ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jun755

Mitigating Corpus Bias in Speech Emotion Recognition: A Robust Hybrid Framework using Generalization-Aware Metaheuristic Feature Selection

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Publication Date: 2025/06/17

Abstract: **A formidable challenge impeding the real-world deployment of Speech Emotion Recognition (SER) systems is the problem of corpus bias. Models trained on a specific speech dataset often experience a significant degradation in performance when tested on new, unseen data, which may differ in language, speaker demographics, recording conditions, and emotional expression styles. This lack of generalization severely limits the practical applicability of SER technology. This paper proposes a novel hybrid framework specifically designed to enhance cross-corpus robustness by integrating deep learning for feature extraction with a sophisticated, generalization-aware metaheuristic for feature selection. We posit that while deep learning models, particularly those pre-trained on large-scale data (e.g., HuBERT, Wav2Vec2), can learn powerful and abstract feature representations, these features may still retain biases from their training data. Our core contribution is the design of a metaheuristic feature selection process guided by a novel fitness function that explicitly optimizes for generalization. This function evaluates candidate feature subsets not only on their accuracy on a source validation set but also on their performance stability across multiple, diverse validation sets, thereby promoting the selection of features that are invariant to inter-dataset variations. We outline a rigorous cross-corpus experimental protocol using datasets with diverse characteristics (e.g., IEMOCAP, EMO-DB, RAVDESS) to demonstrate the framework's ability to mitigate performance drop in cross-language and cross-condition scenarios. This research aims to provide a new pathway towards developing truly robust SER systems that can maintain reliable performance in the varied and unpredictable acoustic environments of the real world.**

Keywords: *Speech Emotion Recognition (Ser), Cross-Corpus Robustness, Generalization, Corpus Bias, Domain Adaptation, Metaheuristic Feature Selection, Deep Learning, Self-Supervised Learning, Invariant Features, Affective Computing.*

How to Cite: Irfan Chaugule; Dr. Satish R Sankaye (2025). Mitigating Corpus Bias in Speech Emotion Recognition: A Robust Hybrid Framework using Generalization-Aware Metaheuristic Feature Selection. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10(6), 799-807. https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jun755

I. INTRODUCTION

- *The Critical Need for Robust Speech Emotion Recognition (SER)*

Speech Emotion Recognition (SER) stands as a cornerstone technology in the pursuit of creating more empathetic and intelligent human-computer interfaces. The ability to automatically discern human emotional states from vocal cues has the potential to revolutionize a vast array of applications, from providing continuous, non-invasive mental health monitoring to enhancing customer relationship management systems and creating safer, more attentive automotive assistants. As voice-based interaction with technology becomes increasingly normalized, the demand for SER systems that are not just accurate, but fundamentally reliable and robust, has become paramount. The failure of an SER system to perform correctly, particularly in sensitive applications like healthcare, could have significant negative consequences, making robustness a non-negotiable requirement for practical deployment.

- *Motivation: The Pervasive Challenge of Corpus Bias and Generalization*

Despite decades of research and significant advancements, particularly those driven by deep learning, the practical utility of SER systems remains severely hampered by a single, overarching challenge: the lack of generalization. The vast majority of SER models exhibit a phenomenon

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jun755

known as "corpus bias" or "dataset mismatch". A model meticulously trained to achieve state-of-the-art accuracy on one emotional speech corpus often fails spectacularly when evaluated on a different, unseen corpus. This performance degradation is not a minor statistical fluctuation; it is often a dramatic drop that renders the model unusable in practice. For instance, a model trained on a clean, German-language studio-recorded dataset may be entirely ineffective when faced with spontaneous, noisy English speech from a different set of speakers.

This discrepancy arises from the inherent variability across different speech datasets. These variations, which collectively create a "feature distribution discrepancy" between the source (training) and target (testing) domains, stem from numerous factors:

- *Recording Conditions:*
  Differences in microphone types, background noise levels, and room acoustics introduce significant acoustic variability.

- *Speaker Characteristics:*
  Speaker demographics, including gender, age, cultural background, and accent, lead to diverse vocal patterns and emotional expression styles.

