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Research Article

Keywords: GEMM, GPU Optimization, CUDA, CUTLASS, cuBLAS, Tensor Cores, RTX 4060, Ada Lovelace, Software Pipelining, High Performance Computing, WMMA, Matrix Multiplication, Throughput Benchmarking, Memory Hierarchy, Shared Memory Pressure

Posted Date: July 15th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-10347375/v1

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Additional Declarations: The authors declare no competing interests.

High-Performance FP16 General Matrix Multiplication on NVIDIA Ada Lovelace via CUTLASS and WMMA: A Benchmark and Pipeline-Depth Analysis

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July 13, 2026

Abstract

General Matrix Multiplication (GEMM) is the fundamental kernel powering deep learning, scientific computing, and data analytics on modern GPUs. NVIDIA's Tensor Cores—specialized hardware units for mixed-precision matrix multiply-accumulate—deliver theoretical throughput up to 60.55 TFLOPS in FP16 on the Ada Lovelace architecture (RTX 4060, AD107). However, achieving near-peak throughput requires careful orchestration of the GPU memory hierarchy through tiling, software pipelining, and warp-level matrix manipulation. In this work, we present a systematic benchmark of FP16→FP32 GEMM optimization strategies on a consumer-grade RTX 4060, spanning three implementation tiers: (i) the closed-source cuBLAS library, (ii) the open-source CUTLASS template library with device-level API instantiation, and (iii) a custom Warp Matrix Multiply Accumulate (WMMA) kernel. We evaluate the impact of pipeline depth (S) and threadblock tile geometry on throughput at $N = 8192$. The optimal configuration—CUTLASS with $S = 3$, tile 256×128, and epilogue vectorization 4—achieves 31.9 ± 0.3 TFLOPS (52.7% of peak), matching the CUTLASS profiler's built-in `s16816gemm_f16` kernel. Counterintuitively, deepening the pipeline to $S = 4$ *decreases* throughput to 31.1 TFLOPS, revealing that shared-memory pressure and occupancy constraints—not pipeline depth—are the dominant bottlenecks on this architecture. Our calibrated analytical model correctly predicts $S = 2$ (25.6 TFLOPS) and $S = 3$ (31.4 TFLOPS) but overestimates $S = 4$ by 13.8%, underscoring the multi-bottleneck nature of GPU GEMM. The custom WMMA kernel reaches 25.1 TFLOPS with full numerical validation. All code is released as open-source.

1 Introduction

Matrix multiplication is the computational foundation of modern artificial intelligence, high-performance computing, and scientific simulation. The general matrix-matrix product (GEMM), defined as $C = \alpha AB + \beta C$, accounts for the majority of floating-point operations in deep learning training and inference, from convolutional neural networks to large language models [2, 4]. A single training run of a 7-billion-parameter transformer may execute more than 10^{19} GEMM FLOPs, making every percentage point of throughput improvement significant for energy consumption and training time.

1.1 The GPU Computing Landscape

Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) have evolved from fixed-function graphics pipelines to massively parallel, programmable processors optimized for data-parallel workloads. Modern NVIDIA GPUs, based on the Ada Lovelace architecture, contain thousands of CUDA cores organized into Streaming Multiprocessors (SMs), each with dedicated register files, shared memory, L1 cache, and—crucially—Tensor Cores [5]. These specialized units, first introduced in the Volta architecture (V100, 2017) [3], perform matrix-multiply-accumulate on small fragments (4×4 matrices) in a single clock cycle, delivering one to two orders of magnitude higher throughput than conventional CUDA cores for mixed-precision computation.

1.2 The GEMM Optimization Challenge

Despite the raw throughput available from Tensor Cores, achieving near-peak GEMM performance is far from trivial. The GPU memory hierarchy—global memory (HBM2/GDDR6), L2 cache, shared memory, and register file—forms a deep pyramid with dramatically different bandwidths and latencies at each level. To keep Tensor Cores saturated, a GEMM implementation must:

1. Tile the matrices across all three dimensions (M, N, K) to fit in shared memory and registers.
2. Prefetch tiles from global memory to shared memory using software-pipelined DMA copies, overlapping memory transfers with computation.
3. Orchestrate warp-level matrix multiply-accumulate using WMMA or MMA PTX instructions.
4. Manage shared memory bank conflicts through padding strategies.

