ADROID Conference Series: Engineering and Technology
Volume 2, Issue 3, pp.48-60, 2026

Object Surface Defect Segmentation using Vision Transformers and Hybrid Models

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Abstract. Detection of surface defects in the manufacturing industry is fundamental to maintain the quality of products and reduce waste production. Inspection processes are always affected by human error due to the nature of manual operations in manufacturing environments, particularly in cases of high production rates, while traditional machine vision systems cannot generalize over the complex structure of surface materials. In order to achieve the goal of automated surface defect detection, convolutional neural networks have been proposed. However, the local feature extraction abilities restrict these network from detecting long-distance dependencies in surface material structures and hence limits its ability to detect defect boundaries accurately. This research paper offers an empirical comparison between three deep learning frameworks for pixel-based surface defect detection: a baseline CNN architecture known as U-Net, Vision Transformer (ViT) based on patch-wise attention mechanism, and TransUNet that combines CNN and transformer architecture. The three deep learning models were compared following a unified approach of training and evaluation over three benchmark industrial surface defect segmentation datasets, i.e., MVTec AD, NEU Surface Defect Database, and DAGM 2007, where the Dice Coefficient and mean Intersection over Union are used as evaluation criteria. It is observed that U-Net performs best in terms of maximum mIoU of **0.75** at Epoch 26, ViT attains **0.72** with better generalization behavior at Epoch 41, and TransUNet achieves **0.67** at epoch 19.

Keywords: Surface Defect Segmentation, Vision Transformers, Hybrid CNN-Transformer Models, Industrial Quality Inspection, Deep Learning, Dice Coefficient, Mean Intersection over Union (mIoU).

1. INTRODUCTION

The task of identifying surface defects reliably is important not only from the practical point of view but also necessary for quality assurance. Surface defects like cracks, scratches, pits, dents, and corrosion may significantly undermine structural safety and decrease the lifetime of manufactured products. Moreover, some defective products cannot be even launched into the market without causing considerable damage to a company's reputation. Manual inspection is becoming less effective due to increasing automation and high production volumes. Fatigue and subjective perception significantly reduce the reliability of manual inspection results. Secondly, high inspection rates lead to low precision.

Rule-based machine vision solutions appeared as an alternative to manual inspections; however, the use of hard-coded rules and strict dependencies on lighting conditions and material surface properties limit applicability and reliability. Deep learning models have greatly enriched the range of tools suitable for automation. Convolutional neural networks and encoder-decoder architectures based on them (such as U-Net) provide highly accurate pixel-wise object segmentation through hierarchical features and structural dependencies recovered using skip connections.

Despite remarkable achievements of CNNs, models based on them are limited by local receptive fields. Long-range inter-dependencies between pixels are hard to encode since conventional convolutions do not account for long-range spatial relationships. This limitation motivates the increased attention to Vision Transformer models whose self-attention mechanism allows encoding relationships between patches independently of their distance in an image. Vision Transformers process images as sequences of tokens representing fixed-size patches.

The third approach, Hybrid CNN-Transformer Networks represented by the TransUNet architecture, tries to capitalize on the benefits of both types of networks by employing CNN encoders for the purpose of obtaining feature-rich representations of local textures, combined with transformer encoders which can learn global context. While there have been numerous studies exploring each of these three paradigms individually, to the best of our knowledge, an objective comparison between them, performed under similar experimental conditions for the task of industrial surface defects detection, is lacking in the current literature. This work attempts to fill this gap.

The main contribution of this study is the comprehensive comparative analysis of U-Net, ViT, and TransUNet architectures applied to the problem of pixel-level detection of surface defects. In this experiment,

all models were trained with the use of one and the same pre-processing procedure, evaluated on three commonly used benchmarks of industrial data, and assessed through the **Dice Coefficient** and **mIoU** metrics.

2. MOTIVATION

The constant gap between the requirements for the functioning of automated systems for inspection of defective industrial products and the current capabilities remains an important research problem. Manual inspection does not work reliably at large scales, while rule-based systems cannot be generalized. Despite significant improvements shown by models based on convolutional neural networks, the inability to capture global context limits their effectiveness in defect detection on surfaces. The dangers related to overlooking defects in safety-sensitive fields such as aerospace, automotive, and electronics assembly motivate the development of more powerful automated systems.

A revolution in natural language processing brought about by transformer models that found applications to computer vision problems through architectures like ViT and Swin Transformer offers a potential avenue for improvement. However, there is insufficient research into how well these models suit industrial applications and whether their performance exceeds that of CNN models. Existing work either performs a stand-alone assessment or evaluates transformer models against CNNs but uses separate evaluation settings for them.

This paper aims to provide a rigorous comparison framework that would allow practitioners to make better architectural choices. Contributions of the paper include the following points:

- Comparison of three architectures (U-Net, ViT, TransUNet) in identical experimental settings.
- Evaluation on the **MVTec AD**, **NEU Surface Defect Database**, and **DAGM 2007** datasets.
- Convergence analysis and epoch-wise metrics plotting (training/val mIoU).
- Guidance on trade-offs associated with model choice for practical purposes.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of deep learning techniques that have been developed for use in image segmentation over the last ten years shows how these approaches have advanced from traditional convolutions to attention mechanisms and hybrids. Such developments are critical when choosing appropriate models for segmentation of defects on industrial surfaces.

A. CNN-Based Segmentation Methods

The initial progress towards successful image segmentation has been made by using Convolutional Neural Network (CNN)-based methods, where the model suggested by Ronneberger et al. [3] named **U-Net** became one of the first architectures designed for solving the problem of pixel-wise image segmentation. An encoder-decoder network design with a skip connection was used to localize objects, providing high-quality results while preserving spatial information on each layer. A distinctive feature of the approach implemented in U-Net is its ability to work properly with small amounts of training data, which makes it perfect for applications in the sphere of medicine and industry. Nevertheless, CNN-based models are known for their poor performance regarding receptive field limitations, which prevents capturing long dependencies and global context relations within complex surface structures.