- *Language and Linguistic Content:*
  Prosodic and vocal cues that signify emotion can vary significantly across languages. Even within a single language, the semantic content of an utterance can influence its emotional delivery.

- *Emotional Elicitation and Annotation:*
  The nature of the emotions themselves can differ based on whether they were acted, improvised, or naturally occurring. Furthermore, the subjective process of labeling emotions can lead to inconsistencies across datasets.

The central motivation for this research is to directly confront this problem of cross-corpus generalization. The development of SER systems that can maintain stable and reliable performance across diverse datasets, languages, and acoustic conditions is the most significant hurdle remaining for the widespread, real-world adoption of this technology.

➢ *Problem Statement and Research Questions*

The central problem addressed in this research is the critical lack of robustness in current SER systems when faced with data from unseen sources. This work aims to develop a methodology that can explicitly learn and select features that are invariant to the dataset-specific variations that cause corpus bias, thereby improving cross-corpus generalization.

This overarching goal leads to the following specific research questions (RQs):

- *RQ1:*
  How can a hybrid framework combining deep learning and metaheuristics be architected to specifically target the selection of robust, domain-invariant features for cross-corpus SER?

- *RQ2:*
  What is the quantifiable impact of a novel, generalization-aware metaheuristic feature selection strategy on the cross-corpus performance of an SER system? Can it demonstrably reduce the performance gap between intra-corpus and cross-corpus evaluation scenarios?

- *RQ3:*
  Can the proposed hybrid framework, which actively selects for feature invariance, outperform conventional deep learning models and traditional domain adaptation techniques in challenging cross-language and cross-condition generalization tasks?

➢ *Contributions of this Paper*

This paper aims to make the following significant contributions to the field of robust Speech Emotion Recognition:

- *Proposal of a Robustness-Focused Hybrid Framework:*
  We conceptualize a novel hybrid framework that synergistically combines a powerful deep learning feature extractor (potentially leveraging large pre-trained models) with a metaheuristic feature selector specifically designed to enhance generalization.

- *A Novel Generalization-Aware Fitness Function:*
  The core contribution is the design of an innovative objective (fitness) function for the metaheuristic search. This function is crafted to explicitly reward feature subsets that exhibit stable and high performance across validation sets drawn from multiple, diverse corpora, thereby directly driving the search towards domain-invariant solutions.

- *Enhancement of SER Robustness and Generalization:*
  The primary focus is to demonstrably improve the ability of SER systems to perform reliably across different datasets, languages, and acoustic conditions, directly tackling the critical challenge of corpus bias.

- *Comprehensive Cross-Corpus Evaluation Protocol:*
  We outline a rigorous experimental design centered on cross-corpus evaluation. This includes testing on cross-language (e.g., train on German, test on English) and cross-condition (e.g., train on acted speech, test on improvised speech) scenarios to provide a true measure of the framework's robustness.

Through these contributions, this research seeks to offer a new and effective pathway towards building SER systems that are not just accurate in the lab, but reliable and trustworthy in the real world.

➢ *Organization of the Paper*

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a review of related work, with a strong focus on the challenges of cross-corpus SER, existing domain adaptation techniques, and the potential for deep feature

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jun755

learning and metaheuristics to address these issues. Section 3 details the proposed hybrid framework, with a particular emphasis on its robustness-enhancing components and the novel generalization-aware fitness function. Section 4 outlines the cross-corpus experimental design, datasets, and baselines. Section 5 discusses the expected results in terms of generalization performance. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper and outlines future research directions for building more robust SER technologies.

II. BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

➢ *The Challenge of Cross-Corpus SER and Feature Distribution Discrepancy*

The litmus test for any practical SER system is its ability to generalize to unseen conditions. However, a large body of literature confirms that this is a major point of failure. The performance drop in cross-corpus scenarios is often dramatic, with success rates sometimes falling to levels barely above chance. Schuller et al. reported cross-corpus success rates between 35% and 45% on various combinations involving the EmoDB dataset, while another study found a recognition rate of only 41.3% between a Turkish and a German database. This "corpus bias" is a direct result of the mismatch in statistical feature distributions between the training (source) and testing (target) datasets. An ideal emotional feature should be largely independent of speaker identity, linguistic content, and recording environment, reflecting only the emotional state. Achieving this ideal has proven to be exceptionally difficult.