5. Balance register allocation across threads to maximize occupancy.

1.3 Available Software Stacks

Three principal approaches exist for GEMM on NVIDIA GPUs, each with different trade-offs between performance, flexibility, and development effort:

- **cuBLAS** (NVIDIA CUDA Basic Linear Algebra Subroutines): A closed-source, vendor-optimized library that exposes a standard BLAS interface. cuBLAS achieves near-peak GEMM performance across most problem sizes through an extensive kernel-selection heuristic [14]. However, it offers no user-level control over tile sizes, pipeline depth, or threadblock configuration, making it unsuitable for experimentation or customization.
- **CUTLASS** (CUDA Templates for Linear Algebra Subroutines): NVIDIA's open-source C++ template library that decomposes GEMM into composable primitives at three hierarchical levels (threadblock, warp, instruction) [1, 2]. CUTLASS exposes compile-time parameters for every aspect of the kernel—tile dimensions, pipeline depth, epilogue fusion, data types—enabling systematic exploration of the design space. Version 3 introduced the CuTe layout algebra [13], providing a rigorous mathematical framework for tensor layout manipulation.
- **WMMA API**: The CUDA Warp Matrix Multiply Accumulate API provides warp-level primitives for Tensor Core operations [3]. While lower-level than CUTLASS, WMMA allows direct control over fragment layout and synchronization, at the cost of increased development complexity.

1.4 Research Questions and Contributions

This work addresses the following research questions:

- **RQ1**: What fraction of the theoretical FP16 tensor-core peak (60.55 TFLOPS) can be achieved via cuBLAS, CUTLASS, and hand-tuned WMMA kernels on a consumer-grade Ada Lovelace GPU (RTX 4060)?
- **RQ2**: Does deepening the software pipeline (increasing the number of shared-memory stages S) improve throughput, and does the improvement follow simple analytical models?
- **RQ3**: What is the optimal threadblock tile shape and epilogue vectorization for $N = 8192$ on this architecture?
- **RQ4**: How effectively does the CUTLASS device-level API reproduce the profiler's library kernels, and what are the practical considerations for its use?

Our key contributions are:

1. A reproducible, open-source benchmarking framework for GEMM on Ada Lovelace GPUs using the CUTLASS device-level API with arbitrary compile-time parameters.
2. An experimental demonstration that $S = 4$ is *inferior* to $S = 3$, contradicting predictions from simple throughput models and revealing shared-memory pressure as a secondary bottleneck.
3. A calibrated analytical performance model that correctly predicts $S = 2$ and $S = 3$ but reveals its limitations at $S = 4$ (13.8% overestimation).
4. A custom WMMA kernel validated to 10^{-2} relative error against cuBLAS, serving as a pedagogical reference.
5. A detailed analysis of the cuBLAS driver crash observed on Windows during cross-validation (addressed in our methodology as a TDR-related issue).

2 Related Work

2.1 NVIDIA Tensor Cores: Programmability and Precision

The foundational study of NVIDIA Tensor Core programmability was conducted by Markidis et al. [3] on the Volta V100 GPU. Their work evaluated three programming approaches—WMMA API, CUTLASS, and cuBLAS—and found that Tensor Cores could deliver up to 83 TFLOPS in mixed precision, representing 66% of the theoretical 125 TFLOPS peak. Precision analysis showed that FP16 input with FP32 accumulation introduces relative errors up to 10^{-3}, which they characterized as acceptable for most HPC applications. They recommended judicious use of mixed precision with periodic error monitoring.

Sun et al. [8] extended this analysis to Ampere (A100) Tensor Cores via microbenchmarks, measuring latency and throughput of individual WMMA and MMA instructions. Their key finding was that the newer MMA API (available from Ampere onwards) provides substantially lower latency than WMMA for equivalent operations ($\sim$4 cycles vs. $\sim$8 cycles per 16x16x16 MMA). They also characterized the numeric behavior of TF32, BF16, and FP16 formats on Tensor Cores, providing a valuable reference for practitioners.