Some of the challenges related to using CNN-based models for segmentation can be solved with the help of certain extensions. For instance, CNNs together with Feature Pyramid Networks (FPN) were used to detect defects on steel surfaces by Zhang et al. [7], resulting in an mIoU of 85.6.

B. Transformer-Based Segmentation Methods

The emergence of transformer architectures has been an important event in the area of computer vision. In their work, Dosovitskiy et al. [1] showed how image data can be transformed into sequence information by applying self-attention and discarding convolution operators. Such an approach makes it possible to analyze global dependencies in the entire image and thus helps identify context-dependent anomalies that would otherwise remain undetected.

In their turn, Liu et al. [2] designed the Swin Transformer algorithm by adding hierarchically extracted features via shifting windows' self-attention. The advantages of this architecture include better computational efficiency and the capability to learn at multiple scales, thus making it possible to apply transformers in dense prediction tasks like segmentation. Moreover, Mei et al. [8] managed to attain 96.4.

C. Hybrid CNN–Transformer Methods

As an alternative to the issues associated with CNNs and transformers, there have been attempts to merge these two techniques. Specifically, Chen et al. [12] introduced TransUNet – a combination of the CNN-based

encoder with transformer modules, achieving a Dice score of 0.88 when segmenting images from the medical domain.

Likewise, Khan et al. [20] utilized vision transformers for industrial surface defect detection and achieved a Dice score of 0.91. However, in order to make the technology feasible in terms of real-time performance, the authors state that more effort is required. Moreover, Tian et al. [17] point out the necessity to deal with scalability and inference efficiency as critical obstacles when designing an industrial inspection system.

D. Critical Analysis and Research Gap

Based on the review of the literature, it can be seen that the CNN-based models are good at identifying small features but do not possess global context knowledge, whereas the transformer-based models can capture global features effectively but have high computational requirements. The hybrid approach attempts to balance between both but adds more complications.

Furthermore, current research tests their models using varied datasets, experiments, and criteria, which makes comparison between the methods challenging. In line with the broader literature review, there is a need for benchmarking of CNN, transformer, and hybrid models for industrial surface defect segmentation in a consistent setting.

E. Conclusion of Literature Review

Hence, while the field has witnessed considerable developments in segmentation networks, there is still a requirement for a comprehensive and impartial assessment of the CNN, transformers, and hybrid models within a standardized experimental setup. Fulfilling this void will be crucial for determining the best possible solution for segmenting defects within industrial applications. The present study seeks to address this necessity by deploying and assessing U-Net, vision transformer, and hybrid models under similar conditions and through the measurement of the Dice coefficient and mIoU.

TABLE I
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EXISTING SURFACE DEFECT SEGMENTATION METHODS

Author / Ref	Method	Key Contribution	Limitations	Evaluation Metric
Ronneberger et al. [3]	U-Net	Uses skip connections in an encoder–decoder framework for pixel-wise segmentation.	Limited global receptive field.	Dice: 0.92
Dosovitskiy et al. [1]	Vision Transformer (ViT)	Global attention mechanism using image patches without convolution.	Requires large training data.	Accuracy: 88.55%
Liu et al. [2]	Swin Transformer	Shifted window attention with hierarchical structure.	Memory intensive.	mIoU: 53.5%
Zhang et al. [7]	CNN + FPN	Steel surface defect segmentation using feature pyramid architecture.	Poor texture generalization.	mIoU: 85.6%
Mei et al. [8]	Transformer Encoder–Decoder	Contextual texture based anomaly detection.	Hyperparameter sensitive.	AUC: 96.4%
Chen et al. [12]	TransUNet	Combines CNN and Transformer for segmentation.	High computational cost.	Dice: 0.88
Khan et al. [20]	ViT Defect Detection	Industrial defect localization using ViT.	Needs real-time optimization.	Dice: 0.91

4. PROBLEM STATEMENT

For industrial surface defect segmentation, precise identification of cracks, scratches, and other types of defects is necessary for maintaining quality standards and minimizing errors in inspection. Current methods using deep learning, including Convolutional Neural Network-based approaches, Vision Transformers, and CNN-Transformer-based models, provide various strengths and weaknesses. For example, Convolutional Neural Networks can detect local texture efficiently but may find it hard to model spatial correlations. Vision Transformers are better at modeling the context but need annotated data for efficient performance, making the process very resource-intensive. The combination of CNN and Vision Transformer tries to leverage the two types of feature extraction mentioned above; nonetheless, the higher computational cost due to increased model complexity is an issue.

While these methods have proved to be promising in their fields, it should be noted that no systematic analysis of the three in terms of their capabilities was made under the same conditions for training, i.e., in terms of dataset usage and evaluation framework, in regard to industrial surface defect segmentation.

This is why the objective of this project is to conduct comparative analyses on the segmentation performance of CNN-based, Vision Transformer-based, and hybrid segmentation models based on standard evaluation metrics, such as Dice coefficient and mean Intersection over Union (mIoU).

5. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

This design can be described as a modular sequential pipeline containing five steps namely, dataset acquisition and preparation, preprocessing and augmentation, architecture-specific model inference, segmentation outputs generation, and performance assessment. All three models have used exactly the same data pipeline in order to compare their performance fairly. The architecture of the designed framework is illustrated in Fig. 1 below.