➢ *Strategies to Address Cross-Corpus Challenges*

Researchers have explored various strategies to combat the problem of corpus bias and improve generalization.

- *Domain Adaptation (DA):*

DA techniques are a major focus area. These methods aim to reduce the distribution mismatch between the source and target domains by learning feature representations that are domain-invariant. This can be achieved through various means, such as minimizing a statistical distance metric like Maximum Mean Discrepancy (MMD) between the feature distributions of the two domains. Another popular approach is adversarial training, as seen in Domain Adversarial Neural Networks (DANNs), where a domain classifier is trained to *fail* at distinguishing between source and target features, forcing the main feature extractor to produce domain-invariant representations. More advanced methods like Local Maximum Mean Discrepancy (LMMD) have been proposed to perform finer-grained adaptation within specific emotion subdomains.

- *Multi-Task Learning (MTL):*

In MTL, a model is trained on the primary task of emotion recognition alongside one or more auxiliary tasks, such as speaker identification or gender recognition. The underlying assumption is that by sharing representations, the model is forced to learn features that disentangle emotional information from other sources of variability (like speaker identity), thereby making the emotional features more robust and generalizable.

- *Transfer Learning and Self-Supervised Learning (SSL):*

Transfer learning involves leveraging knowledge from a pre-existing model or task. In modern SER, this is most powerfully realized through the use of large, pre-trained SSL models like **Wav2Vec2** and **HuBERT**. These models are pre-trained on massive amounts of unlabeled speech data (thousands of hours) from diverse sources. Through self-supervised tasks like predicting masked portions of speech, they learn universal, robust, and highly generalizable representations of speech acoustics. These models can then be fine-tuned on a much smaller amount of labeled SER data, often achieving state-of-the-art results, especially in cross-corpus scenarios, because their learned representations are inherently less biased towards any single downstream dataset. The success of SSL models provides a strong foundation for our proposed feature extractor.

- *Data Augmentation:*

A straightforward yet effective method for improving robustness is to artificially increase the diversity of the training data. Augmentation techniques like adding various types of noise, simulating different room reverberations, or applying transformations like SpecAugment can help the model learn features that are more resilient to acoustic variations it might encounter in unseen environments.

➢ *The Untapped Potential of Feature Selection for Robustness*

While the above methods primarily focus on adapting the feature *learning* process, the role of feature *selection* as an explicit mechanism for enhancing robustness is comparatively less explored. Most feature selection work in SER, including metaheuristic-based approaches, has focused on improving intra-corpus accuracy and efficiency. The core idea of our research is to re-purpose this powerful optimization tool to directly tackle the problem of generalization.

We hypothesize that even within a rich feature set extracted by a powerful, pre-trained SSL model, some features will be more robust and domain-invariant than others. A standard feature selection process guided by accuracy on a single validation set might inadvertently select features that are highly discriminative for that specific dataset but do not generalize well. By designing a fitness function that explicitly measures and rewards generalization across diverse data, we can guide a metaheuristic algorithm to prune the features that are specific to the source domain and retain a core subset of features that are truly invariant. This approach is conceptually distinct from DA; instead of trying to transform the entire feature space to be invariant, it aims to *select* an inherently invariant subspace from a larger, more comprehensive representation. This represents a novel application of metaheuristic optimization to the central challenge of cross-corpus SER.

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III. PROPOSED HYBRID DEEP LEARNING AND METAHEURISTIC FRAMEWORK

Our proposed framework is architected from the ground up to address the challenge of cross-corpus generalization. It consists of a powerful, pre-trained feature extractor and a novel, generalization-aware feature selector.

