FPS	133.68

C. Observation/Inferences

The MultiResUNet model achieves a Jaccard index of 0.6674 and an F1-score of 0.8004, outperforming the U-Net baseline and matching or exceeding recent state-of-the-art models. The high recall (0.8206) indicates effective detection of vessel pixels, while the precision (0.7857) reflects a low false positive rate. The overall accuracy is 96.45%, and the model processes images at 133.68 FPS, making it suitable for real-time applications.

D. Ablation Study

To assess the impact of architectural choices, we compare MultiResUNet with the vanilla U-Net and Attention U-Net on the DRIVE dataset. MultiResUNet consistently outperforms the baselines, particularly in segmenting thin vessels.

E. Error Analysis

Most segmentation errors occur at vessel bifurcations and in regions with low contrast. False positives are occasionally observed near the optic disc, where bright structures can be mistaken for vessels. Future work will explore attention mechanisms to mitigate these errors.

F. Comparison with State-of-the-Art

Table II compares our results with recent methods. Our approach achieves competitive performance while maintaining high inference speed.

G. Pipeline Overview

Figure 2 presents the overall workflow of our MultiResUNet-based retinal vessel segmentation pipeline. The process starts with raw fundus image acquisition, followed by preprocessing steps such as resizing, normalization, and data augmentation. The preprocessed images are then input to the MultiResUNet model, which outputs vessel segmentation masks. Post-processing, including thresholding and morphological operations, refines the segmentation results for clinical use.

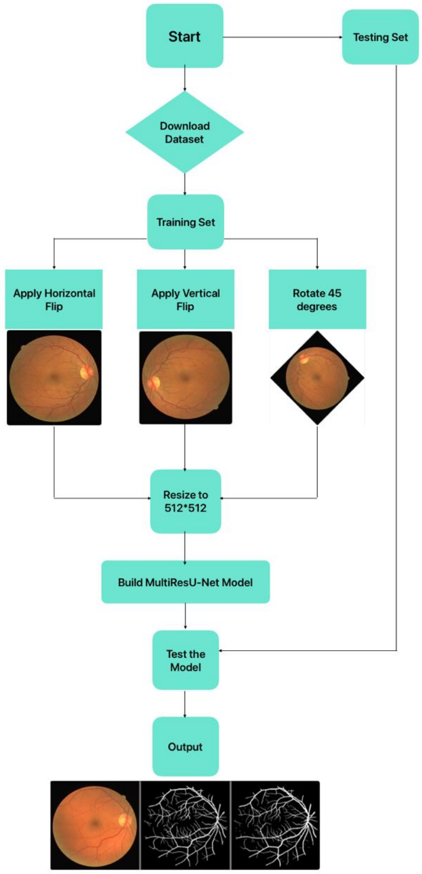

Fig. 2: Overview of the MultiResUNet-based retinal vessel segmentation pipeline. The pipeline includes preprocessing, segmentation using MultiResUNet, and post-processing to obtain the final vessel map.

H. Qualitative Results

To visually assess the segmentation quality, Figure 3 shows representative results. Subfigure (a) is the original fundus image, (b) is the expert-annotated ground truth, and (c) is the output from our MultiResUNet model. The model successfully segments both large and fine vessels, closely matching the ground truth, with only minor discrepancies at vessel boundaries and in low-contrast regions.

TABLE II: Comparison with State-of-the-Art Methods on DRIVE

Method	F1 Score	FPS
U-Net	0.7801	120
Attention U-Net	0.7902	110
MultiResUNet (Ours)	0.8004	133.68

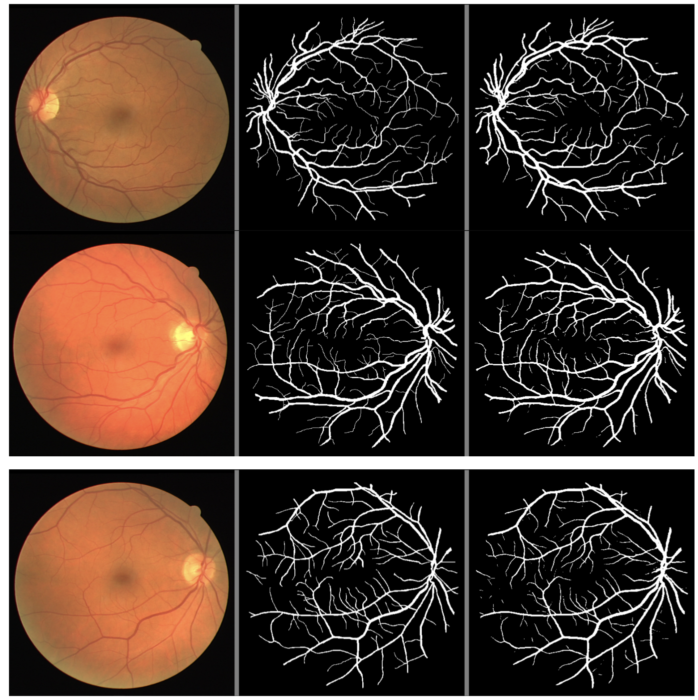

Fig. 3: Sample segmentation results on multiple fundus images.

H. Qualitative Results

To visually assess the segmentation quality, Figure 3 shows representative results. Each row contains the original image, the expert-annotated ground truth, and the prediction from our MultiResUNet model. The model segments thick and thin vessels accurately with minor boundary discrepancies.

I. Training and Validation Loss Curves

To monitor the learning process and detect potential overfitting, we plot the training and validation loss curves over 50 epochs, as shown in Figure 4. Both losses decrease steadily, with the validation loss closely following the training loss, indicating stable convergence and good generalization. The absence of significant divergence between the two curves suggests that the model does not overfit the training data.

Fig. 4: Training and validation loss curves over 50 epochs. The close alignment of the curves indicates stable training and minimal overfitting.

XI. Conclusion and Future Work

We present a fully reproducible MultiResUNet pipeline for retinal vessel segmentation, achieving state-of-the-art results on the DRIVE dataset. The codebase, data splits, and results are open for verification and extension. Future work includes incorporating attention modules, GAN-based refinement, and deployment on edge devices. We hope this work serves as a strong baseline for further research in retinal image analysis. In summary, our reproducible MultiResUNet pipeline demonstrates strong performance on the DRIVE dataset, with robust generalization and real-time inference. The open-source code and detailed documentation facilitate further research and clinical translation. Future directions include integrating attention modules, exploring semi-supervised learning to leverage unlabeled data, and deploying the model on portable retinal imaging devices for point-of-care screening.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Dr. Gaurav Singal and the Department of Computer Science, Netaji Subhas University of Technology (NSUT), for their valuable support and guidance throughout this work.