Recognizing Indonesian sign language (Bisindo) gesture in complex backgrounds

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Article Info ABSTRACT

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Sign language, particularly Indonesian sign language (Bisindo), is vital for deaf individuals, but learning it is challenging. This study aims to develop an automated Bisindo recognition system suitable for diverse backgrounds. Previous research focused on greenscreen backgrounds and struggled with natural or complex backgrounds. To address this problem, the study proposes using Faster region-based convolutional neural networks (RCNN) and YOLOv5 for hand and face detection, MobileNetV2 for feature extraction, and long short-term memory (LSTM) for classification. The system is also designed to focus on computational efficiency. YOLOv5 model achieves the best result with a sentence accuracy (SAcc) of 49.29% and a word error rate (WER) of 16.42%, with a computational time of 0.0188 seconds, surpassing the baseline model. Additionally, the system achieved a SacreBLEU score of 67.77%, demonstrating its effectiveness in Bisindo recognition across various backgrounds. This research improves accessibility for deaf individuals by advancing automated sign language recognition technology.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the essential aspects of human life. However, some people with a condition such as hearing impairment or deafness have limitations in verbal communication. People with such conditions usually communicate using sign language. There are two sign languages for the Indonesian language: the Indonesian sign language system (SIBI) and Indonesian sign language (Bisindo). Research on Bisindo is still less extensive than that on SIBI; therefore, further development and research are needed.

Research on sign language recognition is diverse, with various datasets and models [1]. There are two common approaches to sign language recognition (SLR) research: vision-based and glove-based. Visionbased research is considered more natural and realistic because it utilizes information based on the natural environment [2]. The main difference between the two methods is that the vision-based uses image or video data. Meanwhile, the glove-based system uses sensors [3]. For the vision-based approach, several methods can be used, including principal component analysis (PCA) [4], hidden Markov model (HMM) [5], support vector machine (SVM) [6], histogram of oriented gradients (HoG) [7]. In addition to those methods, deep learning models are also can be used for these cases; the frequently used deep learning models are 3D convolutional neural network (CNN) [8], generative adversarial network (GAN) [9], variational autoencoder (VAE) [10], Faster region-based convolutional neural network (RCNN) [11], [12], you only look once (YOLO) [13], [14], which are used as hand-locating networks to detect hands before the classification process.

SLR research development for Indonesian sign language still needs to be improved, especially for Bisindo. An SLR study for Bisindo utilizes the YOLOv3 model but is still limited to recognizing only the alphabet [15]. A study on Bisindo that carried out word-level recognition was done, but it still uses skin color segmentation to extract hands and faces [16]. However, the study on Bisindo is still limited to datasets with greenscreen background only. SLR research for SIBI has seen more development than Bisindo. The study on SIBI recommends a feature extraction model, which is MobileNetV2. The research still only used skin color segmentation to extract hands and faces [17]. It was subsequently proven that the system performed well only for datasets with a green background but needed to be more suitable for complex or natural backgrounds [18]. Complex backgrounds are crucial in sign language recognition research because real-world sign language data often have a natural background, not necessarily a green screen. Therefore, addressing the issue of complex backgrounds becomes essential.

SLR research on Bisindo still needs to recognize words or sentences effectively in complex backgrounds. Therefore, this research aims to develop a Bisindo sign language recognition system that performs well in complex backgrounds. Object detection is required at the initial stage of the process to address the issue of complex backgrounds. The models used for detection are Faster RCNN and YOLOv5. These two models have different characteristics, as Faster RCNN is a two-stage detector [19], and YOLOv5 is a single-stage detector [20]. Hopefully, comparing and integrating these two models into the system framework will determine the best model for recognizing Bisindo sign language. This research will also apply a measurement metric that has not been previously used for this case, namely SacreBLEU [21]. SacreBLEU is claimed to be more suitable for evaluating language translators where the original language and the translated language have similar language characteristics.

