**Automated Detection of Solar Panel Defects Using Deep Learning**

***Bahaa ALBUARAB ,* Hakan KUTUCU ****

*1Computer Engineering, Karabuk University,* *Karabuk, Turkey*

*2Software Engineering, Karabuk University, Karabuk, Turkey*

|  |
| --- |
| **Abstract**High temperature differentials and external pressures pose significant challenges in the production of photovoltaic (PV) cells for the solar energy sector. These flaws are often evaluated manually, which can lead to issues such as human error, fatigue, and increased costs. To address this challenge, our research focuses on using deep learning methods for the automatic identification of defects in PV modules. We designed and analyzed two distinct models: a custom-built Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) and an adapted, pre-trained InceptionV3 model. To distinguish between healthy and unhealthy PV cells, we conducted an experiment with a dataset of 2,624 electroluminescence (EL) images, performing a binary classification task. While the custom CNN achieved an impressive accuracy of 89.47%, it was slightly outperformed by the InceptionV3 model, which reached an accuracy of 90.88%. These results highlight the potential of both custom-designed and pre-trained deep learning models for defect detection in PV modules, depending on resource availability, computational capacity, and the requirements of the specific application. This study underscores the growing importance of machine learning software in the advancement of renewable energy systems. |
| Keywords: CNN, Photovoltaic (PV), InceptionV3, Electroluminescence (EL), Defect detection |

1. **Introduction**

Renewable energy sources and solar power in particular, have emerged as key players in the fight against climate change and carbon emissions [2]. Photovoltaic (PV) cells, which turn sunlight into electricity, are at the center of this movement. However, surface flaws such as micro-cracks can arise in PV cells due to the complexity of the manufacturing process [1]. These flaws can have a major effect on solar panels' efficiency, reducing electricity production and shortening their lifespan [5]. Manual inspections have traditionally been used to spot these flaws, but they are time-consuming, inconsistent, and fraught with human error [3].

Due to technological progress, automated approaches for flaw identification in PV cells are being investigated. The goal of these techniques is to improve upon manual inspections by offering more precise, trustworthy, and time-efficient means of finding flaws [4]. The use of electroluminescence (EL) photography has been a noteworthy step forward in this area, enabling the detection of flaws that are not immediately apparent by the human eye [6, 7, 8]. However, improvements are needed before this technology can fully realize its potential in the area of fault identification.

In this regard, deep learning—and in particular the application of Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs)—has emerged as a useful technique. In recent years, convolutional neural networks (CNNs) have been extensively used to evaluate EL pictures of PV cells [9, 10, 11] because to their efficacy in image identification and classification tasks. CNNs are ideally suited for detecting small flaws in PV modules due to their capacity to learn complicated patterns and characteristics from data. To improve defect identification in PV cells, scientists have experimented with a wide range of deep learning architectures, from custom-built models to modifications of established frameworks like InceptionV3 [12, 13, 14]. These models have demonstrated potential in boosting the accuracy and efficiency of fault identification, consequently adding to the overall dependability of solar power systems.

We want to add to these previous successes by designing and contrasting a novel CNN model with a modified version of the InceptionV3 model for PV module fault detection. Our method entails using a dataset including pictures of solar panels with different kinds of defects to train and evaluate these models. Through this comparison research, we want to evaluate the usefulness of these models in automating the defect detection process, hence enhancing the accuracy, reducing the labor costs, and overcoming the limits associated with human inspections.

A- Dataset

In this study, we employed a database including 2,624 high-resolution EL images of monocrystalline and polycrystalline PV modules. One of 44 different PV modules was used to capture each of the 300 pixel short images.

Buerhop-Lutz et al [6]. used their knowledge to divide the dataset into two categories: pictures with no flaws ('None Defected'; 1,508 images) and images with defects ('Defected'; 715 images). Due to the importance of distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy PV cells, we have posed this task as a binary classification problem. Figure 1 shows Typical (A) and deficient (B) photovoltaic (PV) cell surfaces.



