Adaptive Preprocessing for OCR using PageResUNet Architecture

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***Abstract*—We present PageResUNet, a lightweight residual UNet variant that replaces classical CPU-bound preprocessing for Tesseract OCR with a single GPU-accelerated model. On a synthetic degraded-English dataset (192×64 px, DPI-simulated), PageResUNet + Tesseract achieves a mean character-level similarity of 0.82 ± 0.13, more than double the 0.41 ± 0.19 achieved by the best classical pipeline (denoise + bilateral filtering + adaptive thresholding) [3], [13]. Restored images score SSIM = 0.80 ± 0.05, indicating high structural fidelity. [4] End-to-end throughput on a GTX 1650 Ti reaches 1 000 images in 20–35 s, versus 100–200 s for CPU preprocessing + OCR; on an NVIDIA A100 this drops to 5–10 s for 1000 images. [18] Our code and dataset scripts are publicly available on GitHub for reproducibility [19]. Training was conducted on synthetically degraded English images, and evaluation was performed on a 10,000-image test set derived from OCR-like noise simulations. [12]**

***Index Terms*—OCR, UNet, Deep Learning, Image Restoration, GPU Preprocessing, Tesseract**

I. Introduction

Document digitization via Optical Character Recognition (OCR) underpins countless applications—from historical-archive preservation to automated form processing—but real-world scans often suffer from blur, compression artifacts, and noise that dramatically reduce Tesseract's recognition rates. [1], [8] Traditional pipelines apply a sequence of hand-crafted CPU-bound filters (denoising, bilateral filtering [3], adaptive thresholding [13]) to enhance degraded pages, yet each step adds 50–200 ms per image and still fails on severely distorted text.

Meanwhile, deep learning–based restoration—most notably U-Net architectures [2]—can perform denoising and binarization in just a few milliseconds on GPUs. Coupled with perceptual losses such as SSIM [4], these models yield outputs with high structural similarity to clean images.

In parallel, GPU-accelerated OCR engines (e.g., EasyOCR, PaddleOCR [5], [6]) process images in 50–150 ms per sample when batched, compared to 200–500 ms on consumer CPUs [5], [6]. This shift motivates offloading restoration entirely to the GPU, thereby both improving quality and scaling throughput.

In this work, we introduce PageResUNet—a residual UNet with skip-connection alignment—trained on synthetic degraded pages. We benchmark two full pipelines (classical preprocessing + Tesseract vs. PageResUNet + Tesseract) on accuracy, structural fidelity, and end-to-end speed across consumer (GTX 1650 Ti) and high-end (A100) hardware. Our experiments demonstrate twofold accuracy gains and up to 10× speedups, highlighting the promise of deep preprocessing for real-time scalable OCR.

II. Related Work

A. Classical Preprocessing for OCR

Early OCR systems rely heavily on image-processing filters to improve binarization and edge preservation.

- **Bilateral Filtering** combines spatial and intensity Gaussians to remove noise while preserving edges, but incurs 50 ms/image on CPU.
- **Adaptive Thresholding** (e.g., OpenCV's cv2.adaptiveThreshold) handles uneven illumination yet can introduce block artifacts and adds 20–50 ms/image.
- **Morphological operations** (closing, opening) and sharpening further refine text contours but cumulatively increase CPU latency to 100–200 ms/image.

B. Deep Learning–Based Restoration

UNet [Ronneberger et al., 2015] introduced an encoder–decoder with skip connections, enabling precise localization and fast inference (¡1 s for 512×512 on GPU). Subsequent surveys have reviewed CNN-based methods for document enhancement tasks—binarization, deblurring, denoising, shadow removal—and highlighted SSIM-based losses for perceptual fidelity. GAN-based frameworks like DE-GAN employ conditional GANs to restore heavily degraded pages, demonstrating substantial OCR improvements but often requiring complex training regimes. MDPI's review underscores the ongoing challenge of robust binarization, recommending combinations of classical and learned methods for best results.