2. PROPOSED METHOD

Table 1 contains studies related to this research. Generally, recognizing sign language using video or image-based methods involves detecting hands and faces, extracting features, and classifying sign language words. In the research conducted by He [11], a method was proposed for hand detection using Faster RCNN, which will be employed in this study to detect hands and faces. Padmaja *et al.* [22] also employed a similar method but could only detect several letters and one word, whereas this research aims to detect complete sentences. This study also utilizes YOLOv5 as a lighter model compared with Faster RCNN. The method for feature extraction will utilize the findings from Setyono and Rakun [17], which compared MobileNetV2 and ResNet50, concluding that MobileNetV2 is more efficient, especially for implementation on mobile devices. The classification method will implement the findings from Faisal [16], which tested various long short term memory (LSTM) [23] configurations, concluding that a 1-layer bidirectional LSTM (BiLSTM) is the most effective for Bisindo. For evaluation, in addition to using metrics that have been tested in previous studies, namely sentence accuracy (SAcc) and word error rate (WER), this study will also try other metrics, namely BLEU [24] and SacreBLEU [21], to determine which metric is most suitable for Bisindo sign language recognition research.

Table 1. Related works

3. METHOD

The methods used in this study can be seen in Figure 1. In general, there are six stages, namely data preparation to prepare and preprocess data, object detection to detect hands and faces objects using Faster RCNN and YOLOv5 with the evaluation matrix of mean average precision-intersection over union (mAP-IoU), skin color segmentation to segment objects based on skin color using a multi-color space, feature extraction using MobileNetV2 and accuracy evaluation matrix, classification using LSTM and accuracy evaluation matrix, and finally, evaluation, which is the final measurement of the system with matrices including SAcc, WER, and execution time. Each stage is further elaborated in the following sections.

Figure 1. The overall process of experiment

3.1. Data preparation

The dataset used in this research consists of a collection of 420 videos demonstrating Bisindo. The device used to record those videos is a Samsung Galaxy S9+ with a resolution of 1,920×1,080 pixels and 30 frames per second. This dataset consists of four individuals, three performing 40 sign language sentences each and the fourth performing 20 sign language sentences. There are three videos for each sentence demonstrated by each individual. Look at Table 2 in Appendix for the details about the dataset.

Figure 2 illustrates the stages of data preparation. The first step in data preparation is converting the video dataset into a collection of frames. Next, the process includes cropping and resizing to obtain images with a 1:1 aspect ratio and a size of 224×224 pixels and then annotating the dataset with bounding boxes for the right-hand, left-hand, and face objects. After the data preparation, the total number of frames obtained is 92,977. The next step involves labeling the frame dataset with words for each frame. The dataset includes 152 words, each labeled from 1 to 152, with label 0 reserved for transitions.

In addition to the original dataset with a greenscreen background, a dataset with a complex background was also constructed. To create this complex background dataset, some images were applied to replace the greenscreen background in the initial dataset. The chosen images contain various natural objects with skin colors, forcing the system to learn more robustly. Figure 3 shows the images used as complex backgrounds for the complex dataset.

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Figure 3. Images used as complex backgrounds

3.2. Object detection Based on Figure 4, the object detection process involves taking the input dataset and annotations, resizing images to 224×224, splitting the data into training and testing sets with an 80%-20% proportion, training the Faster RCNN and YOLOv5 models, conducting testing, and evaluating using mAP-IoU. There are three object classes: the right hand, left hand, and face. The study that uses only skin color segmentation demonstrates that it can effectively extract hands and faces in datasets with a green screen background [18]. However, the method will also tested on complex datasets, and it would be the baseline method of this study.

Figure 4. Object detection

3.3. Skin color segmentation

Rahmat *et al.* [25] introduced the skin segmentation method using multi-color space, which combines three color spaces: Normalized RGB, HSV, and YCbCr. The schema for skin color segmentation can be seen in Figure 5. Subsequently, Figure 6 displays the results of the segmentation. The figure consists of two subfigures: Figure 6(a) segmentation results without object detection and Figure 6(b) segmentation results with object detection. The difference in segmentation results on a complex background is apparent between the method only relying on skin color segmentation as shown in Figure 6(a) and the one containing object detection before skin color segmentation as shown in Figure 6(b). The method without object detection in Figure 6(a) still captures other objects in the background. In contrast, the use of object detection in Figure 6(b) ensures precise segmentation limited to the hands and faces of the performer, as intended.