 (A)



(B)

**Figure** **1.** Photovoltaic (PV) cells with normal (A) and flawed (B) surfaces

1. **Literature Review**

Transparent solar panels are gaining popularity as a viable renewable energy option because of their decreasing prices. Large-scale solar power plant efficiency may be maintained with the use of defect detection methods, such as the detection of micro-cracks in photovoltaic modules. To prove that UV fluorescence can detect faults in solar panels on residential rooftops in Boulder, Colorado, Gabor et al. [19] used a pole-mounted UV flash camera system. This technique worked quite well for a wide range of panel types and ages. Together with a UAV fitted with a thermal camera and GPS, Han et al. [20] presented a deep learning strategy based on an improved YOLOv3-tiny model. This system outperformed the industry-standard YOLOv3-tiny model in defect identification with an accuracy of 96.45%.

By analyzing RGB photos, Espinosa et al. [21] showed that CNNs can automatically diagnose physical problems in PV plants, with an average accuracy of 75% for two classes and 70% for four classes. Attaining 90% AUC on benchmark EL image datasets, Acharya et al. [13] proposed a deep Siamese CNN for defect classification in solar cells. Using models like Inception-v3 and ResNet50-v3, Rahman et al. [23] were able to identify micro-cracks in EL pictures of PV modules with an accuracy of over 96%. The CNN-based architecture used by Akram et al. [9] achieved 99.23% accuracy, however this may not be applicable outside of their small dataset.

Mathias et al. [24] analyzed 2000 EL photos using perspective modification and textural analysis, reaching good accuracies with both SVM and neural networks. Replicating this model yielded impressive results for Winston et al. [25], including an F1-score of 94.6%. Last but not least, Xue et al. [27] employed fuzzy c-means clustering in conjunction with AlexNet CNN to accurately detect concealed cracks [28].

These advancements in deep learning for fault identification in PV modules constitute a significant milestone for solar energy technology. They not only address the solar industry's immediate demands, but also provide the groundwork for advances in automated problem identification in the future, highlighting solar power's vital role in the world's most promising energy sources.

1. **Methodology**

In this study, we set out to develop robust computational models for PV cell characterization and defect diagnosis. Our models were developed with excellent accuracy and efficiency in mind, taking into account the large number of PV cells used in real-world applications. A Custom Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) and the InceptionV3 model are two examples of the types of computational models covered in detail by the technique. Through the use of various tools and techniques, such as data purification, architectural design, training methodologies, and assessment benchmarks, we take a scientific approach to the process, beginning with the collection of raw EL pictures and ending with the evaluation of the produced models. This strategy is based on the most cutting-edge findings and established practices in the fields of deep learning and image analysis.Figure 2 shows General flow chart of the proposed models.

**Preprocessing**

**proposed models**

**Classification**

**Model Evaluation**

**Figure** **2**: General flow chart of the proposed models

**3.1 Preprocessing Techniques:**

The ELVP database included the collection of grayscale photos of photovoltaic (PV) modules with varied degrees of deterioration. A multi-stage picture preparation pipeline, including the following steps, was designed to improve the characteristics of interest and reduce noise: The Preprocessing Stage Flowchart is depicted in Figure 3.

**Input image**

**Contrast Enhancement**

**Noise Reduction**

**Edge Sharpening**

**output**

**Figure** **3** : Flowchart of the Preprocessing Stage.

Because of its improved edge detail retention, Contrast Limited Adaptive Histogram Equalization (CLAHE) was employed to improve photos of PV modules subjected to varying lighting and texturing. Image clarity was further improved by removing random noise with a Gaussian Blur filter (5x5 pixel kernel). A 3x3 kernel-sharpening filter was used to boost the high-frequency edge components and so improve the perceived sharpness of the edges. The calibrated preprocessing processes greatly enhanced feature visibility and noise reduction, allowing machine-learning algorithms to detect defects with higher precision.