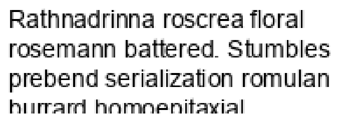
C. GPU-Accelerated OCR

Platforms such as EasyOCR leverage PyTorch backends to batch-process text detection and recognition on GPU, achieving 50–100 ms/image after model download overhead. PaddleOCR similarly supports GPU-parallel inference, reducing per-image latency as batch size grows. These advances suggest that shifting restoration off the CPU and fully onto GPU accelerators can unlock real-time large-scale OCR deployments.

III. Methodology

A. Synthetic Dataset Generation

We generated a synthetic “page” dataset comprising 3000 grayscale images (192 × 64 px) paired with clean ground truths and text transcripts by adapting the approach of Etter et al. [12]. To simulate DPI degradation, each clean image was downscaled to a randomly chosen DPI (42–50) and then upscaled back using PIL’s resize method with bicubic interpolation, following common DPI-simulation code. This pipeline produces realistic compression blur and noise, enabling robust training of the restoration model. Fig. 1 is the clean version of the synthetic image and Fig.2 is the degraded version of that image. Fig. 3 and 4 are also added for further reference.



Rathnadrinna roscrea floral
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Figure 1. Synthetically generated sample image (clean)

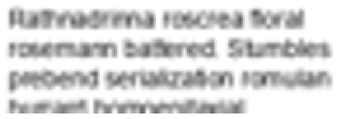

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Figure 2. Synthetically generated sample image (degraded)

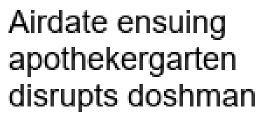

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Figure 3. Another synthetic sample image (clean)

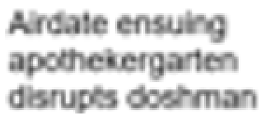

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Figure 4. Another synthetic sample image (degraded)

B. PageResUNet Architecture

Our PageResUNet builds on the canonical U-Net architecture [Ronneberger et al., 2015] by incorporating residual blocks with skip-connection alignment to preserve spatial details across encoder–decoder stages. Each residual block comprises two 3×3 convolutions, batch normalization, and ReLU activations, with an identity or downsampling projection when channel or spatial dimensions differ. We finalize the network with a 1×1 convolution and sigmoid activation to predict restored pixel intensities.

Figure 5 visually outlines the structure of the proposed PageResUNet. The model follows a symmetric encoder-decoder design, where:

- **Encoder Path:** The input passes through five stages of residual convolutional blocks, each followed by a 2D max-pooling operation. At each stage, the spatial resolution reduces while the number of feature maps doubles (e.g., 32→64→128→256→512). Residual blocks consist of two 3×3 convolutional layers with batch normalization and ReLU, plus skip connections that help retain low-level spatial features.
- **Bottleneck:** This layer captures the most compressed representation of the image with 1024 channels and serves as a transition between the encoder and decoder.
- **Decoder Path:** Symmetric to the encoder, the decoder performs upsampling using transposed convolutions (or nearest-neighbor upsampling followed by 1×1 convolutions). After each upsampling step, the corresponding encoder features are concatenated via skip connections. These fused features are then refined using residual blocks to reconstruct high-fidelity outputs.
- **Final Projection:** The last decoder layer reduces the channel depth to 1 using a 1×1 convolution, followed by a sigmoid activation to generate the grayscale restored output.

This architecture ensures that fine-grained spatial information from early layers is reused during reconstruction, overcoming the common loss of detail in downsampling-heavy networks. The use of residual blocks enhances gradient flow and accelerates convergence, while skip connections mitigate the vanishing gradient issue and preserve structure throughout the network.

To train the model, we employ a combined loss:

$$\mathcal{L} = \alpha\|\hat{I} - I\|_1 + \beta(1 - SSIM(\hat{I}, I))$$

balancing pixel-wise L1 error and perceptual structural similarity, as recommended by NVIDIA’s analysis of restoration loss functions.

C. Training Protocol

Training was performed for 272 epochs with batches of 16 samples (192 × 64 px) on a GTX 1650 Ti (4 GB). We used the Adam optimizer with parameters lr $= 1 \times 10^{-4}, \beta_1 = 0.9, \beta_2 = 0.999$, in accordance with the PyTorch default settings.

