Auxiliary Learning for Self-Supervised Video Representation via Similarity-based Knowledge Distillation

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Abstract

Despite the outstanding success of self-supervised pretraining methods for video representation learning, they generalise poorly when the unlabeled dataset for pretraining is small or the domain difference between unlabeled data in source task (pretraining) and labeled data in target task (finetuning) is significant. To mitigate these issues, we propose a novel approach to complement self-supervised pretraining via an auxiliary pretraining phase, based on knowledge similarity distillation, auxSKD, for better generalisation with a significantly smaller amount of video data, e.g. Kinetics-100 rather than Kinetics-400. Our method deploys a teacher network that iteratively distils its knowledge to the student model by capturing the similarity information between segments of unlabelled video data. The student model then solves a pretext task by exploiting this prior knowledge. We also introduce a novel pretext task, Video Segment Pace Prediction or VSPP, which requires our model to predict the playback speed of a randomly selected segment of the input video to provide more reliable self-supervised representations. Our experimental results show superior results to the state of the art on both UCF101 and HMDB51 datasets when pretraining on K100. Additionally, we show that our auxiliary pretraining, auxSKD, when added as an extra pretraining phase to recent state of the art self-supervised methods (e.g. VideoPace and RSPNet), improves their results on UCF101 and HMDB51. Our code will be released soon.

1. Introduction

Self-supervised learning (SSL) methods have taken great strides recently in acquiring high-level semantic visual representations from unlabelled data, eliminating the cost of annotating large-scale datasets [5, 8, 11, 18, 43]. The most common approach in SSL is to use large-scale unlabelled data, such as Kinetics-400 [16], for pretraining network parameters, followed by finetuning on a downstream task with a limited amount of labelled data [5, 8, 9, 11, 43]. Despite the reduction in manual labelling, the performance of SSL methods is leveraged on huge unlabelled datasets, which demands high computational and memory costs, especially for large-scale video datasets. For example, it takes around two weeks to train MoCo [11] on Kinetics-400 for 300 epochs with two Nvidia RTX 2080TI GPUs. In fact, such computational costs place many state-of-the-art (SotA) SSL approaches only in the realms of huge corporations who have such powerful resources [5, 9, 29], and this further becomes a subject of ethical fairness as well as carbon emission foot-
A few recent works have addressed the issue of efficient pretraining for image-based tasks [12, 23, 32], but there is only Lin et al. [22]’s work for video-based tasks which improves the generalization performance of a contrastive learning-based method [38] under a meta-learning paradigm. However, their method is not suited to most of the SotA works that use transformation-based pretext tasks [8,15,26,42,43].

Our motivation is to develop a task-agnostic pretraining process that alleviates the dependency on large-scale datasets for self-supervised video representation learning, while ensuring the model generalises well and still contains rich information. To achieve this, we propose an auxiliary pretraining stage, based on knowledge distillation (KD), which trains on a reduced version of the source dataset, provides implicit knowledge for the primary pretraining stage with the same reduced-size source dataset, and boosts generalization for downstream video representation learning tasks.

Figure 1 illustrates the difference between our framework and existing SSL methods, such as [5,8,15,26,43]. We employ a slowly progressing teacher model to iteratively distill knowledge to the student, our self-supervised model, by evaluating the similarity information of an augmented view of a query video clip to a large queue of random clips as anchors and transferring that information to the student. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time such Similarity-based Knowledge Distillation (SKD) has been used in video-based self-supervised learning, while recently, SKD was adopted in image-based applications, for example for contrastive learning [36,37] or model compression [1,7]. To refer to this aspect of our work, we use auxSKD. To support the operation of the proposed approach on temporal features in the video domain, we apply temporal augmentations, in addition to spatial augmentations, to generate different transformed versions of a query video. Such temporal transformations are the same as the pretext transformations used in the primary pretraining stage. Their application at this stage allows our teacher to impart knowledge which matters most in the primary pretraining stage.

