

DeiT-LT: Distillation Strikes Back for Vision Transformer Training on Long-Tailed Datasets

Supplementary Material

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A. Experimental Details

A.1. Datasets

CIFAR-10 LT and CIFAR-100 LT. We use the imbalanced CIFAR-10 and CIFAR-100 datasets with an exponential decay in sample size across classes. This decay is guided by the Imbalance Ratio ($\rho = \frac{\max_i N_i}{\min_j N_j}$). For our experiments on CIFAR-10 LT and CIFAR-100 LT, we show the results on $\rho = 100$ and $\rho = 50$. CIFAR-10 LT comprises 12,406 training images across 10 classes ($\rho = 100$). Out of the 10 classes, the first 3 classes are considered *Head* classes with more than 1500 images per class, the following 4 classes are *Mid* (medium) classes with more than 250 images each class, and the last 3 classes account for the *Tail* classes, with each class containing less than 250 images each. Following a similar decay, the 100 classes of CIFAR-100 LT (10,847 training samples with $\rho = 100$) are also divided into three subcategories: the first 36 classes are considered as the *Head* classes, *Mid* contains the following 35 classes, and the remaining 29 classes are labeled as *Tail* classes. Both CIFAR-10 LT

and CIFAR-100 LT datasets are evaluated on held-out sets of 10,000 images each, equally distributed across all classes.

ImageNet-LT. We use the standard LT dataset created out of ImageNet [42]. ImageNet-LT consists of 115,846 training images, with 1280 images in the class with the most images and 5 images in the class with the least images. Out of the 1,000 classes sorted in the descending order of sample frequency, we consider classes with more than 100 samples as *Head* classes, the classes with samples between 20 and 100 to be *Mid* classes and the classes with less than 20 samples as the *Tail* classes as done in Cui et al. [8].

iNaturalist-2018. iNaturalist-2018 [52] is a real-world imbalanced dataset with 437,513 training images. Out of the 8,142 classes sorted in the descending order of sample frequency, we consider classes with more than 100 samples as *Head* classes, the classes with samples between 20 and 100 to be *Mid* classes and the classes with less than 20 samples as the *Tail* classes, similar to ImageNet-LT.

A.2. Training Configuration

In this subsection, we detail the strategies adopted to train DeiT-LT Base (B) model on four benchmark datasets, namely CIFAR-10 LT, CIFAR-100 LT, ImageNet-LT, and iNaturalist-2018. We use the AdamW optimizer to train DeiT-LT from scratch across all the datasets. These runs use a cosine learning rate decay schedule with an initial learning rate of 5×10^{-4} . All the runs use a linear learning rate warm-up schedule for the initial five epochs. Furthermore, we deploy label smoothing with $\varepsilon = 0.1$ for all our experiments where the ground truth labels are used to train the CLS expert. Under label smoothing, the true label is assigned a $(1 - \varepsilon)$ probability, and the remaining ε is distributed amongst the other labels. We use hard labels as distillation targets from the teacher network to train the DIST expert classifier via distillation from CNN teacher (Fig. 2). For training the teacher networks with SAM optimizer, we follow the setup mentioned in [38]

CIFAR-10 LT and CIFAR-100 LT : We train DeiT-LT for 1200 epochs on imbalanced versions of CIFAR datasets. DRW loss is added to the training of the DIST expert classifier after 1100 epochs. Mixup and Cutmix are used during the initial 1100 epochs of the training. As suggested in [48], we use Repeated Augmentation to improve the performance of the DeiT-LT training. The (32×32) images of CIFAR datasets are resized to (224×224) before feeding into the transformer architecture. For CIFAR-10 LT and CIFAR-100 LT datasets, ResNet-32 is used as the teacher network. The

Table S.1. Summary of our training procedures used to train DeiT-LT Base (B) from scratch on CIFAR-10 LT, CIFAR-100 LT, ImageNet-LT and iNaturalist-2018.