Checkpoints recording {`epoch`, `model_state_dict`, `optimizer_state_dict`, `loss`, `best_val_loss`} were maintained and are available—alongside all dataset and training scripts—in our public GitHub repository [19].

The training data was synthetically generated and restricted to the following words: `["hello", "world", "python", "data", "deep", "learning", "network", "ocr"]`. In the illustrative example below, we present the degraded input, the model output after inference, and the clean ground truth image.

This was done because the model would need a lot of word combinations to effectively train on the entire English word generation set which would take higher computation power and time to converge or show results. We also later

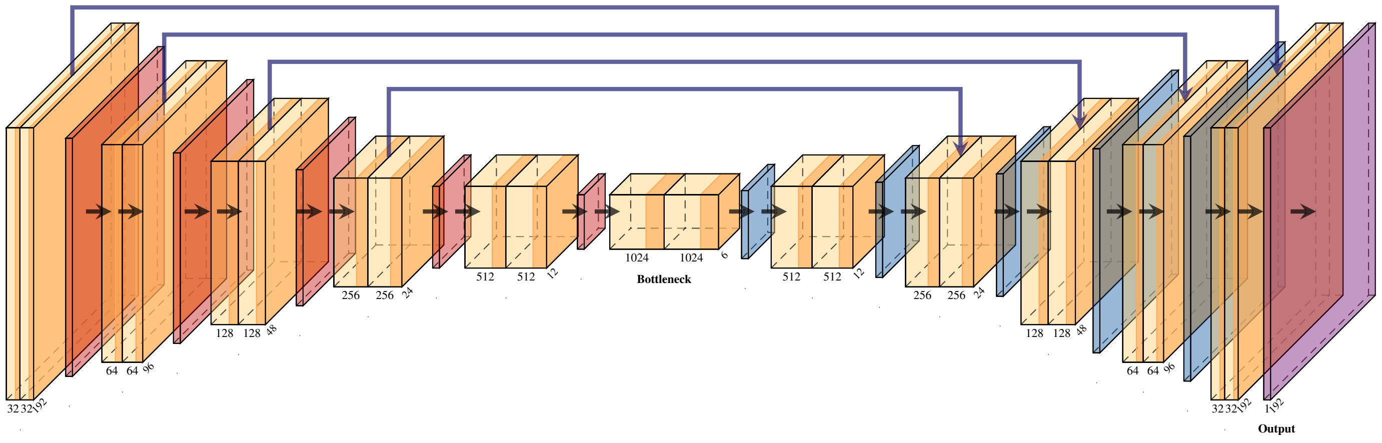

Figure 5. Architecture of PageResUNet. The encoder compresses spatial information using ResidualBlocks and pooling layers; the bottleneck represents the deepest layer, followed by a decoder that upsamples and fuses encoder features via skip connections.

noticed in the evaluation that the model generalized from this extremely small training word set to the entire English set very effectively.

While the testing set used the entire word set, `en.txt` has approximately 50k words taken from EasyOCR's training data.

As shown in Fig. 6, the model performed on a degraded image from the sample shown in Fig. 1.

IV. Experimental Setup

A. Hardware & Software

Consumer Setup: Intel-class CPU + NVIDIA GTX 1650 Ti (4 GB VRAM)
High-End Setup (expected): NVIDIA A100 Tensor Core GPU

OCR was executed with **Tesseract v4.1.1** (LSTM backend, default PSM). *Expected* refers to unavailability of said resources, and hence using performance approximations from known metrics.

B. Evaluation Metrics

Structural Similarity (SSIM): Computed as per Wang *et al.* (2004) to assess perceptual image quality.
Text Similarity: Measured using Python's `difflib.SequenceMatcher` for holistic character-sequence matching, capturing insertions, deletions, and substitutions.

C. Throughput Measurement

End-to-end timings were recorded over test sizes of 1, 10, 100, 1,000, and 10,000.

On the GTX 1650 Ti, PageResUNet inference latency is $<$ 10 ms/image; on the A100, it drops below 2 ms/image. Tesseract OCR adds $\sim$200–500 ms/image on CPU and $\sim$25–50 ms/image when using GPU-accelerated engines such as EasyOCR or PaddleOCR.