Also in this paper, we propose a new pretext task for video representation learning, namely Video Segment Pace Prediction (VSPP). While recent video playback rate prediction methods randomly sample training clips at different paces or speeds [3,43], we sample training clips where only a randomly selected segment of the video has a randomly selected speed and the other segments of the video retain their natural pace. VSPP then requires the learner model to predict the playback speed of this randomly selected segment and its temporal location in the input training video. We advocate that by solving this pretext task, our model can strengthen its awareness of the natural pace of the clip and deal with the imprecise video speed labeling problem [5].

In our experiments, we show that our results, based on Kinetics-100 pretraining as an example of a reduced-size dataset, beat VideoPace [43] (↑5.4% on UCF101 and ↑9.5% on HMDB51) and RSPNet [5] (↑2.7% on UCF101 and ↑2.3% on HMDB51). Further, we show improvements on VideoPace and RSPNet when auxiliary learning via auxSKD is added to them as a pretraining stage. We also perform ablations on auxSKD and our VSPP pretext task parameters.

Our key contributions can be summarised as follows:

- we propose an auxiliary pretraining stage for self-supervised video learning to alleviate the dependency on large-scale source datasets, e.g. to allow using Kinetics-100 instead of Kinetics-400,
- we extend similarity-based knowledge distillation to the task of self-supervised video representation learning which has not been shown before,
- we show that our approach can benefit other pretext tasks for self-supervised pretraining that involve video transformations (e.g. VideoPace [43] and RSPNet [5]),
- we propose a simple, yet effective and novel pretext task which is more commensurate with video motion events than existing video playback prediction tasks,
- we achieve state-of-the-art results on Kinetics-100, and evaluate the performance of different components of our proposed method through ablation experiments.

2. Related Work

In this section, we pay attention to three of the most prominent areas within the main scope of our work, with focus on the more recent, SotA approaches.

Auxiliary Learning – To assist a primary task to generalise better to unseen data, training through auxiliary learning is an effective approach [23,33] and has been applied alongside a wide range of techniques, such as transfer learning [41], reinforcement learning [21], semi-supervised learning [50], and knowledge distillation [45]. In a recent, work, Xu et. al [44] treat a self-supervised learning method as an auxiliary task for knowledge distillation, pushing the student to mimic the teacher on both classification output and auxiliary self-supervision pretext task output. They show that the auxiliary learning step regularizes the student to generalize better on few-shot and noisy-label scenarios. Here, we show that the similarity information between embedded feature points can be used as implicit knowledge for self-supervised pretraining to learn more generalised representations through pretext tasks. To capture this
similarity information, we employ a variation of knowledge distillation, called similarity-based knowledge distillation [37, 40], as an auxiliary task which can be applied to any self-supervised pretraining method.

**Similarity-based Knowledge Distillation** – Knowledge distillation [4, 13] establishes a framework for improving the performance of a lightweight student model, guided by a larger and better performing teacher model which distills the (dark) knowledge it learns to its student [13, 28, 48, 49].

Similarity-based Knowledge Distillation (SKD) methods [1, 7, 30, 31, 36, 37, 40] train a student to mimic the similarity score distribution inferred by the teacher over data samples. Most early works in SKD use a supervised loss during distillation [30, 31, 40], but there are a number of works that combine SKD with contrastive SSL learning to achieve SSL model compression and performance gains [1, 7]. While these works rely on a pre-trained frozen teacher model, Tejankar et al. [36] propose an iterative SKD regime where the teacher model continues to learn similarity score distributions during training. Our auxSKD architecture is similar to [36], but our objectives are different, (i) we expand SKD to extract representations from video data, instead of images, and (ii) we use distilled similarity representations as auxiliary knowledge for different self-supervised pretraining methods, instead of directly applying them on downstream tasks.

**Video Playback Speed Perception** – Creating an efficient self-supervised pretext task to model motion and appearance for video SSL is significantly more difficult than for static images [5]. Recently, estimating video playback speed has attracted much interest as a highly effective way to encourage the model to learn features (of moving objects)
in videos [3, 5, 6, 14, 15, 43, 47]. For example, Epstein et al. [6] design a method to predict normal video speed to detect an unintentional event in the video. SpeedNet [3] determines whether a given video clip is being played at normal or twice its original speed, while VideoPace [43] predicts the specific speed of each video clip which is randomly sampled at a different frame rate. One of the main limitations in considering playback speed alone is that video clips with different speed labels might appear similar to each other, e.g. when different athletes might perform the same sporting action at different speeds.