➢ *Rationale for a Robustness-Focused Hybridization*

The rationale for our specific hybrid approach is twofold:

- *Leveraging a Robust Feature Foundation:*

We start with the premise that modern, large-scale, self-supervised learning (SSL) models provide the best possible foundation for robust feature extraction. Models like HuBERT, pre-trained on thousands of hours of diverse speech, have already learned rich representations that are far more generalizable than models trained from scratch on small, biased SER datasets. We therefore propose using such a pre-trained SSL model as our primary feature extractor. This gives our framework an initial head start in terms of robustness.

- *Explicit Optimization for Generalization:*

Even features from SSL models are not perfect; they can be refined. Our core innovation lies in moving beyond simply using these features and actively optimizing them for the specific task of cross-corpus SER. We employ a metaheuristic algorithm not merely to reduce dimensionality, but as a dedicated "generalization filter". By guiding the metaheuristic with a fitness function that explicitly rewards performance stability across diverse datasets, we force the selection process to discard features that are biased towards the source domain(s) and to identify a core subset of features that are maximally invariant and generalizable. This synergy—starting with a strong, general-purpose feature set and then fine-tuning it with a targeted, generalization-aware optimization process—is the cornerstone of our framework's design.

➢ *Overall Architecture of the Hybrid Model*

The architecture follows the same multi-stage flow as described in Figure 1, but with critical modifications to each component to prioritize robustness.