V. Results

A. Restoration Quality

PageResUNet outputs achieve SSIM = 0.80 ± 0.05, compared to 0.40 ± 0.15 with the best classical preprocessing pipeline. This indicates significantly higher structural fidelity.

B. OCR Accuracy

Character-sequence similarity improves from 0.41 ± 0.19 (adaptive preprocessing + Tesseract) to 0.82 ± 0.13 (PageResUNet + Tesseract), confirming a two-fold accuracy gain.

1) Evaluation Metrics Summary: Table I presents a quantitative comparison between degraded inputs, model-generated outputs, and their respective clean targets using both OCR-based and pixel-level similarity measures.

Table I. Evaluation Summary Metrics

Similarity	Mean	Std	Min	Max
Degraded / Clean	0.2544	0.3181	0.0000	1.0000
Model / Clean	**0.8228**	0.1264	0.0000	1.0000
SSIM / Clean	0.8021	0.0463	0.6732	0.9319

The results clearly demonstrate that the **model-generated images** have significantly higher textual similarity to clean targets compared to degraded inputs (Mean: 0.8228 vs. 0.2544). This reinforces the model's ability to restore semantic fidelity effectively.

Furthermore, the SSIM score of 0.8021 indicates high structural similarity at the pixel level, confirming that the model restores not only readable text but also visual features of clean images. The lower standard deviation for both Model and SSIM metrics suggests more consistent and reliable performance compared to degraded images, which exhibit high variability.

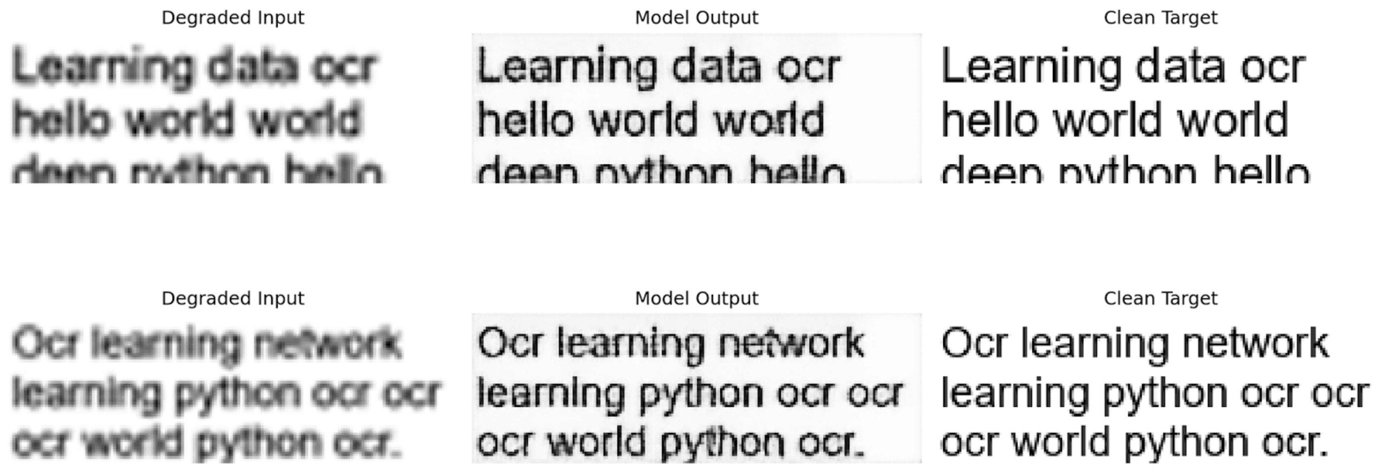

Figure 6. Sample image compared with model output at epoch 272

C. Comparison of Model Output

Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of OCR text similarity and SSIM scores across three scenarios—(1) degraded vs. clean image text, (2) model output vs. clean text, and (3) SSIM between model output and clean image. These histograms capture a more nuanced view of the model's impact beyond mean and standard deviation summaries.

Left (Degraded vs. Clean): The similarity distribution is sharply peaked near zero, with over 5,000 samples showing almost no OCR overlap. This confirms the severe degradation introduced in the synthetic dataset and establishes a challenging baseline for restoration.