Procedure	CIFAR-10 LT	CIFAR-100 LT	ImageNet-LT	iNaturalist-2018
Epochs	1200	1200	1400	1000
Optimizer	AdamW	AdamW	AdamW	AdamW
Effective Batch Size	1024	1024	2048	2048
LR	5×10^{-4}	5×10^{-4}	5×10^{-4}	5×10^{-4}
LR schedule	cosine	cosine	cosine	cosine
Warmup Epochs	5	5	5	5
DRW starting epoch	1100	1100	1200	900
Mixup (α)	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Cutmix (α)	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Mixup and Cutmix during DRW	×	×	✓	✓
Horizontal Flip	✓	✓	✓	✓
Color Jitter	✓	✓	✓	✓
Random Erase	✓	✓	×	×
Label smoothing	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Solarization	×	×	✓	✓
Random Grayscale	×	×	✓	✓
Repeated Aug	✓	✓	×	×
Auto Aug	✓	✓	×	×

teacher is trained from scratch on these imbalanced datasets using LDAM+DRW+SAM [38] and contrastive PaCo+SAM (training PaCo [8] with SAM [13] optimizer) frameworks. The input images to the teacher are of size (32×32) , with the same augmentation used as input images to the teacher network during DeiT-LT training.

ImageNet-LT and iNaturalist-2018. DeiT-LT is trained from scratch for 1400 epochs on ImageNet-LT and for 1000 epochs on iNaturalist-2018. DRW loss for distillation head (DIST expert classifier) is initialized from epochs 1200 and 900 for ImageNet-LT and iNaturalist-2018, respectively. Mixup and Cutmix are used throughout the training, including the DRW training phase. More details regarding the training configuration can be found in Table S.1.

For the ImageNet-LT and iNaturalist-2018 datasets, the ResNet-50 teacher is trained from scratch on the respective datasets using the LDAM+DRW+SAM [38] and contrastive PaCo+SAM (training PaCo [8] with SAM [13] optimizer) methods. The input image size is (224×224) for both the student and teacher network.

A.3. Additional Baselines

We want to highlight that we attempted training baselines, like LDAM for vanilla ViT. However, we find that the LDAM baseline (52.75%) performs inferiorly to the vanilla ViT baselines (62.62%). We find that the loss for the LDAM baseline gets plateaued very early, and the model does not fit to the training dataset (Fig. S.1). To make the comparison fair with

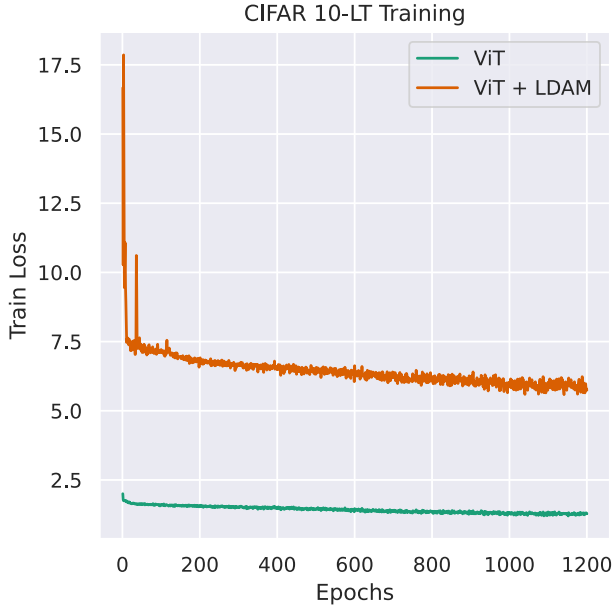
DeiT baselines, we used similar augmentation and other hyperparameters for the ViT Baselines. We think this can be one reason for the non-convergence of the ViT-LDAM baseline. We find that similar abysmal performance for LDAM baseline is also reported by the recent work [59], which also resonates with our finding. We think that investigation into this behavior is a good direction for future work.

Additionally, for a fair comparison, we do not compare against baselines that use pre-training for long-tailed recognition tasks. RAC [46] uses a ViT-B encoder for their retrieval module with weights obtained from pre-training on ImageNet-21K. The authors do not report on small-scale datasets, as they acknowledge the unfair advantage of using the information present in the pretrained encoder. Similarly, for small-scale datasets, LiVT [58] method pretrains the encoder via Masked Generative Pretraining on ImageNet-1k. On the contrary, our DeiT-LT method enables training ViT *from scratch* for both small-scale and large-scale datasets.