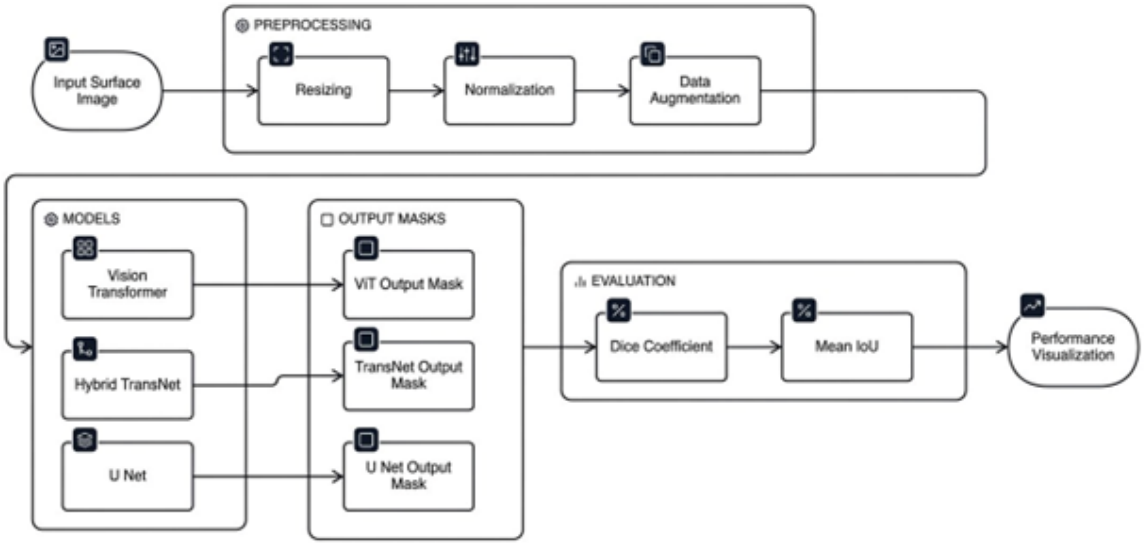

Fig. 1. Overall Architecture of the Object Surface Defect Segmentation Architecture

A. Data Collection

Three different benchmark databases were used to ensure diversity in the studied materials, defect categories, and imaging conditions.

- MVTec Anomaly Detection (AD) Benchmark [4]: Contains 5,354 high-resolution images categorized into 15 object and texture classes, including metals, fabrics, leather, and electronic components with defects such as scratches, dents, and cracks.
- NEU Surface Defect Benchmark: A steel surface inspection dataset containing 1,800 images across multiple defect categories including crazing, inclusion, patches, pitted surfaces, rolled-in scale, and scratches.
- DAGM 2007 Benchmark [16]: A texture defect benchmark consisting of 1,150 images covering six different defect categories.

The merged dataset containing 8,304 images was split into training (70%), validation (20%), and testing (10%) datasets with balanced distribution across each split. Figure 2 shows examples of surface types and defect morphologies present in the merged dataset. Figure 3 compares defective and non-defective samples, demonstrating the complexity of segmentation tasks.

Fig. 2. Representative Samples from the Combined Industrial Defect Datasets (MVTec AD, NEU, DAGM 2007)

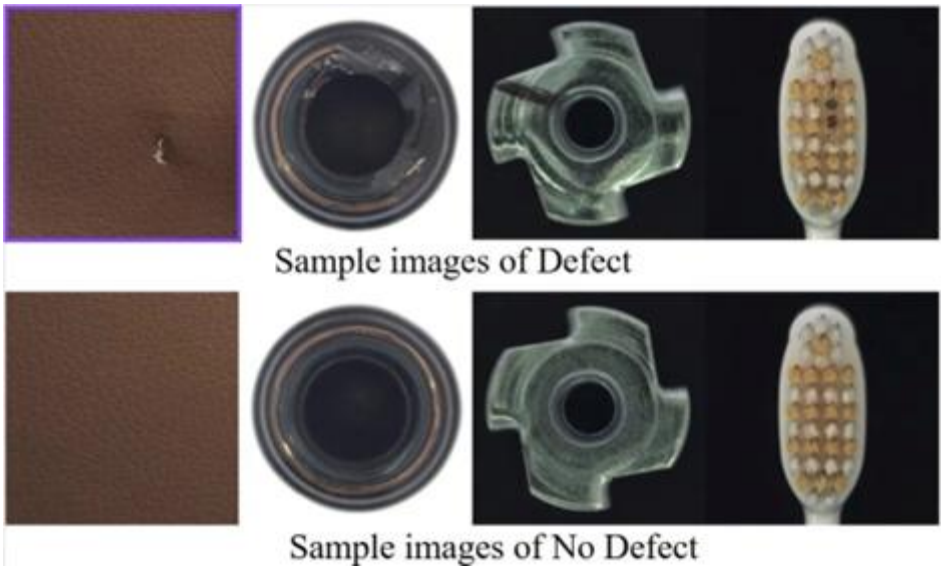

Fig. 3. Sample Images of Defective (top) vs. Non-Defective (bottom) Surface Conditions in MVTec AD

TABLE II
DATASET DISTRIBUTION ACROSS SPLITS.

Split	Normal Samples	Defective Samples	Total
Training (70%)	3,648	2,562	6,210
Validation (20%)	837	663	1,500
Testing (10%)	298	296	594
Total	**4,783**	**3,521**	**8,304**

B. Preprocessing and Data Augmentation

In real-world settings, industrial images vary in terms of lighting conditions, scale, angle, and noise due to the variety of settings where the images are taken. Given this fact and the requirement of developing a model that is robust and compatible with deep learning, especially transformers, preprocessing techniques were conducted to normalize all images.

Image Resizing: All images were resized to **256×256** or **512×512** pixel sizes to make the inputs uniform, which is essential when applying deep learning algorithms to generate patches. Image resizing techniques that maintain aspect ratios were implemented to prevent any kind of distortion to defect features like cracks or scratches.