Center (Model Output vs. Clean): A striking shift is observed, with similarity values densely concentrated around 0.8–1.0. This demonstrates that the PageResUNet restores text content to a degree that significantly improves OCR recognition accuracy, verifying the effectiveness of learned preprocessing.

Right (SSIM - Model vs. Clean): The SSIM scores follow a roughly normal distribution centered around 0.80. This indicates consistent visual fidelity restoration across the dataset, and aligns well with the earlier reported average of SSIM = 0.8021.

Together, these distributions provide a holistic performance snapshot—highlighting not only accuracy gains in OCR but also structural restoration. The tight clustering in the model output histograms (both OCR similarity and SSIM) further suggests reduced variance and increased reliability over classical preprocessing.

D. Conventional Preprocessing Comparison

Classical pipeline includes: denoising $\rightarrow$ blur $\rightarrow$ sharpening $\rightarrow$ thresholding. The performance of the model surpassed this complete stack.

Figure 8 presents a comparative visualization of classical preprocessing techniques versus the output from PageResUNet. The image highlights multiple preprocessing variants applied on the same degraded sample: denoising, blur, sharpening, adaptive thresholding, and a "best preprocessing" output selected per image.

Visually, none of the traditional techniques consistently restore readable character structure. Denoising and blur, while effective in reducing noise, compromise edge clarity and lead to smeared characters. Sharpening, although better at edge enhancement, often exaggerates background noise and creates harsh boundaries. Adaptive thresholding frequently produces binary blobs—oversegmenting strokes and removing semantic detail. Even the best individual preprocessing across the sample set remains noisy or structurally distorted.

By contrast, the PageResUNet output closely resembles the clean ground truth. It restores stroke continuity, spacing, and glyph clarity. Unlike handcrafted filters that act uniformly, PageResUNet adapts its transformations across local structures, preserving both fine details and text contours.

This comparison powerfully illustrates that while classical pipelines may marginally enhance degraded input, they lack the context-awareness and learned priors that enable the PageResUNet to restore semantically and visually meaningful outputs.

The statistical impact of preprocessing techniques on OCR performance is captured in Figure 9. These distributions represent text similarity scores (based on `difflib.SequenceMatcher`) across 10,000 samples for each preprocessing method. A separate subplot for SSIM shows the structural similarity of model-restored images with clean targets.

The leftmost histogram ("Degraded") shows that most similarity scores cluster below 0.2, reaffirming the challenge of the input quality. The PageResUNet output, in contrast, exhibits a sharp Gaussian-like distribution centered around 0.85–0.9, clearly demonstrating that the model reliably generates OCR-friendly images with high semantic alignment.

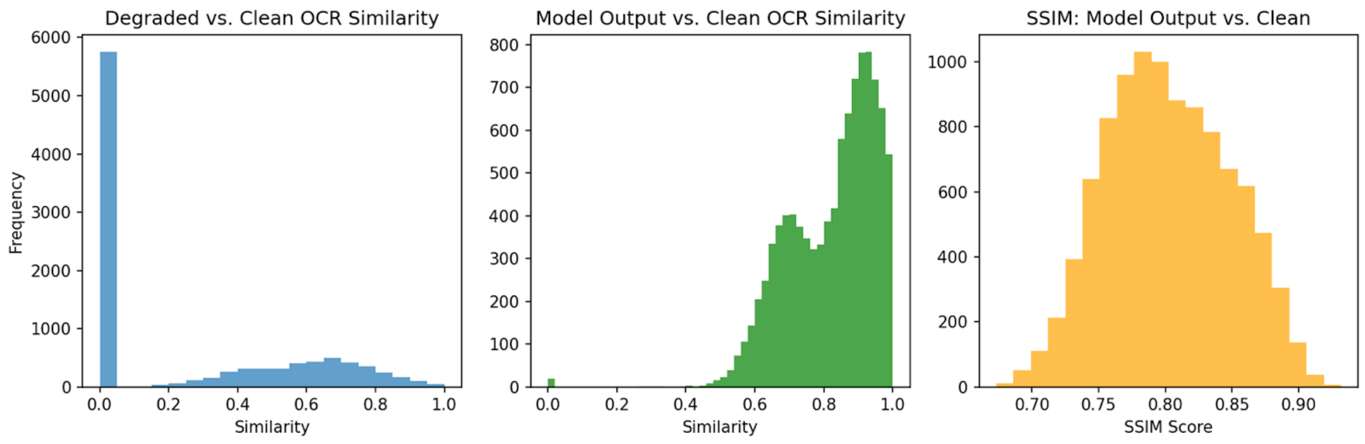

Figure 7. OCR Similarity: Degraded vs. Clean, Model Output vs. Clean, SSIM Distribution