To avoid the dependence on imprecise speed labels, Chen et al. [5] introduce RSPNet to predict relative speed between two video clips to better learn motion features. They use a triplet loss to minimize the distance between two clips of the same video at the same playback speed and maximize the distance between two clips of the same video at different playback speeds. Also in ASCNet [14], Hunag et al. focus on speed similarity and propose a consistent speed perception task which aims to minimize the distance between two clips from two different videos with the same playback speed.

In VSPP, we propose a simple, yet effective video sampling strategy which does not rely on comparing video clips at different speed rates, since we embed a speed rate change within each clip. This emphasises focus on motion and abstracts the model from appearance features for which RSPNet and ASCNet require a whole additional processing pipeline. It also allows our model to converge much faster, e.g. after 20 epochs compared to 200 for RSPNet and ASCNet.

3. Proposed Approach

Our goal is to reduce the pretext training computational burden by developing an auxiliary pretraining phase that assists the primary pretext task to learn as efficient generalised self-supervised video representation as possible on a reduced-size source dataset. To achieve this, we take inspiration from Similarity-based Knowledge Distillation which is used in recent works [1, 7, 36, 37]. We illustrate our full self-supervised pretraining framework in Figure 2.

3.1. Auxiliary Learning via auxSKD

Our auxiliary learning framework consists of a teacher $T$ and a student $S$ with the same architecture followed by a fully-connected layer, as the projection, to map the representations into a lower dimension space. We follow BYOL [9] and use a MLP predictor layer on top of the student model. This makes the teacher-student architecture asymmetric to prevent collapsed solutions. We randomly initialize both models from scratch equally. The student model and its predictor layer are updated by backpropagation while momentum update [11] is applied in the teacher model to be a running average of the student.

At each iteration our pretext task transformation VSPP is applied twice to a raw video instance $v$ to generate two video clips $v_1^*$ and $v_2^*$ independently, with the goal of maximizing their similarity in our teacher-student framework. Then, given feature encodings $(T(v_1^*), S(v_2^*))$ and predictor function $MLP(.)$ for $S$, we perform $L_2$ normalization such that $z^T = \frac{T(v_1^*)}{||T(v_1^*)||}_2$ and $z^S = MLP(S(v_2^*)) / ||MLP(S(v_2^*))||_2$.

Similar to [11,36], we consider a memory bank of $H$ feature vectors (or anchors) $x_1^T = [x_1^T, ..., x_H^T]$ obtained from the teacher model under a simple FIFO strategy, where $n$ is the length of the memory bank. Specifically, at each iteration, we enqueue the feature vectors of the current batch extracted from the teacher model and dequeue the earliest instances. Next, we calculate the similarity of the teacher’s embedding $z^T$ to all feature vectors in the memory bank and apply Softmax to obtain a probability distribution,

$$p_i^T = -\log \frac{\exp(\frac{\text{sim}(z^T, x_i^T)}{\gamma^T})}{\sum_{j=1}^H \exp(\frac{\text{sim}(z^T, x_j^T)}{\gamma^T})} ,$$

where $p_i^T = [p_1^T, ..., p_H^T]$ is the probability of teacher query $z^T$ for the i-th anchor point, $\text{sim}(.,.)$ measures the similarity between $L_2$ vectors, and $\gamma^T$ is the temperature value for the teacher’s model.