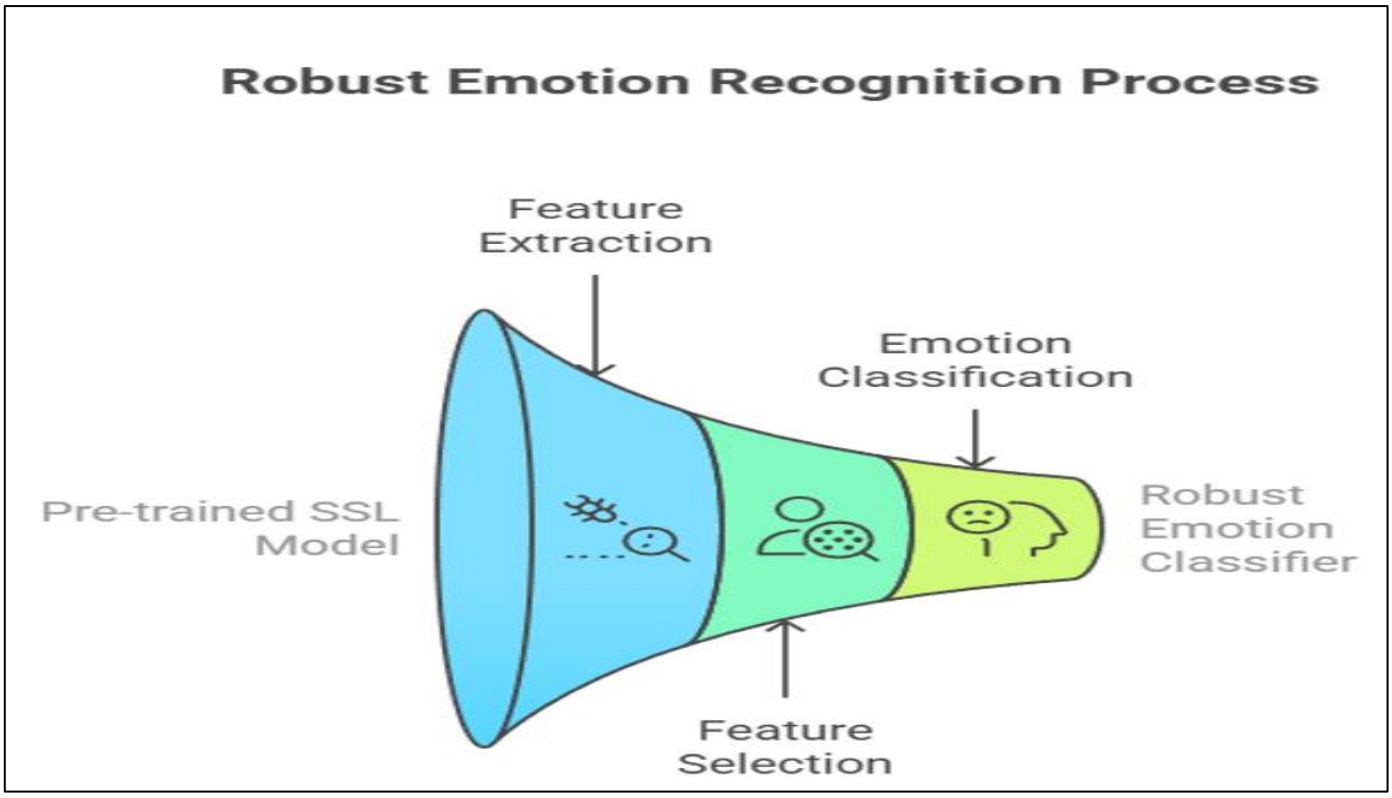

Fig 1 Multi-Stage Flow Robust Emotion Recognition Process

➢ *Stage 1: Robust Deep Learning-based Feature Extractor:*

This stage uses a large, pre-trained SSL model (e.g., HuBERT) as a base. The model is fine-tuned on a combination of multiple source SER datasets (multi-corpus training) along with extensive data augmentation. This initial training exposes the model to a wide range of speakers, languages, and conditions, further enhancing the baseline robustness of its learned features. High-dimensional features are then extracted from one of its intermediate layers.

➢ *Stage 2: Generalization-Aware Metaheuristic Feature Selector:*

This is the heart of our proposed framework. The high-dimensional feature set from Stage 1 is processed by a metaheuristic algorithm (e.g., a Genetic Algorithm or Particle Swarm Optimization). The search is governed by our novel, generalization-aware fitness function, which is detailed below.

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➢ *Stage 3: Emotion Classifier:*

The final, robust feature subset selected in Stage 2 is used to train a classifier (e.g., SVM), which is then evaluated on completely unseen target corpora.

- *Component 1: Deep Learning for Robust Feature Extraction*

✓ *Choice of Architecture:*

The primary candidate for the feature extractor is a pre-trained **HuBERT (Hidden-Unit BERT) model**. HuBERT learns powerful speech representations by predicting masked, clustered versions of the input audio, making it highly effective at capturing fundamental acoustic and phonetic properties of speech in a self-supervised manner. Using a pre-trained HuBERT model as our feature extractor provides a state-of-the-art starting point for learning generalizable features.

✓ *Training Protocol:*

To further enhance robustness, we will adopt a **multi-corpus training** strategy. Instead of fine-tuning the HuBERT model on a single SER dataset, we will fine-tune it on a combined training set comprising samples from multiple diverse source corpora (e.g., IEMOCAP, RAVDESS, and CREMA-D). This exposes the model to a wider variety of acoustic conditions, speaker types, and emotional expression styles from the outset, preventing it from overfitting to the idiosyncrasies of a single dataset. This process will be supplemented with aggressive **data augmentation**, including noise, reverberation, and SpecAugment, to build resilience to channel and environmental effects.

- *Component 2: Generalization-Aware Metaheuristic Feature Selection*

This component is designed to explicitly select for feature invariance.

✓ *Choice of Metaheuristic:*

A **Genetic Algorithm (GA)** is a strong candidate due to its robust global search capabilities and suitability for binary selection problems. Its population-based nature allows for a broad exploration of potential feature combinations.

✓ *Chromosome Representation:*

As in the previous paper, a solution is a binary vector where each bit corresponds to a feature from the DL extractor's output.