A.4. Augmentations for OOD distillation

While both DeiT and our DeiT-LT pass images with strong augmentations to the teacher network for distilling into the student network, the set of augmentations used to train the teacher network itself differs between the two approaches. DeiT first trains a large teacher CNN (RegNetY-16GF) using the same set of strong augmentations as that used for the student network. However, we find that distilling from a small teacher CNN (such as ResNet32) trained with weak aug-

Figure S.1. Comparison of training loss for vanilla ViT and ViT+LDAM training on CIFAR-10 LT



mentations gives better performance (see Sec. 3.1) for more details). Table S.2 compares the augmentations used to train the teacher for DeiT (RegNetY-16GF) and for our method DeiT-LT. Our experiments use ResNet32 as the teacher network for CIFAR-10 LT and CIFAR-100 LT, and ResNet50 for the Imagenet-LT and iNaturalist-2018 datasets. For the PaCo teacher, we utilize the mildly strong augmentations used by the PaCo [8] method itself. We would like to convey, that the PaCo training does not utilize the Mixup and CutMix augmentation in particular while training, which helps us to create OOD samples for this using Mixup and CutMix itself. Distilling via out-of-distribution (OOD) images enables the student to learn the inductive biases of the teacher effectively. This is particularly helpful in improving the performance on the tail classes that have significantly fewer training images.

B. Detailed Results

Performance of individual experts: Our approach focuses on training diverse experts, where the CLS expert classifier is able to perform well on *Head* (majority) classes, while the DIST expert classifier is able to perform well on the *Tail* (minority) classes. By averaging the output of the individual classifiers, we are able to exploit the benefit of both.

In this portion, we discuss the individual performance of the CLS and DIST expert classifiers of our proposed DeiT-LT method on CIFAR-10 LT, CIFAR-100 LT, ImageNet-LT, and iNaturalist-2018. As can be seen in Table S.3 and Table S.4, the CLS and DIST classifiers give a contrasting performance on the head and tail classes, supporting our

Table S.2. Comparing augmentation used to train RegNetY-16GF (teacher for DeiT training) and ResNet32 (teacher for DeiT-LT training) for CIFAR-10 LT.

Procedure	RegNetY-16GF (Strong)	ResNet32 (Weak)
Image Size	224×224	32×32
Random Crop	✓	✓
Horizontal Flip	✓	✓
Mixup (α)	0.8	×
Cutmix (α)	1.0	×
Color Jitter	0.3	×
Random Erase	✓	×
Auto Aug	✓	×
Repeated Aug	✓	×

claim of expert classifiers. For CIFAR-10 LT ($\rho = 100$), the CLS expert classifier is able to report an accuracy of 96.5% on images of the head classes, whereas the DIST expert classifier settles with 72.8% on the same set of classes. On the other hand, the DIST expert classifier reports 93.0% accuracy on the tail classes, which is almost 33% more than that of the CLS expert classifier. Like CIFAR-10 LT, the CLS expert classifier performs better on the head classes of CIFAR-100 LT ($\rho = 100$) than the DIST, whereas the DIST expert classifier reports much higher accuracy on the tail classes. The CLS classifier achieves an accuracy of 73.7% on the head classes, and the DIST expert classifier secures 43.1% accuracy on the tail classes. We notice that by averaging the output of the classifiers, we are able to report good performance in both the majority and the minority classes. CIFAR-10 LT reaches an overall accuracy of 87.3%, with 93.8% on head classes and 85.7% on tail classes. Similarly, with 72.8% on the head and 31.0% on the tail, DeiT-LT is able to secure an overall 54.8% on CIFAR-100 LT. The results demonstrate that there is a parallel trend in the performance of experts for both CIFAR-10 LT and CIFAR-100 LT when ρ is set to 50.

A similar trend is seen for large-scale ImageNet-LT and iNaturalist-2018 in Table S.4. For ImageNet-LT, the CLS expert classifier reports 68.3% accuracy on the head classes, which is approximately 11% more reported by the DIST expert classifier. At the same time, we observe that the DIST expert classifier is able to get an accuracy of 46.6% on the tail, which is significantly higher than the 13.5% of the CLS expert classifier. For iNaturalist-2018 as well, the CLS expert classifier achieves a high accuracy of 73.8% on the head classes, and the DIST expert classifier reaches 77.0% on the tail classes. After averaging the outputs of the two classifiers, DeiT-LT reports an overall accuracy of 59.1% for ImageNet-LT and 75.1% for iNaturalist-2018, which would not have been possible by training a standard Vision

Table S.3. Accuracy of expert classifiers on Head, Mid, and Tail classes for CIFAR-10(100) LT.