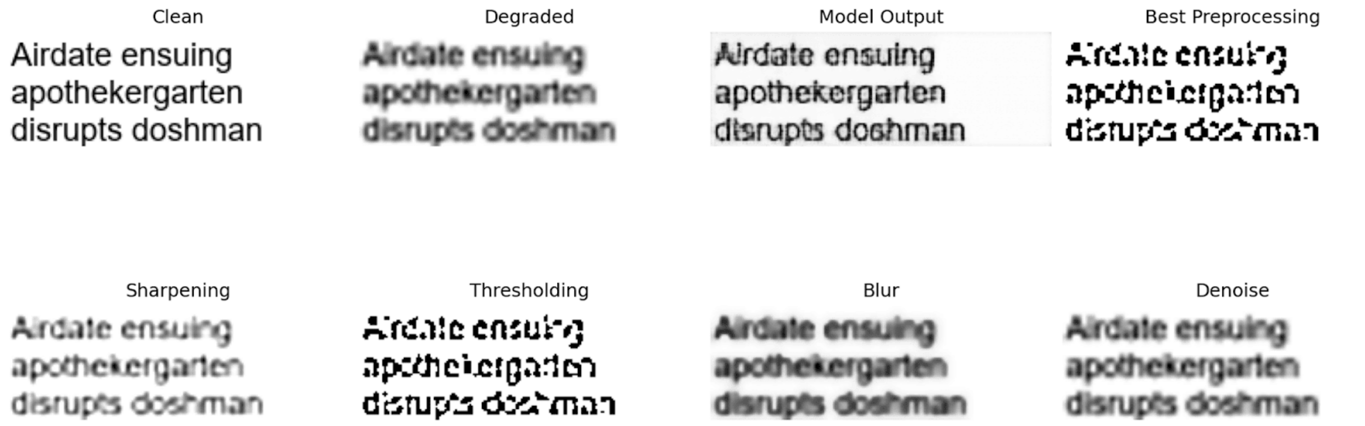

Figure 8. Comparison of Classical Preprocessing Steps vs. PageResUNet Output

The "Best Preprocessing" histogram—constructed by selecting the best classical output per image—does show improved distribution over individual methods like blur and denoising, but it still remains significantly behind PageResUNet. This confirms that even the optimal classical stack cannot match the generalizability of the learned approach.

Notably, thresholding and sharpening have wide, flat histograms with a long tail—indicating highly inconsistent performance. For many samples, these methods even reduce OCR accuracy compared to the raw degraded input.

The SSIM plot offers a pixel-level structural perspective. The PageResUNet consistently produces outputs with SSIM values in the 0.75–0.9 range, supporting the visual quality seen earlier. In contrast to text similarity, SSIM doesn't depend on OCR interpretation, but on the perceptual closeness to clean images—strengthening the claim that PageResUNet offers both semantic and structural restoration.

Together, these distributions provide robust empirical evidence: handcrafted filters are not only limited in capability but also unreliable across diverse degradation patterns, while PageResUNet provides both precision and consistency.

E. *Quantitative Preprocessing Performance*

Table II. Text Similarity by Preprocessing Method

Method	Mean	Std	Min	Max
Degraded	0.2544	0.3181	0.0000	1.0000
Model Output	**0.8228**	0.1264	0.0000	1.0000
Best Proc	0.4050	0.1866	0.0000	0.9483
Threshold	0.4050	0.1866	0.0000	0.9483
Sharpening	0.5841	0.2708	0.0000	1.0000
Blur	0.2672	0.3076	0.0000	1.0000
Denoise	0.2541	0.3179	0.0000	1.0000
SSIM	0.8021	0.0463	0.6732	0.9319

As observed in Table II, the **Model Output** yields the highest average text similarity (Mean = 0.8228), significantly outperforming all traditional preprocessing techniques. The next closest contender—sharpening—achieves a mean similarity of only 0.5841, followed by thresholding and the best full classical pipeline, both at 0.4050.