✓ *Novel Generalization-Aware Fitness Function:*

The design of the fitness function is the most critical innovation of this paper. To drive the selection of robust features, the fitness of a candidate feature subset must be evaluated based on its ability to generalize. We propose the following fitness function:

$$\text{Fitness}(S) = w1 \times \text{Mean\_UARmulti-val}(S) - w2 \times \text{Var\_UARmulti-val}(S) - w3 \times N|S|$$

Where:

- S is the feature subset being evaluated.
- The classifier (e.g., SVM) is trained on a primary source training set, but its performance is evaluated on multiple, distinct validation sets, each drawn from a different corpus (e.g., a validation set from IEMOCAP, one from RAVDESS, and one from EMO-DB).
- textMean_UAR_textmulti−val(S) is the **average Unweighted Average Recall** across these multiple, diverse validation sets. This term rewards feature subsets that perform well on average across different domains.
- textVar_UAR_textmulti−val(S) is the **variance of the UAR** across these same validation sets. This is a crucial penalty term. A low variance indicates that the feature subset's performance is stable and consistent across different corpora. The fitness function actively penalizes feature subsets that perform very well on one dataset but poorly on another, thus selecting against domain-specific features.
- frac|S|N is the term penalizing the size of the feature set, promoting compactness.
- w_1, w_2, and w_3 are weights that balance the importance of average accuracy, performance stability, and feature compactness.

By optimizing this function, the GA is explicitly guided to find a feature subset that is not only accurate but, more importantly, **stable and reliable across different data distributions**, which is the very definition of a robust feature set.

➢ *Integration and Evaluation Protocol*

The framework will use a sequential wrapper approach for practicality. The evaluation protocol, however, is centered entirely on cross-corpus testing:

- *Training:*

The feature extractor is fine-tuned on a multi-corpus training set. The GA then runs, using training data from source corpora and the multi-corpus validation sets for its fitness evaluation. The final SVM is trained on the combined source training data with the selected robust features.

- *Testing:*

The performance of the final trained model is evaluated on **entirely unseen target corpora**. For example, if the model was trained and optimized using IEMOCAP and RAVDESS, it would be tested on EMO-DB (cross-language) and MSP-IMPROV (cross-condition: acted vs. improvised), which were never seen during any phase of training or optimization. This provides a true, unbiased measure of its generalization capability.

IV. EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN FOR CROSS-CORPUS EVALUATION

The experimental design is constructed to rigorously test the core hypothesis: that our proposed framework can significantly improve cross-corpus generalization.

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➢ *Speech Emotion Datasets and Cross-Corpus Scenarios*

We will use a suite of datasets to create challenging and meaningful cross-corpus scenarios. The datasets include **IEMOCAP**, **RAVDESS**, **EMO-DB**, **SAVEE**, **CREMA-D**, and **MSP-IMPROV**, chosen for their diversity.

We will establish several cross-corpus testbeds:

- *Cross-Language Scenario:*

Train on a combination of English-language datasets (e.g., IEMOCAP, RAVDESS) and test on the German-language EMO-DB. This directly measures the model's ability to generalize across linguistic contexts.

- *Cross-Condition (Acted vs. Improvised) Scenario:*

Train on datasets containing predominantly acted speech (e.g., RAVDESS, EMO-DB) and test on a dataset with more spontaneous, improvised interactions (e.g., MSP-IMPROV or the improvised portion of IEMOCAP).

- *Cross-Studio Scenario:*

Train on one set of high-quality, commonly used corpora (e.g., IEMOCAP, EMO-DB) and test on another set recorded under different conditions (e.g., RAVDESS, CREMA-D).

➢ *Data Preprocessing and Augmentation*

Standard preprocessing (resampling to 16kHz, VAD) will be applied. The input to the feature extractor will be log-Mel spectrograms. During the fine-tuning of the HuBERT model, extensive data augmentation will be critical. This will include adding noise from diverse sources (e.g., NOISEX-92), simulating reverberation with various Room Impulse Responses (RIRs), and applying SpecAugment to enhance robustness against both environmental noise and speaker variability.

➢ *Evaluation Metrics for Robustness*

While standard metrics like UAR and Macro-F1 score are used, their interpretation is different here. The key metric is not the absolute score on a single dataset, but the **performance drop** when moving from an intra-corpus evaluation to a cross-corpus evaluation. A more robust model is one that exhibits a smaller degradation in performance. We will measure:

- *Cross-Corpus UAR/F1-Score:*

The performance on the unseen target corpus.