Normalization: The pixel intensities are normalized to a specific range using the **min-max** technique. The use of this approach helps overcome the problem of different lighting conditions and sensors used within an industrial environment. Through this normalization process, the gradients' updating process becomes stable, hence faster convergence.

Data Augmentation: Due to the limited data available for annotation within an industrial environment, some augmentation approaches have been implemented.

- Rotation (+/- 15°): This approach simulates the variation in the orientation of the object within the production line.
- Flipping horizontally: It creates invariance with respect to direction change.
- Change in brightness and contrast (+/- 20%): This helps simulate illumination conditions within a real-world setting.
- Add Gaussian noise: It helps emulate noise within the sensors and other surface features.

These are some of the approaches that can help mitigate overfitting and enhance model robustness.

In general, the pre-processing stage is important in helping the model become more robust, achieving convergent training, and avoiding bias to certain environments, like particular lighting conditions and camera angles that are common in industry-based inspection models.

C. Vision Transformer (ViT) Architecture

In ViT, the images undergo transformation into patches. In this way, the model can model global contexts via self-attention mechanisms.

Patch Embedding: The pre-processed input image is first split into patches with dimensions of **16×16 pixels**. An image of **256×256** dimension will generate **256** such patches. Each patch is flattened to form a vector that is subsequently projected into an embedding of fixed dimensionality using a linear transformation (**of 256 or 768**).

Positional Encoding: Since transformers do not have any notion of space built-in, a positional encoding is introduced for each patch embedding to maintain the spatial information.

Transformer Encoder: The sequence of embedded patches is then fed into **12 layers** of transformer encoders, which include:

- Layer Normalization (LayerNorm) to stabilize the training process.
- Multi-Head Self-Attention (MHSA) using **8 heads** of attention, which makes it possible for the network to find relationships between far-away areas of the image.
- Feedforward Neural Network (MLP) for transforming features non-linearly.
- Residual connections to avoid problems with the vanishing gradient and train deeper models.

Self-attention helps the model detect dependencies within the image, making it possible for the model to recognize even subtle and widespread anomalies.

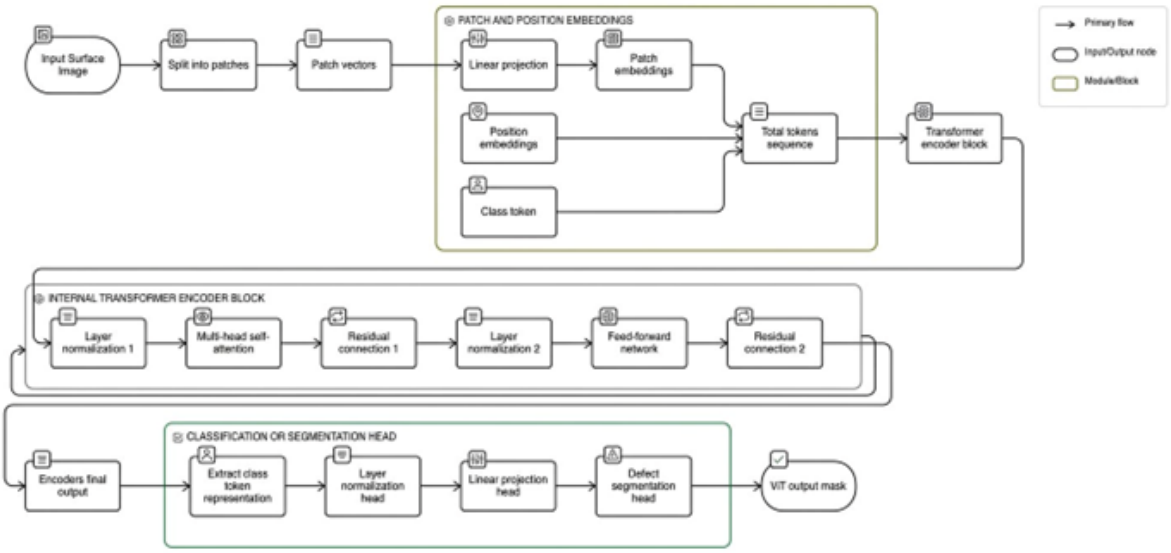

Fig. 4. Vision Transformer (ViT) Architecture for Surface Defect Segmentation

D. Hybrid CNN-Transformer Architecture (TransUNet)

In order to incorporate both local feature extraction and global context modeling, the proposed architecture was inspired by **TransUNet**.

CNN Encoder (Backbone: ResNet-50)

The CNN part of the model learns hierarchical representations.

- **Stage 1:** First convolution with kernel size **7×7** and **64 filters** to learn low-level features like edges and textures.
- **Stages 2–4:** Successive downsamplings with **3×3 convolutional filters** to extract higher-order features.
- **Stage 5:** Generates high-level representations that can be further used by the transformer.

Convnets have good inductive biases (locality and translational invariance) which makes them very suitable for the detection of fine-grained surface defects.

Transformer Encoder: The feature maps learned from the CNN encoder are reformatted to patches and then fed to a transformer encoder. The advantage of such an approach is that the relationship between distant regions can be captured.

Decoding with Skip Connections: The decoder used for generating segmentation maps follows a similar pattern to that used in U-Net and involves:

- Upsampling to recover spatial information.
- Skip connections from encoder CNN blocks to keep track of spatial details.

- Integration of both CNN and Transformer based representations for accurate segmentation.

This combination addresses the drawbacks of both architectures individually.