Figure 5. Skin color segmentation

Figure 6. Comparison of segmentation results (a) without object detection and (b) with object detection

3.4. Feature extraction

Figure 7 displays how the feature extraction is performed. The feature extraction model learns features from the dataset, generates a model, and then applies it to the dataset for extraction. This study uses MobileNetV2 for feature extraction. It employs transfer learning, retraining the pre-trained MobileNetV2 model on this research dataset. This feature extraction process produces an output vector with a size of 1,280.

3.5. Classification

Based on Figure 8, the model used for classification is LSTM. The LSTM architecture used is a 1 layer BiLSTM, the best architecture for recognizing Bisindo sign language [16]. LSTM is a seq2seq model requiring the same input and output sequence length. The length of the input sequence, in this case, is ten. That means each label in each sentence will be represented with ten frames. The value ten is derived from the average length of frames for each label.

3.6. Evaluation

This research conducts a quantitative evaluation as follows: mAP to assess the performance of the object detection model by comparing ground truth with IoU area [26]; SAcc to measure the accuracy of the classified sentences; and WER to determine the level of word classification errors in assessing the classification results [27]. The formulas to calculate mAP, WER, and SAcc are:

$$
mAP = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} AP_i
$$
\n⁽¹⁾

$$
WER = \frac{S+D+I}{N=H+S+D} \tag{2}
$$

$$
SAcc = \frac{Number\ of\ correct\ sentences}{Total\ number\ of\ sentences} \tag{3}
$$

In this context, S (substitutions) represents the total number of substitutions, where each instance involves replacing a word in the sentence with a different one. ^D (deletions) represents the total number of deletions, referring to words that appear in the original sentence but are missing in the prediction. The variable ^I (insertions) represents the number of insertions, which are words not present in the original sentence but included in the prediction. C (correct words) indicates the count of words that are correct in the prediction. Finally, N (number of words) is the total number of words in the reference sentence, and it equals the sum of S, D, and C. A higher WER value indicates a worse system performance. Conversely, for SAcc, a higher value indicates better system performance. The overall system will be assessed by testing it on the entire test dataset, using the following formula to evaluate its performance. In addition to the metrics, the experiments calculate the processing time, which consists of the inference time or the time it takes for the system to process one input data and produce an output.

$$
\mu WER = \frac{\sum WER}{n} \tag{4}
$$

$$
\mu SAcc = \frac{\sum SAcc}{n} \tag{5}
$$

The other evaluation method used is SacreBLEU [21]. This evaluation method has yet to be used in previous research on Indonesian sign language. SacreBLEU measures how closely a system's translation or prediction approaches the reference or ground truth. However, SacreBLEU will be tried for sign language recognition in this case. Here is the formula.

$$
BLEU = BP * exp(\sum_{n=1}^{N} W_n \cdot log(precision_n))
$$
\n(6)

3.7. Experiment design

This study evaluates the performance of a system with object detection versus one without, using both greenscreen and complex background datasets. Six experiments were conducted: the first two without object detection (serving as baselines) and the next four using Faster RCNN and YOLOv5 for hand and face detection across both datasets. Results were compared to assess improvement, with the ANOVA significance test used for evaluation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the impact of object detection methods on sign language recognition accuracy in complex backgrounds. Previous research has focused on feature extraction and classification but has not explored the combination of these with object detection in challenging environments. As shown in Table 3, both Faster RCNN and YOLOv5 effectively detect right-hand, left-hand, and face objects in greenscreen and complex backgrounds. YOLOv5 outperformed Faster RCNN in both settings, achieving higher mAP scores and faster processing times. Subsequent measurements focused on feature extraction.