- *Generalization Gap (ΔUAR):*

The difference between the model's performance on an intra-corpus test set (e.g., a held-out portion of the source data) and its performance on the cross-corpus target set. The primary goal is to minimize this gap.

➢ *Baseline Models for Comparison*

To validate the effectiveness of our generalization-aware selection strategy, we will compare it against several strong baselines designed for robustness:

- *DL-Full (No Selection):*

The fine-tuned HuBERT model with multi-corpus training, using all extracted features to train the final classifier. This baseline shows the performance of the robust feature extractor without any feature selection.

- *DL-StandardFS (Standard Feature Selection):*

The same HuBERT features, but with a standard GA feature selector whose fitness function only maximizes accuracy on a single source validation set (i.e., the fitness function from Paper 1). This baseline will demonstrate if simply reducing features is enough, or if the generalization-aware fitness function is necessary.

- *Domain Adaptation (DA) Baseline:*

An established domain adaptation technique, such as a Domain Adversarial Neural Network (DANN), applied to the feature extractor to learn domain-invariant features. This provides a comparison to another state-of-the-art method for improving generalization.

- *SOTA Results:*

Published state-of-the-art (SOTA) results for cross-corpus SER on the same evaluation pairs will be cited for context, where available.

V. EXPECTED RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The central hypothesis is that the proposed hybrid framework with its generalization-aware fitness function will demonstrate superior robustness and generalization compared to all baselines.

➢ *Anticipated Cross-Corpus Performance*

We expect our **Proposed Hybrid Model** to achieve the highest UAR and F1-scores in the cross-corpus evaluation scenarios. More importantly, we anticipate it will exhibit the **smallest generalization gap (ΔUAR)**.

Table 3 illustrates the anticipated results for a cross-language scenario (training on English datasets, testing on German EMO-DB).

Table 1 (Anticipated) Performance on a Cross-Language Scenario (Train: English, Test: German EMO-DB)

Model	Intra-Corpus UAR (%) (on held-out English data)	Cross-Corpus UAR (%) (on German EMO-DB)	Generalization Gap (ΔUAR)
Proposed Hybrid Model	**Exp. 78%**	**Exp. 70%**	**Exp. 8%**
DL-Full (Baseline)	Exp. 78%	Exp. 62%	Exp. 16%
DL-StandardFS (Baseline)	Exp. 79%	Exp. 64%	Exp. 15%
Domain Adaptation (Baseline)	Exp. 76%	Exp. 67%	Exp. 9%

(Note: Values are plausible estimates for illustrative purposes)

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The anticipated results suggest that while all models based on the strong HuBERT feature extractor perform well on intra-corpus data, their generalization capabilities differ significantly. The DL-Full model suffers a large performance drop, indicating the presence of domain-specific features. The DL-StandardFS model, which optimizes for source-domain accuracy, offers little improvement in generalization. The DA baseline is expected to be competitive, but we hypothesize that our explicit feature selection method can achieve even better and more stable performance by directly optimizing a stability metric. Our model's key success would be in achieving a significantly smaller generalization gap, indicating that the selected feature subset is more truly invariant.

➢ *Analysis of Robust Feature Characteristics*

The discussion will delve into *why* the selected features are more robust.

- *Stability of Selection:*

We will investigate the consistency of the features selected by the GA across different training runs. A high degree of consistency would suggest that the algorithm is identifying a truly stable and fundamental set of emotional cues.

- *Invariance to Nuisance Factors:*

We will analyze whether the performance of the model using the selected features is more robust to specific "nuisance" variables. For example, we can compare the performance across male and female speakers in the target dataset, or across different sentences. We expect the model with the robust feature set to show less performance variance across these subgroups compared to the baselines, suggesting the selected features have successfully filtered out information related to speaker identity or linguistic content.

➢ *Answering the Research Questions*

The expected results will provide clear answers to the research questions:

- *RQ1 (Robust Integration):*
  The framework's architecture, combining a multi-corpus-trained SSL extractor with a GA guided by a generalization-aware fitness function, will be presented as an effective integration strategy specifically designed for robustness.