Similarly, we calculate the student similarity distribution $p_i^S = [p_1^S, ..., p_H^S]$ over $n$ memory bank anchor points, with

$$p_i^S = -\log \frac{\exp(\frac{\text{sim}(z^S, x_i^T)}{\gamma^S})}{\sum_{j=1}^H \exp(\frac{\text{sim}(z^S, x_j^T)}{\gamma^S})} .$$

Here $\gamma^S$ is the temperature value for the student’s model. Finally, the loss is measured by the Kullback–Leibler (KL) divergence as

$$\mathcal{L}(T, S) = \sum_i \text{KL}(p_i^T \ || \ p_i^S) .$$

Note that during training, the teacher network is frozen and we update its weights using momentum with the update rule $\theta_T \leftarrow m\theta_T + (1 - m)\theta_S$, where $m \in [0, 1]$ is the momentum hyperparameter to ensure smoothness and stability, and $\theta_T$ and $\theta_S$ are the teacher and student model parameters respectively. This updates $\theta_T$ to be a slow moving average of $\theta_S$. Pseudo-code for our auxSKD training is provided in Algorithm 1.

3.2. Primary Pretext task learning via VSPP

A SSL pretext task encourages the neural network to learn a representation from unlabelled data which contains high-level abstractions or semantics. In the video pace prediction approach of Wang et al. [43], each training clip is
Algorithm 1 Training auxSKD

Input: Teacher model $T(\cdot, \theta_T)$ and student model $S(\cdot, \theta_S)$, videos $V = \{v_i\}_{i=1}^N$, and memory bank $\{x_i\}_{i=1}^H$.

Output: Trained student model weights $\theta_S$.

1. Randomly initialize $T(\cdot, \theta_T)$ and $S(\cdot, \theta_S)$.
2. while not max epoch do
3. Randomly sample a video $v$ from $V$.
4. Sample two clips $v_1^i$ and $v_2^i$ from $v$ using VSPP video transformation (Section 3.2).
5. Compute student query features $z^S$ from clip $v_1^i$ using student model $S(\cdot, \theta_S)$.
6. Update teacher parameters using momentum: $\theta_T \leftarrow m\theta_T + (1 - m)\theta_S$.
7. Compute teacher query features $z^T$ from clip $v_2^i$ using teacher model $T(\cdot, \theta_T)$.
8. Calculate $p_1^i$ and $p_2^i$ using Eq. 1 and Eq. 2.
9. Add the teacher’s embedding $z^T$ into the memory bank $\{x_i\}_{i=1}^H$ and pop-out the earliest sample.
10. Optimize student model using KL divergence loss, Eq. 3.
11. end while

randomly sampled at a different pace and their pretext task then identifies the pace for each clip. While this is an effective approach, it means each clip is treated as if its pace is its natural speed.

We propose that each clip should contain within it one segment where the pace has been (randomly) altered. Our assumption is similar to [3, 5, 43] in that the network can only represent the underlying video content through efficient spatiotemporal features if it succeeds in learning the pace reasoning task, however, we build on [43]’s proposal through a more intricate, yet simple, within-video pace alteration task. Our proposed VSPP pretext task requires our model to temporally explore a video clip and predict the index and speed of a segment within a clip which is sampled at a different speed rate.

Given a video clip $v_i$ comprising $N$ frames, we generate video $v^*_i = \{I_0, I_1, ..., I_{K-1}\}$ of size $K < N$, comprising $Z$ segments, such that $K/Z$ number of frames in segment $\zeta$ are sampled at pace $\lambda$, where both $\zeta$ and $\lambda$ are randomly selected from $1 \leq \zeta \leq Z$ and $1 \leq \lambda \leq Q$ respectively, and $Q$ is the highest possible speed rate. Note, when $Z = 1$ the sampling strategy is similar to [43]. In this work, we select $Z = 4$ and $Q = 4$ to allow a significantly wide variation of starting locations and sudden speed rate changes to provide more precise self-supervision signals. Specifically, our approach results in a change of speed rate in only one segment of the clip while the rest of the clip (before and after) retains its natural rate (see Figure 3). This strategy allows the network to better find the difference between natural speed (changes which happen gradually) and altered speed (changes which happen suddenly) in a clip, alleviating imprecise video speed labeling issues [5].

To have a random speed rate $\lambda$ for the $\zeta^{th}$ segment, beginning at frame $I_0$ and ending at frame $I_r$, then

$$I_b = f_r + ((\zeta - 1) * \frac{K}{Z}) + (\lambda - 1),$$

$$I_e = I_b + \lambda * (\frac{K}{Z} - 1), \quad (4)$$

where $f_r$ is the $r^{th}$ frame of the original video $v_i$ which is randomly selected during sampling to generate a more diverse video clip $v^*_i$ at each iteration.