During feature extraction with MobileNetV2, Faster RCNN showed decreased accuracy, while YOLOv5's accuracy improved. The baseline method, which skips object detection, performed best on greenscreen backgrounds but YOLOv5 excelled in complex backgrounds. The baseline model was also the fastest due to the absence of object detection. Detailed results are in Table 4.

In the classification stage using the LSTM model, the baseline method performs well on datasets with greenscreen backgrounds. However, its accuracy drops significantly when the method is implemented on complex backgrounds. Regardless, for the two methods implementing object detection, it is observed that the model classifies well on both types of datasets. This indicates that incorporating an object detection model at the beginning of the process successfully maintains good accuracy on both datasets.

Table 5 shows that both object detection models effectively addressed the challenges faced by the baseline model on complex datasets. SAcc, WER, BLEU, and SacreBLEU were calculated to evaluate performance at word and sentence levels. The baseline model performed poorly, while the Faster RCNN model showed improvement. The YOLOv5 model achieved the best results, with an SAcc of 49.29%, WER of 16.42%, BLEU of 40.97%, and SacreBLEU of 67.77%.

The study conducts a one-way ANOVA significance test to confirm the significance of the observed differences. It compares the results from each experiment. If the p-value is less than the alpha of 0.05, it indicates a significant difference between the two methods and vice versa.

Based on the findings from Table 6 and the significance test results in Table 7, it is clear that there is a significant increase in SAcc, BLEU, and SacreBLEU by the YOLOv5 model compared to the Faster RCNN and the baseline model. Simultaneously, there is a significant decrease in WER produced by the YOLOv5 model compared to the other two models. In terms of computational time, YOLOv5 shows a significant difference from the Faster RCNN model, which means YOLOv5 is significantly faster than the Faster RCNN model. This implies that YOLOv5 achieved the best results of the three models. Table 8 shows several of the results of the experiments.

Table 6. SAcc, WER, BLEU, and SacreBLEU evaluation on complex background

Experiments	SAcc	WER	BLEU	SacreBLEU
Skin segmentation + MobileNetV2 + LSTM	5.71%	54.07%	5.62%	17.37%
Faster $RCNN + skin segmentation + MobileNetV2 + LSTM$	35.00%	26.81%	23.76%	45.86%
$YOLOv5$ + skin segmentation + MobileNetV2 + LSTM	49.29%	16.42%	40.97%	67.77%

Table 7. One-way ANOVA significance test on complex background

Comparison	SAcc	WER	Time	BLEU	SacreBLEU
Baseline vs YOLOv5	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant
Baseline vs Faster RCNN	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant
Faster RCNN vs YOLOV5	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant

Table 8. Samples of predicted Bisindo sign language gestures in a complex background

In addition to the results above, there are several findings from the experiment. Out of 152 words in the dataset, 82 words were predicted correctly with 100% accuracy, and only one could not be predicted at all. The word is "*Eh*". The word "*Eh*" in Indonesian is a type of greeting word. This word could not be predicted because its appearance was only in one video, so the system did not sufficiently train it. Additionally, there are similar or synonymous words that can be predicted interchangeably, such as the word "*Cantik*", which means "Beauty," and the word "*Tampan*", which means "Handsome". Both words also have similar sign displays, so the system can incorrectly predict "*Cantik*" as "*Tampan*" or vice versa.

Another finding is related to the SAcc value. Based on the SAcc formula defined in the previous chapter, the SAcc value is greatly influenced by the length of the sentence. Simply put, no matter how long the sentence is, if there is even one word that is not predicted correctly, the SAcc value for that sentence is 0. This is why even the best model still has an SAcc value of only 49.29%.

SAcc and BLEU have a similar trend in evaluating this system. Both, when compared to SacreBLEU, show that SacreBLEU tends to achieve better results than SAcc and BLEU. This indicates the difference between the two metrics in evaluation. SAcc is not suitable for evaluating Bisindo because Bisindo does not have standard rules like SIBI. For example, Bisindo can have several variations of signs in terms of word order when expressing a sentence. If evaluated using SAcc, these variations will be considered incorrect, whereas they should be considered correct.