Data augmentation techniques were used to deal with the handful of flawed photos present in the collection. Modifying contrast, brightness, saturation, and picture orientation were among the methods used to avoid model overfitting and improve generalizability. Contrast enhancements mimicked different lighting situations to bring out previously hidden elements. With an increase from 715 to 1,668 flawed photos, the dataset now provides a bigger and more diverse training pool. Similar augmentation techniques, such as rotation, axis flip, Gaussian blur, and contrast enhancement, were also used to the small training set of the ELPV dataset. These techniques increased the variety of defect manifestations, which is critical for improving the models' generalizability and avoiding overfitting.

**3.2 Custom CNN Model architecture**

High-resolution electroluminescence imaging of photovoltaic cells is the focus of the study, which uses a Custom CNN Model architecture developed especially for this purpose. Convolutional layers with 3x3 filters of sizes 32, 64, 128, and'same' padding to maintain spatial dimensions follow the Image Input Layer for 300x300x3. Incorporating non-linearity and improving feature extraction, batch normalization and ReLU activation are provided. To lessen the need for storage space and processing power, we implement Max pooling layers with a pool size of 2 x 2 and a stride of 2. The design closes with a fully connected layer for binary classification, a softmax layer for class probability, and a classification layer for choices. This setup strikes a good compromise between complexity and efficiency, making it useful for applications like flaw detection in PV cells.

Tuning the learning rate, number of epochs, and batch size during training and compilation of the CNN improves its effectiveness. The effectiveness of feature extraction is directly affected by the architecture's layers and filters. Activation functions like ReLU, sigmoid, or tanh add non-linearity, allowing the model to capture complicated patterns. Minimization of the loss function is affected by the selection of optimizer, such as Adam or SGD. These tweaks are essential to assure the model's efficacy for certain tasks, balancing learning efficiency with prediction accuracy. Table 1 contains the specifics of these options.

**Table 1**. Settings for Training and Compilation

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Parameter | Value |
| Optimizer | Adam |
| Loss Function | Categorical Cross-Entropy |
| Performance Metric | Accuracy |
| Batch Size | 32 |
| Number of Epochs | 30 |
| Validation Split | Typically 0.2 (20% for validation) |

**3.3 InceptionV3 model architecture**

The study uses the InceptionV3 architecture, which has 23.8 million parameters and strikes a good balance between complexity and layer count. The scale and intricacy of patterns are improved by the use of varying filter sizes within the same layer. In comparison to AlexNet and VGG, this model has fewer parameters while providing a more comprehensive representation of features. Including three sets of Inception layers and two grid-thinning components, its 350 connections make it stand out.

The final result is the result of extracting various functional levels via a fully connected (FC) layer, which is the result of global average pooling. The input layer handles 299x299x3 pictures, and there are 94 convolution layers with varied filter sizes. Particularly, a scaling layer is ideally positioned after the input layer, which results in a first convolution layer with a weight matrix of 149x149x32 dimensions.

The InceptionV3 model's complete training and compilation parameters are presented in Table 2. This architecture shines in complex machine learning applications that need in-depth picture analysis.

**Table 2.** Training and Compilation Parameters

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Parameter | Typical Value/Setting |
| Batch Size | 32 |
| Optimizer | Adam |
| Learning Rate | 0.001 |
| Loss Function | Cross-entropy  |
| Epochs | 30 |
| Metric(s) for Evaluation | Accuracy, Precision, Recall, F1 Scor. |
| Validation Split | Typically 0.2 (20% for validation) |

**4. Results and Discussion**

Two deep learning models, the Custom CNN and InceptionV3, were evaluated and compared in this work, with both having been trained using data from photovoltaic cells. Accuracy, F1-Score, Precision, and Recall all hovered around 89.5%, demonstrating the Custom CNN's all-around excellence. This harmony indicates a model with somewhat superior precision, with a little more weight placed on the precision of positive predictions. Figure 5(A) displays the confusion matrix, which confirms this model's efficacy, especially in detecting faulty cells, which is essential in quality control settings.