Summary of our overall method: Given a 3D encoder, such as an R(2+1)D or R3D-18, and a video dataset $V = \{v_i\}_{i=1}^N$, we perform our auxiliary learning stage using our flavour of SKD (see Section 3.1 and Algorithm 1) based on a KL loss (Eq. 3). Following this auxiliary pretraining stage, the student model enters the primary pretraining stage to solve our VSPP pretext task through two simultaneous sub-tasks: i) predicting the speed rate $\lambda$ in the $\zeta^{th}$ segment of $v^*$, ii) predicting the temporal location of the segment in $v^*$ which is sampled at a different speed, i.e. predicting index $\zeta$. Then by jointly optimizing these two tasks, the final self-supervised loss is defined as:

$$\mathcal{L} = \alpha \mathcal{L}_{\text{speed}} + \beta \mathcal{L}_{\text{seg}}, \quad (5)$$

where $\alpha$ and $\beta$ are balancing weights (empirically found to work best in our experiments when $\alpha = \beta = 1$). $\mathcal{L}_{\text{speed}}$ and $\mathcal{L}_{\text{seg}}$ are cross-entropy losses.

4. Experiments

4.1. Datasets

We conducted our experiments on four datasets, two for pretraining, Kinetics-400 [16] (K-400) and Kinetics-100 [5] (K-100), and two for downstream action recognition, UCF101 [34], HMDB51 [19].

Figure 3. Changing the natural speed of one random segment of a video clip for the pretraining stage - the VSPP pretext task learns where in $v^*$ this occurs and at what speed change. In this example $\lambda = 2$ and $\zeta = 2$. 
**Kinetics-400** is a huge dataset for action recognition collected from Youtube, which contains 400 human action classes and around 240K videos. Each video lasts about 10 seconds.

**Kinetics-100** is composed of 100 classes and around 33K videos. We use K-400 and K-100 as pretraining datasets to validate our proposed approach’s performance on a reduced-size dataset and promote less dependency on large-scale datasets for self-supervised representation learning.

**UCF101** contains 101 action categories with a total of 13320 videos. It is divided into three training/testing splits and we follow prior works [5, 43] to use training split 1 for self-supervised pre-training and train/test split 1 for fine-tuning and evaluation.

**HMDB51** contains 6,849 video clips of 51 action classes which is a relatively small dataset compared to UCF101 and kinetics. This dataset is divided into three splits and we use split 1 for our downstream task evaluation, similar to prior works [5,43].

### 4.2. Implementation Details

**Backbone Networks** – We choose two different backbones R(2+1)D [39] and R3D-18 [10], as our 3D encoder, which have been widely used in recent SotA self-supervised video representation learning methods [5, 14, 29].

**Default Settings** – We run all experiments under PyTorch on two GeForce RTX 2080 Ti GPUs with a batch size of 30. We use SGD as our optimizer with momentum of 0.9 and weight decay of 5e-4.

**Pretraining Stages** – Following [43], for both auxiliary and primary stages, we pretrain our models for 20 epochs with an initial learning rate of $1 \times 10^{-3}$. The learning rate is decreased by 1/10 every 6 epochs. For data augmentation, we randomly crop the video clip to $112 \times 112$ and then apply horizontal flip and color jittering to each video frame. Following [2], for UCF101 we apply (10x more iterations at) 90K iterations per epoch for temporal jittering. In our auxiliary pretraining stage, we use a predictor head for the student encoder comprising a 3-layer MLP with hidden dimension 1024, and output embedding dimension 128. We do not use a predictor for the teacher and only set its output dimension (projection head) to 128. We follow MoCo [29] and set the size of the memory bank to 16384 and set the momentum value of the encoder update to 0.999. We also use the same temperature for both teacher and student model at 0.02. To use the student encoder for the primary stage, the weights of the convolutional layers are retained after auxiliary pretraining and we drop the projection layer and predictor to replace them with two randomly initialized FC layers corresponding to the segment speed and index outcomes of our VSPP pretext task (see Figure 2). We select our parameters empirically.