Imbalance	Expert	CIFAR-10 LT				CIFAR-100 LT			
		Overall	Head	Mid	Tail	Overall	Head	Mid	Tail
100	Average	87.3 \pm 0.10	93.8 \pm 0.33	83.7 \pm 0.26	85.7 \pm 0.33	54.8 \pm 0.42	72.8 \pm 0.16	55.9 \pm 0.51	31.0 \pm 0.73
	CLS	78.6 \pm 0.15	96.5 \pm 0.06	79.4 \pm 0.39	59.7 \pm 0.20	43.3 \pm 0.39	73.7 \pm 0.19	41.7 \pm 0.73	7.5 \pm 0.26
	DIST	79.9 \pm 0.31	72.8 \pm 0.92	75.4 \pm 0.18	93.0 \pm 0.15	42.5 \pm 0.48	39.3 \pm 1.64	45.1 \pm 0.47	43.1 \pm 0.33
50	Average	89.9 \pm 0.17	94.5 \pm 0.18	87.2 \pm 0.26	88.8 \pm 0.34	60.6 \pm 0.03	74.6 \pm 0.10	60.5 \pm 0.10	43.1 \pm 0.06
	CLS	84.1 \pm 0.33	96.5 \pm 0.12	83.3 \pm 0.66	72.8 \pm 0.55	49.6 \pm 0.21	76.0 \pm 0.31	50.5 \pm 0.46	15.9 \pm 0.41
	DIST	83.2 \pm 0.23	74.6 \pm 0.51	81.8 \pm 0.21	93.6 \pm 0.08	48.0 \pm 0.20	44.0 \pm 0.25	48.4 \pm 0.36	52.6 \pm 0.07

Table S.4. Accuracy of experts on Head, Mid and Tail classes for ImageNet-LT and iNaturalist-2018.

Expert	ImageNet-LT				iNaturalist-2018			
	Overall	Head	Mid	Tail	Overall	Head	Mid	Tail
Average	59.1	66.7	58.3	40.0	75.1	70.3	75.2	76.2
CLS expert classifier	47.5	68.3	40.0	13.5	65.6	73.8	65.8	63.1
DIST expert classifier	56.4	57.2	58.6	46.6	72.9	56.1	73.2	77.0

Transformer (ViT) with a single classifier.

C. Comparison with CLIP based methods

Recently, some approaches such as VL-LTR [46] and PEL [43] have adopted a pre-trained CLIP backbone to address long-tailed recognition challenges. As indicated originally, and also reinforced by [57], CLIP is trained on large-scale balanced dataset (400 M Image-Text pair). As there is a lot of *overlapping concepts between balanced CLIP data and long-tailed datasets (ImageNet-LT and iNat-18)*, the performance of the CLIP fine-tuned methods *does not indicate meaningful progress on long-tail learning tasks*, as CLIP has already seen tail concepts in abundance. Due to this unfairness in training datasets used, we refrain from comparing the CLIP fine-tuned models (i.e., VL-LTR, PEL etc.) with DeiT-LT models trained from scratch.

D. Visualization of Attention

To demonstrate the effect of distillation in DeiT-LT, we visualize the attention of baseline methods on ImageNet-LT without distillation (ViT and DeiT-III) and compare it with DeiT-LT. As DeiT-LT contains both the DIST token and the CLS token, for visualization we average the attention across both. We use the Attention Rollout [45] method for visualization. Fig. S.2 shows the result of attention for different methods. It can be clearly observed that DeiT-LT is able to localize attention at the correct position of objects, across

almost all cases. We find that DeiT-III attention maps are better in comparison to ViT, but it also often gets confused (eg. Bell Pepper, Sea Snake etc.) compared to DeiT-LT.

E. Statistical Significance of Experiments

In this section, we present the results of our experiments on CIFAR-10 LT and CIFAR-100 LT ($\rho = 100, 50$)(as in Table S.3), with three different random seeds. In Table S.3, we report the average performance of the expert classifiers along with the standard error for each. The low error demonstrates that the DeiT-LT training procedure is stable and quite robust across random seeds.