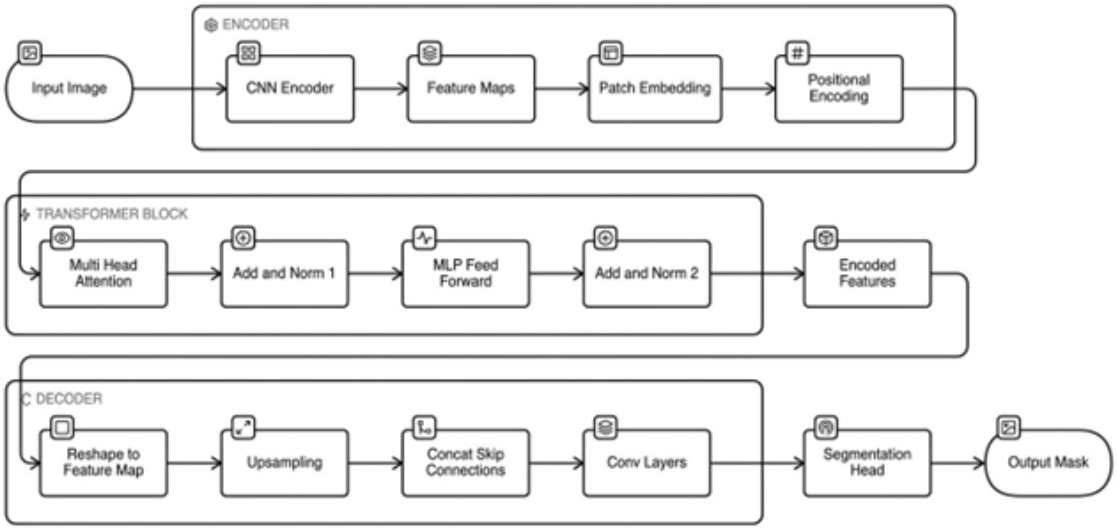

Fig. 5. TransUNet Hybrid CNN-Transformer Architecture

E. CNN Baseline (U-Net)

The U-Net was used as the CNN-based baseline, where the pre-trained **ResNet-34** encoder was used with a symmetrical decoder, where both were linked via skip connections for each scale level. The encoder down-samples the input using convolutional layers and max pooling, while the decoder up-samples the image using transposed convolution layers combined with skip connections from the encoder to restore spatial information. The **1×1 segmentation layer** generated the output probability map for binary classification of defects. Since U-Net performs very well on small amounts of annotated data sets, it is considered a strong competitor.

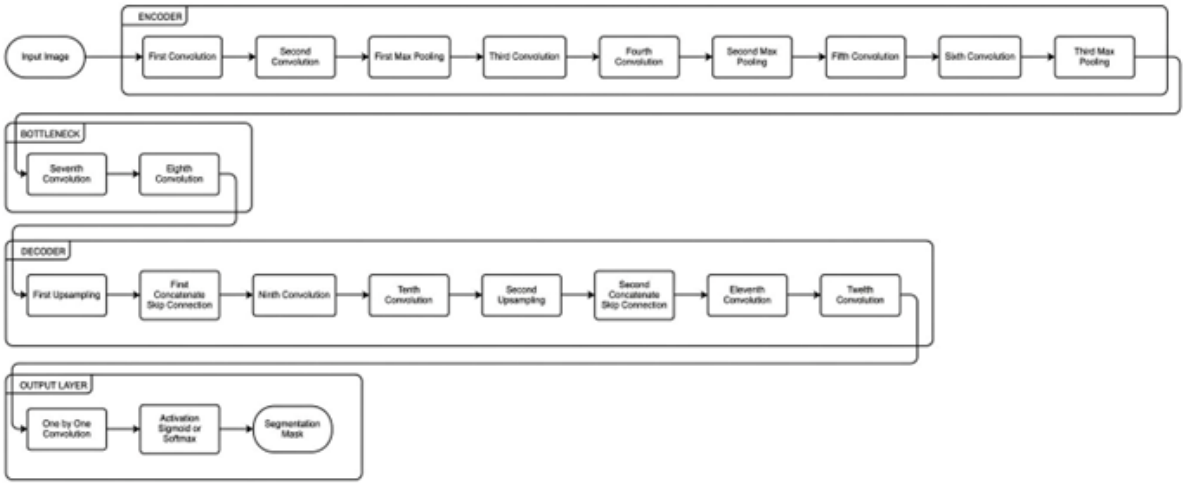

Fig. 6. U-Net CNN Architecture for Surface Defect Segmentation

All three models have been trained using the **AdamW** optimization algorithm with cosine annealing for the learning rate and a combination of **Binary Cross-Entropy loss** and **Dice loss** functions as objectives. These training setups have been summarized in **Table 3** below.

TABLE III

TRAINING CONFIGURATION FOR ALL MODELS.

Model	Input Size	Max Epochs	Batch Size	Optimizer	Loss Function
U-Net	256×256	40	16	AdamW	Dice Loss
ViT	256×256	60	8	AdamW	Cross-Entropy
TransUNet	256×256	40	8	AdamW	Dice Loss

F. Performance Evaluation Metrics

In order to quantitatively assess the proposed method, two metrics are used: **Dice coefficient** and **mean intersection over union (mIoU)**. These metrics are commonly used in segmentation problems, especially when there is an imbalance between classes.

Dice coefficient assesses the extent of overlap between the predicted mask and the ground truth. It works well in cases of imbalanced data where the defective areas constitute a tiny fraction of the whole image.

$$\text{Dice} = \frac{2TP}{2TP + FP + FN} \qquad (1)$$

where **TP** stands for true positives (correctly classified defect pixels), **FP** is false positives (incorrectly classified defect pixels), and **FN** is false negatives (defect pixels not detected).

The mean Intersection over Union (**mIoU**) computes the overlap between the predicted and true mask values divided by the sum of these values. It is designed to penalize both over- and under-segmentation errors.

$$\text{mIoU} = \frac{TP}{TP + FP + FN} \qquad (2)$$

Using Dice Coefficient along with mIoU offers a complete assessment of the segmentation results.

6. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Implementation Details

All experiments were performed on a computer with **Intel Core i7 CPU, 16GB RAM, and CUDA-enabled Graphics Processing Unit (GPU)**. The deep learning library used in all experiments was **PyTorch**, while **OpenCV** library helped in preprocessing images, **NumPy** was used for performing numerical computations, and results were visualized using **Matplotlib/Seaborn**. The technique of early stopping and learning rate decay was used to avoid overfitting of the model.

B. Validation Dice Coefficient Comparison

Fig. 7 depicts the Dice scores achieved on validation samples through all training epochs for all three models. In particular, the best Dice performance was demonstrated by **U-Net**, reaching approximately **0.63 Dice** in **epoch 26**. The smooth convergence of the model can be attributed to the nature of U-Net's architecture and its inductive bias based on convolutions, allowing for efficient and reliable learning of local textures even with small datasets. On the other hand, **ViT** performed steadily with Dice scores ranging between **0.50 and 0.56** throughout the entire training process; the peak overlap achieved by the model is consistent with existing issues with transformers at medium dataset sizes. **TransUNet** demonstrates high variance in Dice during the initial training epochs but eventually converges to a peak value of approximately **0.48 Dice** in **epoch 19**.

Fig. 7. Validation Dice Score Comparison — U-Net, ViT, and TransUNet Across Training Epochs

C. Validation mIoU Comparison

Validation mIoU Curves are shown in **Fig 8** below, and we can see that performance-wise, there are significant differences compared to the results for the Dice metric. The highest peak mIoU was obtained with **U-Net** at **epoch 26** and amounted to **0.75**; next came **ViT**, whose **mIoU of 0.72** was achieved at **epoch 41**, and third was **TransUNet** with an **mIoU of 0.67** at **epoch 19**. However, there is another key observation here: unlike the differences we saw between U-Net and ViT with respect to Dice scores, the difference in mIoU is significantly smaller, indicating that **ViT performs well in detecting the region occupied by defects (or union coverage), whereas the accuracy of pixel-level overlap (which is better measured with Dice) is slightly worse**. For inspection applications, where it is important to detect defects and estimate their locations, but not boundaries, ViT traits might be acceptable, if not desirable.

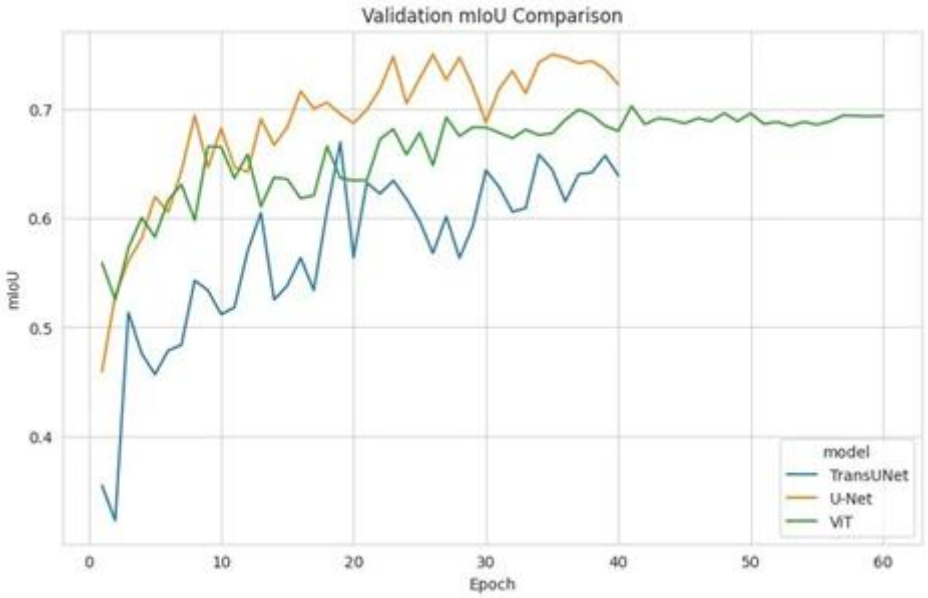

Fig. 8. Validation mIoU comparison of U-Net, ViT, and TransUNet across training epochs.

D. Training vs. Validation mIoU Analysis

Fig. 9. represents the curves of train vs validation mIoU for all three models. Hence, it became feasible to examine generalization capability. The train vs validation mIoU gap steadily increased beginning from epoch 30

for the case of **U-Net**. It means overfitting to some extent in the late stage of training, which is one of the features of CNNs if there is a limited amount of diverse input data. The curves of train vs validation mIoU for **ViT** models are very similar; moreover, the value of validation mIoU exceeded train mIoU several times. That means excellent regularization achieved using self-attention mechanism and good generalization capabilities in terms of various surface textures, since this property is vital for a practical application of the model. **TransUNet** demonstrated the maximum gap between validation and train mIoU during early training stages, but it drastically decreased after the convergence stage.