**Fine-tuning** – During fine-tuning, we transfer the weights of the convolutional layers to the human action recognition downstream task, while the last fully connected layer is randomly initialized. We fine-tune the network on UCF101 and HMDB51 for 25 epoches with labelled videos and apply cross-entropy loss. We use the same data augmentation and training strategy as the pretraining stage except for the initial learning rate which is set to $3 \times 10^{-3}$, similar to [43].

**Evaluation Settings** – We follow the common evaluation protocols on video representation learning [14, 43] to assess the performance of our proposed approach. For action recognition, we sample 10 clips uniformly from each video in the test sets of UCF-101 and HMDB-51. Then for each clip, we only simply apply the center-crop. To find the final prediction, we average the Softmax probabilities of all 10 clips from the video.

### 4.3. Evaluations on UCF101 and HMDB51

**Comparison on K400 pretraining** – In Table 1, we present our comparison with SotA self-supervised learning methods and report the top-1 accuracy on both UCF-101 and HMDB-51 datasets, along with the pretraining settings for all methods, i.e. backbone architecture, input size, pretraining dataset, and number of epochs.

In Rows 1-4, for reference we show a mix of methods that operate on temporal manipulations at different input sizes and on different backbones. Rows 5-11 allow more like-for-like comparisons of recent, popular works in SSL video representation learning based on K-400 pretraining, R3D-18 backbone and almost consistent image sizes across the techniques. ASCNet achieves the most superior results with a combined appearance and speed manipulation approach.

In Rows 12-17 where pretraining is on K-400 on the R(2+1)D architecture, RSPNet and VideoMoCo come first and second-best alternatively on the two test datasets, while our approach exceeds CEP on both.

**Comparison on K100 pretraining** – The results on Rows 18-27 of Table 1 represent the essence of our contributions, in that we aim to reduce the dependence of SSL methods on large pretraining datasets, for example by replacing K-400 with K-100 for pretraining. We apply our auxSKD stage to another transformation-based pretext task, i.e. VideoPace, and also to one contrastive task, i.e. RSPNet, to exhibit the flexibility of our method. For VideoPace, we train its auxSKD with video clips sampled based on VideoPace’s own sampling strategy, as proposed in [43]. To integrate auxSKD into the RSPNet framework, we train it with the video transformation proposed in [5] and then transfer all the convolutional layer weights to its query encoder and initialize the projection head and key encoder randomly from scratch.
Table 1. Comparative performance results on UCF101 and HMDB51 when pretraining on K400, and most importantly, on the reduced-size dataset K-100 (shaded region) to emphasise the power of our proposed approach. Note auxSKD refers to our proposed auxiliary pretraining stage using similarity-based knowledge distillation.

Pretraining on only K-100 with the R(2+1)D backbone, VideoPace achieves less accurate results on UCF101 than when pretraining with K-400 as expected, but it surpasses its own K-100 performance (12.3%) at 76.1% when our auxiliary SKD pretraining is added to it. This is very close to its performance with K-400 pretraining (1.1%). Similarly, RSPNet’s performance improves when our auxiliary SKD is deployed, from 74.7% to 75.5% for UCF101 and from 37.3% to 39.0% for HMDB51. We also observe improvements when adding auxSKD to VideoPace and RSPNet (Rows 24 and 26) on the R3D-18 backbone at 3.4%/3.6% and 1.7%/0.8% on UCF101/HMDB51 respectively. Our proposed method obtains the best performance on both datasets when pretrained on K-100. We also note that unlike VideoPace [], RSPNet [5] and ASCNet [14] (for which no code has been released at the time of writing), we do not have an appearance stream in our method.

### 4.4. Ablation Studies

We perform ablations to establish the effectiveness of our auxiliary pretraining process and our VSPP pretext task.

Effectiveness of auxSKD – We verify the impact of our auxiliary pretraining stage by showing the performance improvement gained by it. In Table 2, we present the results of our proposed method on an R(2+1)D and R3D-18 backbones with and without auxiliary pretraining for UCF101, K-100 and K-400 pretraining datasets. It is clear that in each and every case auxSKD causes an increase in performance.