While both the Accuracy and F1-Score of the InceptionV3 model were over 90%, the Recall was significantly higher at 92.38%, demonstrating the model's remarkable ability to generalize and accurately identify new data. According to the metrics presented in Table 3, InceptionV3 excels at detecting the positive class (defective cells) while avoiding false-positive results. This is essential for preserving the dependability of solar systems by preventing the accidental overlooking of damaged cells.

 

(a) Custom CNN Performance (b) InceptionV3 Performance

**Figure 4.** Custom CNN and InceptionV3 Performance

Figure 4(b) further underscored the strong performance of the InceptionV3 model, with high Recall and F1-Score indicating a well-tuned balance between sensitivity (true positive rate) and specificity (true negative rate). The confusion matrix in Figure 5(b) visually reinforced these findings, showing the model's effectiveness in correctly identifying defective cells, which is paramount in preventing the deployment of faulty PV modules..

**Table 3.** Performance Metrics

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model | Accuracy | Precision | Recall | F1-Score |
| Custom CNN | 89.47% | 90.72% | 89.38% | 90.04% |
| InceptionV3 | 90.88% | 88.85% | 92.38% | 90.58% |

In conclusion, while both models perform admirably, the InceptionV3 model demonstrates a slight edge, particularly in Recall, which could make it the preferred choice in applications where the cost of false negatives is high. The study's results suggest that advanced architectures like InceptionV3 can significantly benefit photovoltaic cell analysis and defect detection, which is a vital step in the quality assurance process..

****

1. Custem CNN (b) InceptionV3

**Figure 5.** Confusion matrix

**4.1 Comparison with Previous Works**

Using the same dataset as in our study, we conducted a comparative analysis of our results with those of recently developed approaches in the field of defective PV module cell classification. The outcomes, as presented in Table 4, reveal that our proposed models achieved an accuracy of 89.47% for the Custom CNN and 90.88% for the InceptionV3 model. This comparison with prior studies highlights the advancements and effectiveness of our models:

**Table 4.** Comparison with Previous Works

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **References** | **Method** | **Dataset** | **ACC** |
| [7] | SVM | solar cell | 82.44 |
| [7] | CNN | solar cell | 88.42 |
| [13][14][14]This studyThis study | CNNL-CNNDFB-SVMCustom CNN modelInceptionV3 model | solar cellsolar cellsolar cellsame as usedsame as used | 74.7589.3394.5289.4790.88 |

**5. Conclusions**

Our study explored the use of artificial intelligence in the renewable energy sector, focusing on the inspection of photovoltaic (PV) cells for defects, which is critical for maintaining their efficiency. We addressed the limitations of traditional manual inspections by developing and comparing two machine learning models: a custom-built Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) and an adapted InceptionV3 model. Both models were trained on electroluminescence images of PV cells and performed binary classification tasks. The custom CNN model achieved an accuracy of 89.47%, while the more complex InceptionV3 model achieved slightly higher accuracy at 90.88%. This comparison demonstrates the potential of both custom-designed and pre-trained deep learning models in automating PV cell inspection, enhancing precision, and reducing costs. Our findings support the further integration of AI in renewable energy, indicating a future where sustainable energy is improved through computational intelligence.