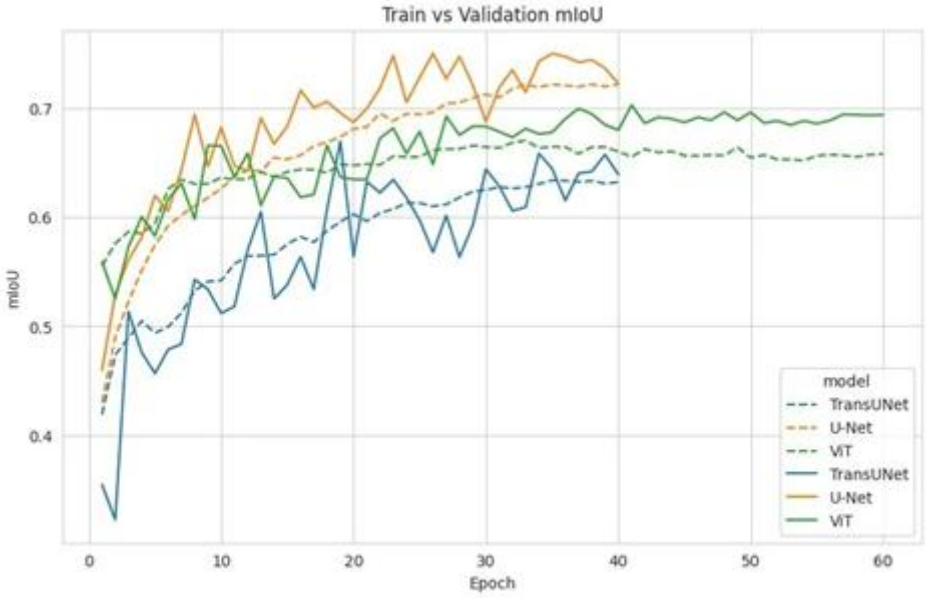

Fig. 9. Training vs. Validation mIoU Curves — All Three Models (solid: train, dashed: validation)

E. Best Epoch Identification

The **mIoU** value per validation epoch at which each of these models showed their best results is illustrated in **Fig. 10**; that value was selected as the final model checkpoint for evaluating its test result. **U-Net** performed best at **epoch 26 (mIoU = 0.75)**, **TransUNet** at **epoch 19 (mIoU = 0.67)**, and **ViT** at **epoch 41 (mIoU = 0.72)**. The order of speediness of training of the three models is in line with the specific properties of each model's learning: **CNN** of **TransUNet** learns local features fast, the convolutions of **U-Net** enable faster learning of global patterns, while attention of **ViT** requires more training.

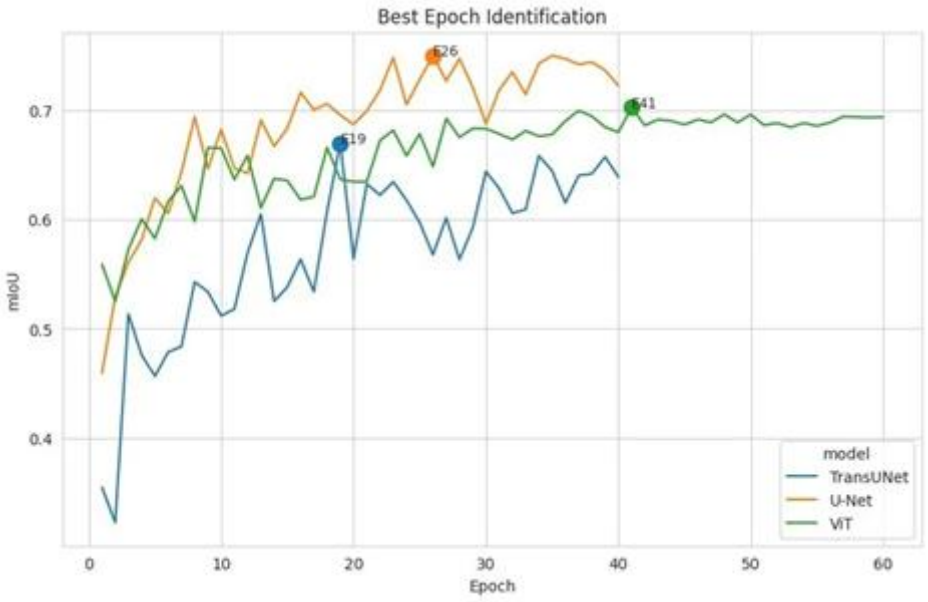

Fig. 10. Best Epoch Identification for Each Model Based on Peak Validation mIoU

F. Best Model Performance Summary

Fig. 11. shows a grouped bar graph of the highest **mIoU** and **Dice** scores for each of the models at their optimal checkpoints. **U-Net** performs best in terms of both measures (**mIoU = 0.75, Dice = 0.63**), while **ViT** and **TransUNet** are second and third respectively (**ViT:** mIoU = 0.72, Dice = 0.56; **TransUNet:** mIoU = 0.67, Dice = 0.52). The overall lower Dice scores compared to the mIoU scores across all models can be attributed to the unbalanced distribution of defect pixels in the test data.

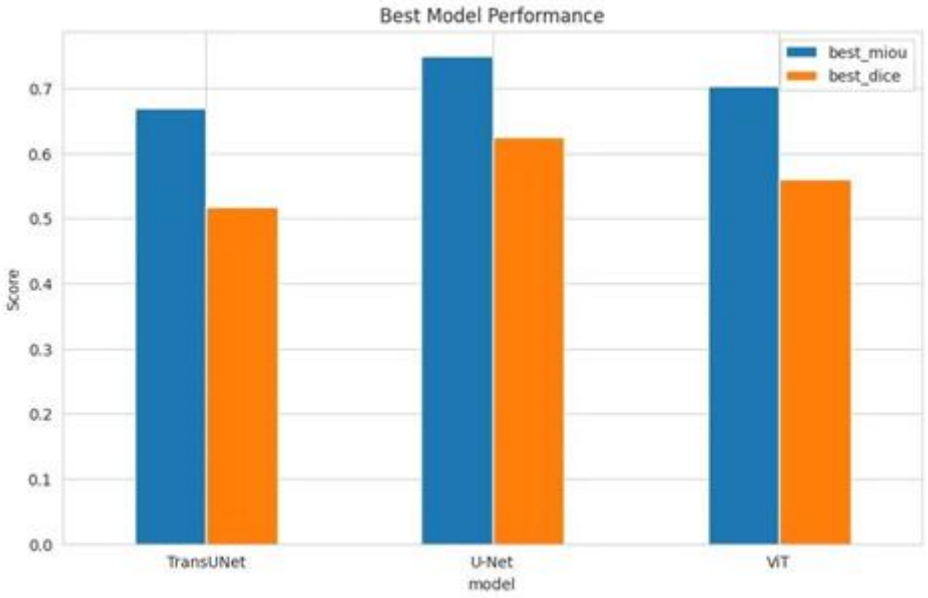

Fig. 11. Best Model Performance Comparison — mIoU and Dice Scores for All Three Architectures

TABLE IV
FINAL PERFORMANCE COMPARISON OF SEGMENTATION MODELS.