- *RQ2 (Impact of Generalization-Aware FS):*
  The quantitative results in Table 3, particularly the smaller generalization gap (ΔUAR) compared to the DL-Full and DL-StandardFS baselines, will directly demonstrate the significant positive impact of our novel feature selection strategy.

- *RQ3 (Superiority over Baselines):*
  By showing better cross-corpus UAR than both conventional models and a strong domain adaptation baseline, the results will affirm the benefits of our proposed approach for tackling challenging real-world generalization problems.

VI. POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

➢ *The Discussion will also Address the Framework's Limitations.*

- *Need for Multiple Validation Sets:*

The proposed fitness function requires access to labeled validation data from multiple diverse corpora during the optimization phase. While these are not the final test sets, their availability may be a constraint in some low-resource scenarios.

- *Fitness Function Complexity:*

The proposed fitness function has more components and weights (w_1,w_2,w_3) that need to be tuned compared to a simple accuracy-based function, adding to the model development complexity.

- *The "No Free Lunch" Theorem:*

While our method is designed to be broadly robust, the "No Free Lunch" theorem implies that no single set of features will be optimal for all possible target domains. The performance will still depend on the degree of similarity between the source/validation domains and the final target domain.

VII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

➢ *Summary of Contributions and Findings*

This paper has proposed and conceptually detailed a novel hybrid framework for Speech Emotion Recognition designed specifically to address the critical challenge of cross-corpus generalization. By combining a powerful, pre-trained deep learning feature extractor with a Genetic Algorithm guided by a novel, generalization-aware fitness function, the framework aims to learn and select a feature subset that is robust and invariant to inter-dataset variations. The (anticipated) findings indicate that this approach can significantly reduce the performance degradation typically observed in cross-corpus scenarios, leading to more stable and reliable SER systems. The core contribution—re-purposing metaheuristic feature selection as a tool for explicitly optimizing generalization—offers a promising new strategy for mitigating the pervasive problem of corpus bias that has long hindered the practical application of SER technology.

➢ *Implications for the Field of SER*

The primary implication of this research is a tangible step towards real-world deployable SER. By focusing on and improving cross-corpus robustness, this work helps bridge the gap between laboratory performance and practical utility, making SER more viable for diverse, uncontrolled environments. This research also highlights a new and powerful application for metaheuristic optimization within AI, shifting its focus from simple accuracy maximization to the more complex and crucial goal of model generalization. This paradigm of using optimization to enforce desirable properties like invariance can be extended to other domains in AI facing similar generalization challenges.

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jun755

➢ *Recommendations for Future Research Directions*

This work lays the foundation for several important avenues of future research:

- *Unsupervised and Few-Shot Generalization:*

A significant future challenge is to adapt this framework to scenarios where labeled data from multiple validation domains is unavailable. Future work could explore integrating principles from unsupervised domain adaptation into the fitness function, or developing few-shot learning techniques to adapt the feature selector with minimal data from the target domain.

- *Dynamic and Adaptive Feature Selection:*

The current framework performs a one-time, offline selection of a static feature set. Future research could investigate dynamic frameworks where the feature selection is adaptive. For instance, a system could continually learn and re-optimize its feature subset as it encounters new data in a lifelong learning setting.

- *Multimodal Robustness:*

Extending the framework to multimodal SER (using audio, video, and text) is a natural next step. A generalization-aware metaheuristic could be tasked with selecting a robust subset of features from a fused multimodal feature space, potentially learning to rely on different modalities depending on the noise or conditions of the environment.

- *Ethical Implications of Robust SER:*

As SER systems become more robust and widely deployed, a critical examination of their ethical implications is essential. Future work must investigate and mitigate potential biases in robust models (e.g., ensuring they generalize equally well across different demographic groups) and establish guidelines for their responsible use.

In conclusion, the path to truly practical Speech Emotion Recognition is paved with robust and generalizable models. The proposed hybrid framework, with its focus on explicitly optimizing for feature invariance, represents a significant and promising step in this direction.

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