References

1. Hussain, M.; Al-Aqrabi, H.; Hill, R. PV-CrackNet Architecture for Filter Induced Augmentation and Micro-Cracks Detection within a Photovoltaic Manufacturing Facility. Energies 2022, 15, 8667.
2. CO2 Emissions in 2022–Analysis-IEA. Available online: https://www.iea.org/reports/co2-emissions-in-2022 (accessed on 11 April 2023).
3. Padmavathi, N.; Chilambuchelvan, A. Fault detection and identification of solar panels using Bluetooth. In Proceedings of the 2017 International Conference on Energy, Communication, Data Analytics and Soft Computing, ICECDS 2017, Chennai, India, 1–2 August 2017; pp. 3420–3426.
4. Dhimish, M.; Mather, P. Development of Novel Solar Cell Micro Crack Detection Technique. IEEE Trans. Semicond. Manuf. 2019, 32, 277–285.
5. Dhimish, M.; Holmes, V.; Dales, M.; Mehrdadi, B. Effect of micro cracks on photovoltaic output power: Case study based on real time long term data measurements; Effect of micro cracks on photovoltaic output power: Case study based on real time long term data measurements. Micro Nano Lett. 2017, 12, 803–807.
6. Buerhop-Lutz, C., Deitsch, S., Maier, A., Gallwitz, F., & Brabec, C. J. (2018). A Benchmark for Visual Identification of Defective Solar Cells in Electroluminescence Imagery. 35th European PV Solar Energy Conference and Exhibition, 1287–1289.
7. Deitsch, S., Christlein, V., Berger, S., Buerhop-Lutz, C., Maier, A., Gallwitz, F., & Riess, C. (2019). Automatic classification of defective photovoltaic module cells in electroluminescence images. Solar Energy, 185(February), 455–468. https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.solener.2019.02.067
8. Deitsch, S., Buerhop-Lutz, C., Sovetkin, E., Steland, A., Maier, A., Gallwitz, F., & Riess, C. (2021). Segmentation of photovoltaic module cells in uncalibrated electroluminescence images. Machine Vision and Applications, 32(4). DOI: 10.1007/s00138-021-01191-9
9. Akram, M. W., Li, G., Jin, Y., Chen, X., Zhu, C., Zhao, X., & Ahmad, A. (2019). CNN based automatic detection of photovoltaic cell defects in electroluminescence images. Energy, 189. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.energy.2019.116319
10. Tang, W., Yang, Q., Xiong, K., & Yan, W. (2020). Deep learning based automatic defect identification of photovoltaic module using electroluminescence images. Solar Energy, 201(November 2019), 453–460. 10.1016/j.solener.2020.03.049.
11. Tang Wuqin, Quiang Yang, W. Y. (2019). Deep Learning Based Models For Defect Detection of Mono Cr. PV Modules with EL Images Using Data Augmentation. In 2019 IEEE PES Asia-Pacific Power and Energy Engineering Conference (APPEEC), Macao, Macao. (pp. 1–5).
12. Luo, Z., Cheng, S. Y., & Zheng, Q. Y. (2019). Corrigendum: GAN-Based Augmentation for Improving CNN Performance of Classification of Defective Photovoltaic Module Cells in Electroluminescence Images (IOP Conf. Ser.: Earth Environ. Sci. 354 012106). IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science, 354, 012132. 10.1088/1755- 1315/354/1/012132.
13. Acharya AK, Sahu PK, Jena SR. 2019. Deep neural network based approach for detection of defective solar cell. Materials Today: Proceedings 39(5):2009–2014 DOI 10.1016/j.matpr.2020.09.048.
14. Demirci MY, Beşli N, Gümüşçü A. 2021. Efficient deep feature extraction and classification for identifying defective photovoltaic module cells in Electroluminescence images. Expert Systems with Applications 175(2):114810 DOI 10.1016/j.eswa.2021.114810.
15. Wang Y, Li L, Sun Y, Xu J, Jia Y, Hong J, Hu X, Weng G, Luo X, Chen S, Zhu Z, Chu J, Akiyama H. 2021. Adaptive automatic solar cell defect detection and classification based on absolute electroluminescence imaging. Energy 229:120606 DOI 10.1016/j.energy.2021.120606