Model	Best mIoU	Best Dice	Convergence
U-Net (CNN)	0.75	0.63	Fast, mild late overfitting
ViT (Transformer)	0.72	0.56	Slow, strong generalization
TransUNet (Hybrid)	0.67	0.52	Moderate, early volatility

G. Discussion and Interpretation

Several practical lessons could be drawn from the results that are important regardless of the exact numerical values obtained. First, the clear superiority of the **U-Net** at the present dataset scale demonstrates the ongoing relevance of convolutional biases in cases when annotated training examples are limited. In the context of manufacturing inspections where labeling becomes costly and time-consuming, the greater sample efficiency of **U-Net** is certainly important.

Second, while the **mIoU of 0.72** achieved by the **ViT** is slightly lower than **0.75** reached by **U-Net**, the strong validation-train similarity achieved by the former model points to the trade-off between absolute performance and generalizability. The latter is a much more important factor when inspecting defects made of materials or kinds that are poorly represented in the training data – a common problem of custom manufacturing.

Thirdly, the poor performance of **TransUNet** despite its architectural sophistication is another valuable negative result. The increased complexity of training both the CNN and transformer parts can lead to optimization issues that limit the model's performance when the training data is not enough for both parts. These results emphasize warnings made in earlier research [12] regarding the need for a larger number of data samples in hybrid models, and further research into pre-training approaches should be done to enhance TransUNet's performance in small-data industrial environments.

Lastly, the consistently low values of the Dice score compared to mIoU indicate the difficulty of attaining high overlap between pixels in imbalanced class datasets. It supports the recommendation of using **mIoU** as the main criterion in evaluating industrial segmentation solutions.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though there have been encouraging findings in this study, certain issues still need to be highlighted.
Firstly, the effectiveness of the examined models depends on the number and variety of the used data. While a mixed dataset taken from different benchmark sources was used for this research, it might not reflect all the aspects that can arise in an actual industrial environment, such as novel defects, changing light conditions, and rare instances.
Secondly, Vision Transformers (**ViT**) and hybrid methods like **TransUNet** have relatively high hardware requirements. Since they use self-attention, they tend to consume a lot of memory and take longer to train, which makes their usage in limited-resource or real-time industrial contexts challenging.
Thirdly, even though ViTs are generally good at generalizing, they need a significant amount of labeled data for training, which is hard and costly to gather in an industrial setting. On the other hand, CNNs show satisfactory results with smaller datasets because of their inductive biases, but they find it challenging to model complex dependencies in images.
Further to that, the current research paper is concerned with binary classification, defective or non-defective products. As such, it cannot be used when multiple classifications of defective items are required.
Lastly, the experiments performed were done in a controlled environment. Issues related to the practical use of such models like inference speed and hardware limitations have not been discussed here.

8. NOVELTY AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Innovations and contributions:

- Comparative Controlled Experimental Setup: A precise and replicable three-way comparative analysis of U-Net, ViT and TransUNet under consistent experimentation parameters to conduct the first comprehensive comparison of these architectures for the problem of industrial surface defect detection.
- Evaluation on Multiple Datasets: Robust evaluation through three state-of-the-art industrial benchmark datasets – MVTec AD, NEU Surface Defect Dataset, and DAGM 2007 dataset.
- Performance Monitoring: Precise monitoring of training and validation mIoU on an epoch-by-epoch basis to identify important distinctions in terms of convergence, overfitting tendencies, and generalization ability beyond the mere performance metric.
- Industrial Implementation Guidelines: Practical recommendations for selecting a suitable architecture depending on the quantity of training samples, generalization abilities and computational resources needed for industrial inspection tasks.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTIRE WORK

The present work provides a comparative evaluation of three deep learning frameworks, namely U-Net, Vision Transformer (ViT), and TransUNet, in the context of industrial manufacturing applications. The experiments were conducted using three datasets with similar settings, which allowed for a reliable architectural comparison of the models.
U-Net demonstrates outstanding performance with the highest mean intersection over union (0.75) and Dice (0.63) scores at the given scale of datasets due to well-defined convolutional inductive biases facilitating rapid model convergence and accurate boundaries. ViT yields high mean intersection over union (0.72) but shows a better generalization pattern with well-aligned training and validation curves and monotonic convergence. TransUNet yields lower peak metrics (mIoU: 0.64; Dice: 0.54) under the current conditions, which implies that hybrid architectures benefit from larger training datasets to harness their modeling power.
Based on these results, the following recommendations can be formulated: U-Net should be used in inspection applications requiring rapid model convergence with scarce labeled samples; ViT is more appropriate in situations where generalization to various or unseen surfaces is crucial and a large amount of training data is available; TransUNet is suitable for large-scale applications where both boundary accuracy and modeling global context are required.

Several paths will be explored for future research: semi-supervised and self-supervised pre-training approaches to decrease label requirements in case of ViT and TransUNet models; light-weight transformers, suitable for edge devices, especially for use in Industrial IoTs; generalization towards multi-class defect segmentation with metrics per class; and testing in real-world manufacturing settings to measure the inference speed and throughput.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the current research.

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