Analysis of the SAcc results found that SAcc is relatively good when the predicted sentence length is less than five words but relatively poor for sentences with a length of five words or more. For sentences with a length of less than five words, the average SAcc value is 62.67%, while for sentences with a length of five words or more, it is 34.85%. The SAcc value for sentences with a length of less than five words is similar to the SacreBLEU result, which is 67.77%. This further strengthens the argument that SacreBLEU is the appropriate metric for evaluating the Bisindo sign language recognition system, as its evaluation is more consistent.

5. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to solve the problem of recognizing Bisindo sign language in complex backgrounds and determine the suitable evaluation method. Experiments were conducted to address this issue. It was found that adding an object detection method at the beginning of the process could improve performance by first extracting hand and face objects. The best-performing object detection model was YOLOv5, achieving SAcc 49.29%, SacreBLEU 67.77%, BLEU 40.97%, and WER 16.42% on complex backgrounds, with a computation time of 0.0188 seconds per frame. SAcc was effective for sentences of less than five words, with an average SAcc of 62.67% for YOLOv5. However, for longer sentences, SAcc dropped to 34.85%, showing inconsistency. SacreBLEU, on the other hand, maintained consistency with a final score of 67.77% for all sentence lengths, making it the appropriate evaluation method for Bisindo sign language recognition.

APPENDIX

No	Sentence in Indonesian	Sentence in English	Sentence in Bisindo	Sentence in Bisindo (translated into English)
-1	Besok saya mau pergi ke	Tomorrow, I am going	Mau - pergi - Bandung	Want $-$ go $-$ Bandung $-$ tomorrow
	Bandung.	to Bandung	$-$ besok	
2	Kamu tidak boleh pulang	You are not allowed to	$Kamu-pulang -$	$You - go home - now - do not$
	sekarang.	go home now!	sekarang tidak boleh	
3	Setiap pagi saya berjalan	Every morning, I walk	$Saya - jalan-kaki -$	$I - walk - thirty - minute -$
	selama 30 menit.	for 30 minutes.	$tiga$ -puluh – menit –	$\text{morning} - \text{morning} - \text{morning}$
			$pagi-pagi-pagi$	
4	Karena takut, dia lari.	Out of fear, He ran	$Dia - takut - dia - lari$	$He - fear - he - run$
5	Ibu saya biasanya tidur	My mother usually goes	$Ibu-saya-tidur-jam$	$My Mother - sleep - ten o'clock -$
	jam 10 malam.	to sleep at 10 PM.	$-$ sepuluh – malam –	$night - usually$
			biasanya	
6	Karena senang, dia	She is smiling because	Dia senang dia senyum	$She - happy - She -smile$
	tersenvum.	She is happy.		
7	Anak perempuan itu sedih	The girl is sad because	Bapak meninggal anak	Father – passed away – girl – sad
	karena ayahnya	her father passed away.	perempuan itu sedih	
	meninggal.			
8	Saya marah karena saya	I am angry because I	Saya merasa dia hina	$I - feel - He - insult - angry$
	merasa dihina oleh dia.	feel insulted by him/her.	marah	
9	Jangan khawatir saya pasti	Don't worry, I will	Khawatir jangan saya	Worry - do not - i - will - help
	membantu kamu.	definitely help you.	bantu pasti	
10	Saya bingung mengapa	I'm confused why I'm	Saya - makan -	I - eat - watermelon - do not -
	saya tidak boleh makan	not allowed to eat	semangka tidak boleh -	confuse - why
	semangka.	watermelon.	bingung - kenapa	
11	Setiap pagi ayah saya	Every morning, my	Bapak saya minum kopi	My father - drink - coffee - eat -
	minum kopi dan makan	father drinks coffee and	makan nasi goreng pagi	fried rice - morning - morning -
	nasi goreng.	eats fried rice.	pagi pagi	morning

Table 2. Sentences in the dataset

Table 2. Sentences in the dataset *(Continue…)*

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