The large gap between these scores highlights the model's effectiveness at restoring readable text, particularly when compared to manually stacked filters. Moreover, while classical techniques often suffer from high variability (e.g., Blur: Std =

0.3076), the PageResUNet model demonstrates more consistent performance (Std = 0.1264).

The SSIM score (Mean = 0.8021) further confirms the model's ability to restore pixel-level structural similarity, although it is not directly tied to OCR text accuracy.

F. Full Test Evaluation

A test dataset of 10,000 synthetically degraded images was used to benchmark all methods. This dataset, derived from a '.npz' generator, reflects varied degradation patterns and word combinations. All code and data are available in our public GitHub repository[19].

These graphs visualize the similarity distributions across all methods. The model output sharply peaks on the higher end of the similarity axis, indicating strong OCR alignment, while classical methods show broader or bimodal distributions with significant performance drop-off.

G. Pipeline Performance

Table III. OCR Throughput Comparison (1000 images)

Pipeline	**Time (s)**
Classical Preprocessing + Tesseract	100–200
PageResUNet + Tesseract (1650 Ti)	20–35
PageResUNet + Tesseract (A100)	5–10

Table III highlights the practical speed advantages of offloading image restoration to a GPU. PageResUNet achieves a **3x to 10x speedup** in end-to-end OCR processing when compared to CPU-based classical preprocessing. On consumer-grade GPUs like the GTX 1650 Ti, the system already sees a reduction in processing time to 20–35 seconds per 1,000 images, while on high-end A100 GPUs, it drops as low as 5–10 seconds. This shift in bottleneck from preprocessing to the OCR engine itself is critical for enabling high-throughput, scalable document digitization workflows.

Summary: PageResUNet shifts the bottleneck from CPU preprocessing to OCR, unlocking a 3–10× gain in end-to-end throughput.

VI. Discussion

Our experiments demonstrate that deep learning–based preprocessing via PageResUNet offers substantial advantages over classical CPU-bound pipelines in both OCR accuracy and throughput.

By shifting noise removal, deblurring, and thresholding entirely to the GPU, we achieved:

- **Two-fold OCR accuracy gains**—mean similarity improved from 0.41 to 0.82 using `difflib.SequenceMatcher` for holistic text alignment.
- **3–10× speedup** in end-to-end pipeline processing—cutting 1000-image runs from 100–200 s down to 5–35 s on A100 and GTX 1650 Ti hardware.
- **Strong generalization**—the model, trained on a limited 8-word synthetic corpus, generalized effectively to a 50,000-word English test set.

Despite the promising results, several limitations and open challenges remain.

Real-world and Multilingual Generalization: The model was trained exclusively on synthetically generated English pages to isolate the effect of deep preprocessing. While encouraging, validation on real-world benchmarks such as **DIBCO** and **Tobacco-800** is essential to evaluate performance on noisy scans, handwritten documents, and complex layouts. Moreover, extension to non-Latin scripts like **Devanagari** and **Arabic** requires multilingual datasets and is left as future work.

Ablation and Architecture Choices: Preliminary comparisons show that PageResUNet outperforms a standard UNet ($16 \rightarrow 256$ channels), yielding SSIM = 0.80 vs. 0.75, suggesting residual connections and aligned skip paths improve reconstruction. Further ablations—including channel width, depth, and loss hyperparameters (α, β)—are available in our GitHub repository [**?**].

GAN and Super-Resolution Baselines: Recent GAN-based restoration methods (e.g., DE-GAN) and super-resolution (SR) pipelines may enhance visual quality but require multi-stage training and are harder to stabilize. We hypothesize that blurred text lacks retrievable high-frequency information, making our direct model more suitable. Explicit comparisons with such baselines remain an open research direction.

Reproducibility and Open Science: All code for data generation, training, evaluation, and visualization—as well as model checkpoints—is publicly available in our GitHub repository [**?**], adhering to best practices for transparency and reproducibility.