F. Details on Local Connectivity Analysis

We compute the mean attention distance for samples of tail classes (i.e. 7,8,9 class for CIFAR-10) using the method proposed by Raghu et al. [36]. For each head present in self-attention blocks, we calculate the distance of the patches it attends to. More specifically, we weigh the distance in the pixel space with the attention value and then average it. This is averaged for all the images present in the tail classes. We utilize the code provided here as our reference ¹. We show in Fig. 4b that for early blocks (1 and 2) of ViT, the proposed DeiT-LT method contains local features. As we go from ViT to distilled DeiT to proposed DeiT-LT, we find that features

¹<https://github.com/sayakpaul/probing-vits>

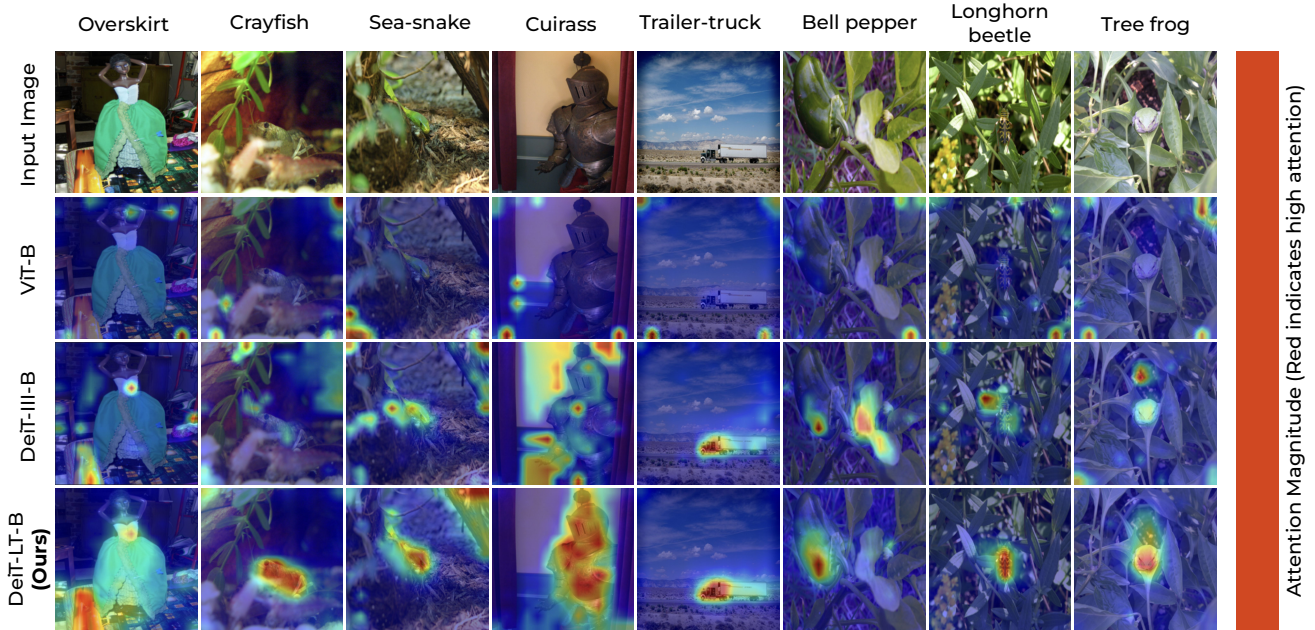


Figure S.2. Visual comparison of the attention maps from ViT-B, DeiT-III [51] and DeiT-LT (*ours*) on the ImageNet-LT dataset, computed using the method of *Attention Rollout* [1].

become more local, which explains the generalizability of DeiT-LT for tail classes. To further confirm our observations, we also provide local connectivity plots for the tail classes of the CIFAR-100 dataset (Fig. S.3). We observe that DeiT-LT produces highly local features. Further, we find that the DeiT baseline (Table 2), which is inferior to ViT for CIFAR-100, shows the presence of global features. Hence, the local connectivity correlates well with generalization on tail classes. The correlation of locality of features to generalization has also been observed by [36], who find that using the ImageNet-21k dataset for pre-training leads to more local and generalizable features in comparison to networks pre-trained on ImageNet-1k data.