Ablation on VSPP – Our VSPP pretext task determines both the segment within a clip where there is a speed alteration compared to the natural speed of the rest of the clip and what the speed rate is, effectively parameters \( \lambda \) and \( \zeta \). Based on ablation studies in [43], for all the experiments here we consider 4 different speed rates i.e. \( Q = 4 \), hence \( \lambda = \{1, 2, 3, 4\} \).

Table 3 outlines the effect of each sub-task in VSPP when our model pretrains on them separately and jointly (on K-100). Our auxSKD pretraining task is not engaged for this ablation. As can be seen, the best result is obtained when pretraining jointly on both tasks and having the maximum number of segments \( Z = 4 \) at 60.8% on the UCF101.
Table 2. Ablation of the auxiliary pretraining stage auxSKD with our proposed approach.

| Speed Prediction | Segment Prediction | #Classes | UCF101 |
|------------------|--------------------|----------|-------|
| ✓                | ✓                  | {Q = 4, Z = 1} | 57.5  |
| ✓                | ✓                  | {Q = 4, Z = 2} | 57.5  |
| ✓                | ✓                  | {Q = 4, Z = 3} | 59.5  |
| ✓                | ✓                  | {Q = 4, Z = 4} | 60.8  |
| ✓                | ✗                  | {Q = 4, Z = 4} | 58.3  |
| ✓                | ✗                  | {Q = 4, Z = 4} | 59.9  |

Table 3. Ablation of our VSPP pretext task pretrained on K-100 with R3D-18 (no auxSKD stage). We examine the importance of each subtask within VSPP while the number of segments within the clip change.

- In Figure 4 (left), we compare the performance of our proposed method on UCF101 when pretrained on K-100 with and without auxSKD using different checkpoints. It can be seen that when auxiliary learning is switched off, the performance of our VSPP pretext task is lower at all checkpoints. We also notice that the performance starts to saturate after 20 epochs for both VSPP and VSPP+auxSKD. In Figure 4 (right), we can see that after around 20 epochs, the changes in the VSPP losses are not significant. This demonstrates that our model converges quickly and we can ensure the convergence of our model during pretraining with only 20 epochs.

5. Limitations

We identify three limitations of our work:

- a fundamental aspect of our VSPP pretext task is that it thrives on the altered natural pace of motion in a segment of a video while the rest of the clip retains its natural motion. However, any sudden and very fast motion in a clip may violate this assumption as the fast motion within the selected segment of a clip may be missed when it’s sampled. This is a similar limitation for other current speed based pretext tasks such as VideoPace and RSPNet.

- we aim to test our approach on at least one other reduced-size version of an existing, large dataset, such as FineAction [25] to further validate our auxiliary pretraining stage as an approach that reduces the dependence of self-supervised learning approaches on large pretrained datasets.

- other speed-related pretext tasks, such as ASCNet, RSPNet, and VideoPace include an appearance stream in their methodology, however in this work, while the absence of an appearance stream may seem to be a limitation, it was avoided to focus on the power of VSPP as an independent pretext task and promote the auxiliary pretraining stage as two contributions that may be used in a modular fashion by the community. We expect that adding an appearance stream to our VSPP may improve our results.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we introduced an auxiliary-learning phase for self-supervised video representation learning that allows a significant reduction in the amount of unlabelled data required for the pretraining task. The approach exploits similarity-based knowledge distillation to better prepare a (student) network to perform its primary pretraining.
task. Our experiments show that this new auxiliary phase auxSKD improves the performance of other existing SSL approaches, such as VideoPace [43] and RSPNet [5].

We also introduced a new video speed analysis task, VSPP, that predicts the index and altered speed of a segment within a clip which is sampled at a different frame rate to the rest of the clip. Solving this task can strengthen the network’s awareness of the video's natural speed rate and alleviate the imprecise video speed labeling problem [5]. Our experiments illustrate that the features learnt achieve competitive or superior results compared to the state of the art, while training on a much smaller dataset, e.g. K-100 rather than K-400, and at a lower computational cost.

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