16. S.Amarnadh, P. P. Reddy, and N. Murthy, ―FreeHand Sketch-based Authenticated Security System using Convolutional Neural Network,‖ Int. J. Eng. Adv. Technol. ISSN, pp. 2249–8958.
17. X. Xu, J. Wu, J. Wang, Q. Qu, Z. Tan, and M. Luo, ―Materials Identification of Polarized Pulse Laser Detection Based on Sparse Autoencoder and Softmax Classifier Framework,‖ IEEE Trans. Instrum. Meas., vol. 71, pp. 1–9, 2022.
18. Xie, X., Lai, G., You, M., Liang, J., & Leng, B. (2022). Effective transfer learning of defect detection for photovoltaic module cells in electroluminescence images. Solar Energy. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.solener.2022.10.055Title
19. Gabor, A.M.; Knodle, P. UV Fluorescence for Defect Detection in Residential Solar Panel Systems. In Proceedings of the Conference Record of the IEEE Photovoltaic Specialists Conference, Fort Lauderdale, FL, USA, 20–25 June 2021; pp. 2575–2579.
20. Han, S.H.; Rahim, T.; Shin, S.Y. Detection of faults in solar panels using deep learning. In Proceedings of the 2021 International Conference on Electronics, Information, and Communication, ICEIC 2021, Jeju, Republic of Korea, 31 January–3 February 2021.
21. Espinosa, A.R.; Bressan, M.; Giraldo, L.F. Failure signature classification in solar photovoltaic plants using RGB images and convolutional neural networks. Renew. Energy 2020, 162, 249–256.
22. Rahman, M.R.; Tabassum, S.; Haque, E.; Nishat, M.M.; Faisal, F.; Hossain, E. CNN-based Deep Learning Approach for Micro-crack Detection of Solar Panels. In Proceedings of the 2021 3rd International Conference on Sustainable Technologies for Industry 4.0, STI 2021, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 18–19 December 2021.
23. Zhang, N.; Shan, S.; Wei, H.; Zhang, K. Micro-cracks Detection of Polycrystalline Solar Cells with Transfer Learning. J. Phys. Conf. Ser. 2020, 1651, 012118.
24. Mathias, N.; Shaikh, F.; Thakur, C.; Shetty, S.; Dumane, P.; Chavan, D.S. Detection of Micro-Cracks in Electroluminescence Images of Photovoltaic Modules. In Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Advances in Science & Technology (ICAST), Padang, Indonesia, 24–25 October 2020.
25. Winston, D.P.; Murugan, M.S.; Elavarasan, R.M.; Pugazhendhi, R.; Singh, O.J.; Murugesan, P.; Gurudhachanamoorthy, M.; Hossain, E. Solar PV’s Micro Crack and Hotspots Detection Technique Using NN and SVM. IEEE Access 2021, 9, 127259–127269.
26. Singh, O.D.; Gupta, S.; Dora, S. Segmentation technique for the detection of Micro cracks in solar cell using support vector machine. Multimed Tools Appl. 2023, 1–26.
27. Xue, B.; Li, F.; Song, M.; Shang, X.; Cui, D.; Chu, J.; Dai, S. Crack Extraction for Polycrystalline Solar Panels. Energies 2021, 14, 374.
28. Chen, H.; Zhao, H.; Han, D.; Liu, K. Accurate and robust crack detection using steerable evidence filtering in electroluminescence images of solar cells. Opt. Lasers Eng. 2019, 118, 22–33.
29. Zyout, I.; Qatawneh, A. Detection of PV Solar Panel Surface Defects using Transfer Learning of the Deep Convolutional Neural Networks; Detection of PV Solar Panel Surface Defects using Transfer Learning of the Deep Convolutional Neural Networks. In Proceedings of the 2020 Advances in Science and Engineering Technology International Conferences (ASET), Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 4 February–9 April 2020.
30. Alaa S. , Ibrahim DA, Zebari DA, Hammadi S, Mohammed H, Mohammed MA , Damaševičius R . Identifying defective solar cells in electroluminescence images using deep feature representations: DOI 10.7717/peerj-cs.992