G. Distilling low-rank features

In our proposed method, as the `DIST` token serves as the expert on tail classes, it is important to ensure that it learns generalizable features for minority classes that are less prone to overfitting. As stated in [3], training a network with SAM optimizer leads to low-rank features. In this subsection, we investigate the feature rank of the `DIST` token that is distilled via a SAM-based teacher.

Calculating Feature Rank. Consider two sets of images $\mathcal{X}_{all}, \mathcal{X}_{min} \subset \mathcal{X}$, where $\mathcal{X}_{all}, \mathcal{X}_{min}$ refer to the set of images from all the classes and minority (tail) classes, respectively, with \mathcal{X} being the set of all images. We construct feature matrices $F_{n_h, d}^{all}$ and $F_{n_t, d}^{min}$, where n_h and n_t are the number of images in \mathcal{X}_{all} and \mathcal{X}_{min} respectively, and d is the

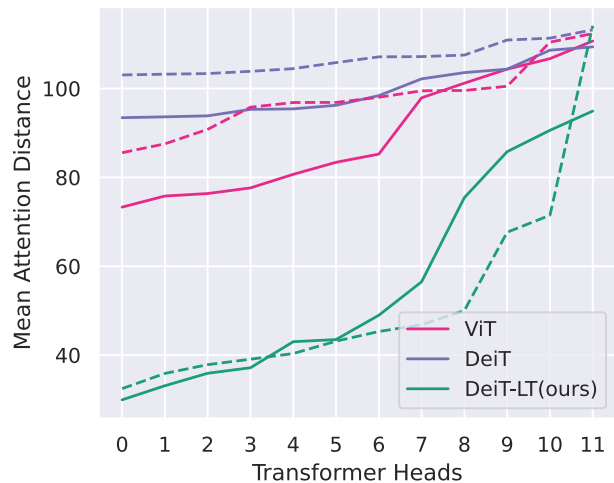


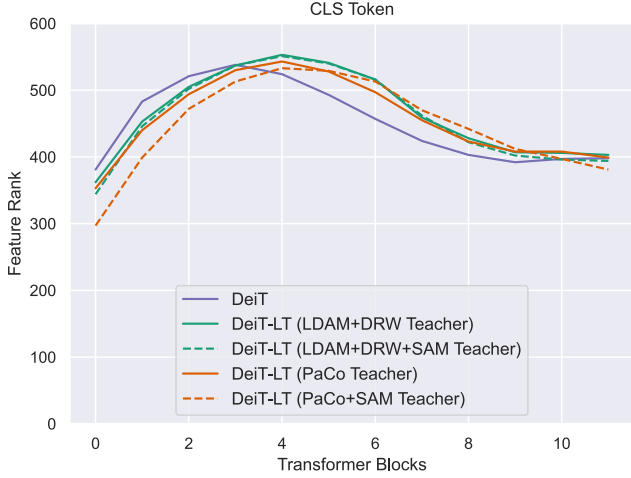
Figure S.3. Mean attention distance for early blocks (1,2) for CIFAR-100 LT tail training images.

dimension of the feature representation from `DIST` token.

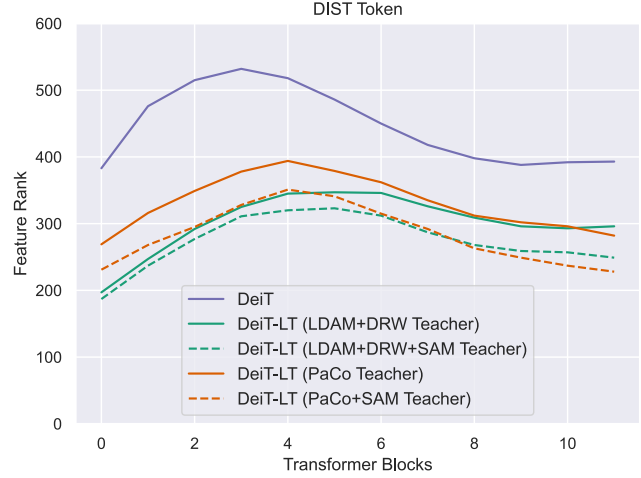
Upon centering the columns of $F_{n_h, d}^{all}$, we decompose the feature matrix as $U, S, V^T = \text{SVD}(F_{n_h, d}^{all})$, and project $F_{n_t, d}^{min}$ using the right singular vectors V as

$$F_{proj}^{min}(k) = F_{n_t, d}^{min} * V_k$$

where V_k contains the top k singular vectors (principal components). We calculate our rank as the least k that



(a) Rank of ViT from Distillation of CNN teachers using CLS token



(b) Rank of ViT from Distillation of CNN teachers using DIST token

Figure S.4. We compare the rank calculated using features from the a) CLS token and b) DIST token when trained on CIFAR-10 LT. Our DeiT-LT captures both fine-grained features (from high-rank CLS token) and generalizable features (from low-rank DIST token).