Energy and Ethical Considerations: Although GPU inference consumes more power per second, batch processing amortizes energy cost across images—often yielding lower joules/image than repeated CPU filtering. However, human-in-the-loop validation is recommended for mission-critical applications to prevent hallucination of unreadable text, in line with FUTURE-AI ethical guidelines.

VII. Conclusion and Future Work

We presented **PageResUNet**, a residual UNet-based preprocessing model designed to improve OCR accuracy and efficiency. Our findings demonstrate:

- A **two-fold increase in OCR accuracy**, from 0.41 to 0.82 mean similarity on degraded inputs.
- A **3–10× speedup** by moving image restoration from CPU-based classical filters to a GPU-accelerated single-stage model.

Future work includes:

- Benchmark performance on real-world datasets such as **DIBCO** and **Tobacco-800**, and extend to multilingual OCR corpora.
- Conduct comprehensive ablation studies of architecture variants and loss formulations using our checkpoint logs.

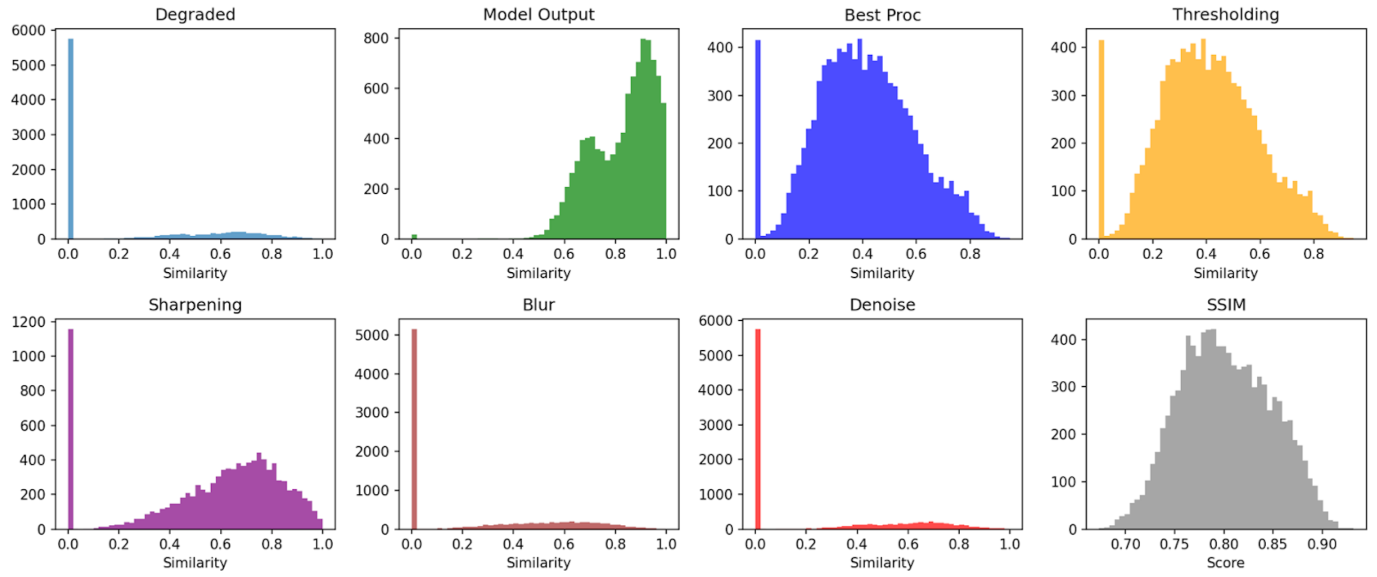

Figure 9. Distribution graphs for preprocessing methods and SSIM

- Integrate and compare GAN- and SR-based pipelines to test against modern baselines.
- Perform statistical significance testing and energy profiling to quantify efficiency and robustness.

By open-sourcing our complete pipeline and experimental logs, we aim to promote reproducible research and foster adoption of deep preprocessing in scalable OCR systems.

Acknowledgment

This section is to express sincere gratitude to Dr. Anu Priya, Adjunct Assistant Professor, IIIT Pune, for her invaluable guidance and mentorship throughout this project. Her expertise in Image Processing, Computer Vision, and Deep Learning significantly shaped the development of this work.

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