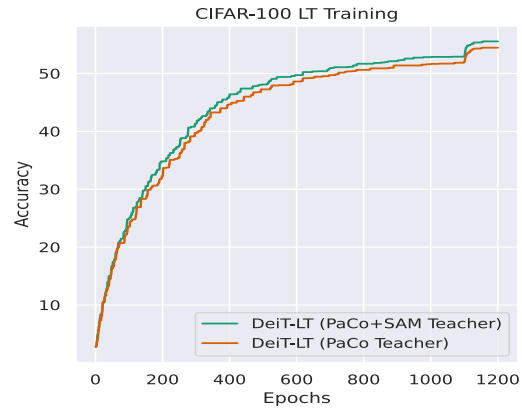
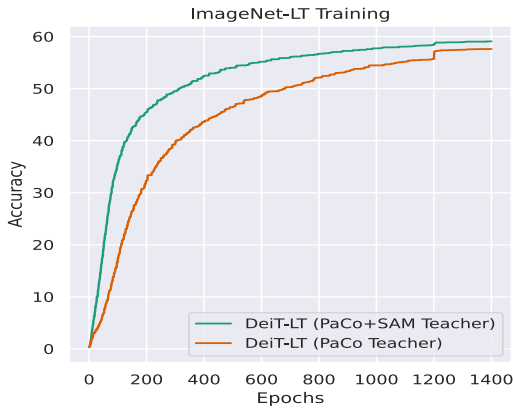


Figure S.5. Validation Accuracy Plots for the ImageNet-LT (left) and CIFAR-100 LT (right). It can be observed that DeiT-LT trained with SAM teachers converges faster than vanilla teachers.

satisfies

$$\frac{\|F_{n_t,d}^{min} - F_{recon}^{min}(k)\|^2}{\|F_{n_t,d}^{min}\|^2} \leq 0.01$$

where $F_{recon}^{min}(k)$ is an approximate reconstructed feature matrix given by $F_{recon}^{min}(k) = F_{proj}^{min}(k) * V_k^T$.

As shown in Fig. S.4b, we find that the DIST token trained with a SAM-based teacher reports a lower rank. As we are able to use the same principal components to represent both the majority and minority classes' feature representation, it signifies that the DIST token learns gener-

alizable characteristics relevant across different categories of images in an imbalanced dataset. By learning semantic similar features, our training of DIST token ensures good representation learning for minority classes by leveraging the discriminative features learned from majority classes.

On the other hand, we observe that CLS token learns high-rank feature representations (Fig. S.4a), signifying that it captures intricately detailed information. Our DeiT-LT, thus, captures a wide range of information by using the predictions made using both fine-grained details from CLS token and generalizable features from DIST token.

G.1. Convergence Analysis with SAM Teachers

We find that models distilled from the teachers trained using SAM [13] converge faster than the usual CNN teachers. We provide the analysis for the DeiT-LT(PaCo+SAM) and DeiT-LT(PaCo) on the ImageNet-LT and CIFAR-100 datasets in Fig. S.5. We observe that models with SAM, converge much faster, particularly for the ImageNet-LT dataset, demonstrating the increased convergence speed for the distillation. This can be attributed to the fact that low-rank models are simpler in structure and are much easier to distill to the transformer.

H. Computation Requirement

For training our proposed DeiT-LT method on CIFAR-10 LT and CIFAR-100 LT, we use two NVIDIA RTX 3090 GPU cards with 24 GiB memory each, with both datasets requiring about 15 hours to train to train the ViT student. We train the DeiT-LT student network on four NVIDIA RTX A5000 GPU cards for the large-scale ImageNet-LT dataset and on four NVIDIA A100 GPU cards for the iNaturalist-2018 dataset, in 61 and 63 hours, respectively.

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