2.2 CUTLASS: Template-Based High-Performance GEMM

The CUTLASS library [1, 2] was introduced by NVIDIA researchers in 2017 as a collection of CUDA C++ template abstractions for implementing high-performance GEMM computations. Unlike monolithic libraries such as MAGMA [17], CUTLASS decomposes GEMM into fundamental components—tiling strategies, warp-level matrix multiply, epilogue

operators—abstracted as C++ template classes. This modular design enables programmers to customize and specialize kernels without modifying the library internals.

Huang et al. [6] published a comprehensive benchmark of GPU Tensor Cores using CUTLASS across Turing, Ampere, and Ada architectures. Their study evaluated FP16, BF16, and INT8 data types with various tile sizes, reporting the importance of matching threadblock tile dimensions to the warp-level compute-to-communication ratio. However, their work used the CUTLASS profiler's pre-compiled kernel library rather than the device-level API, limiting the configurations tested to those shipped with the library.

Bikshandi and Shah [12] demonstrated the power of CUTLASS for implementing complex kernels beyond simple GEMM, using it to build FlashAttention-2 on Hopper (SM90) architecture. Their work highlighted the TMA (Tensor Memory Accelerator) and WGMMA (Warpgroup Matrix-Multiply-Accumulate) features specific to Hopper, which are not available on Ada.

2.3 Stream-K: Work-Centric Parallel Decomposition

Osama et al. [7] identified a fundamental limitation of tile-based GEMM decompositions: for non-square or irregular problem shapes, the output tile grid may not evenly divide across SMs, leading to load imbalance. Their Stream-K algorithm partitions the aggregate inner-loop iterations (K-dimension work) across physical processing elements rather than assigning whole output tiles. Across 32,824 GEMM problem geometries, Stream-K achieved peak speedup of up to 14× over CUTLASS and cuBLAS. For square matrices at $N = 8192$, the advantage is minimal due to natural tile quantization, but the concept is relevant for our future work extending to non-square shapes.

2.4 Roofline Performance Model

The roofline model [10] provides a visual framework for identifying whether a kernel is memory-bound or compute-bound by plotting attained FLOP/s versus arithmetic intensity (FLOPs per byte of memory traffic). Konstantinidis and Cotronis [11] extended this model to GPUs with a quantitative approach incorporating micro-benchmarked hardware parameters. Liu and Halim [9] applied the roofline model to GEMM on the NVIDIA RTX 4070 (Ada Lovelace), deriving a ridge point at 59 FLOPs/Byte. Our measured kernel, with arithmetic intensity approximately 3,400 FLOPs/Byte (assuming full data reuse within tiles), operates firmly in the compute-bound regime.

2.5 Analytical Performance Modeling of GEMM

Lai and Seznec [17] performed performance upper-bound analysis for SGEMM on Fermi and Kepler GPUs, deriving analytical models for the interplay of memory bandwidth, instruction throughput, and occupancy. Their approach inspired the model we develop in Section 3.5. More recently, the "From Roofline to Ruggedness" framework [20] decomposed the GEMM performance landscape into mechanism-attributable components, identifying that adjacent problem shapes differing by a single 128-element step can show 30% throughput variation—a phenomenon we observe in the sensitivity analysis of our results.

2.6 Gap in the Literature

While prior work has extensively characterized Tensor Core GEMM at the library-profiler level, few studies have used the CUTLASS *device-level API* to instantiate kernels with arbitrary pipeline depths and tile shapes beyond the pre-compiled library. In particular, the effect of pipeline depth S on Ada Lovelace consumer GPUs has not been systematically characterized with experimental measurements. This gap is significant because the simple throughput model $\text{GFLOPS} \propto S/(S + \kappa)$ is commonly used to justify deeper pipelines, but our results show that occupancy and shared-memory constraints can reverse the expected benefit.

3 GPU Architecture and GEMM Fundamentals

3.1 NVIDIA Ada Lovelace AD107 Architecture

The RTX 4060 is built on the AD107 chip using TSMC 5nm (4N) process technology, containing 18.9 billion transistors on a 156 mm^2 die [4, 18]. Table 1 summarizes the key specifications relevant to GEMM performance.

3.1.1 Theoretical Peak Throughput

The theoretical FP16 tensor-core peak throughput is computed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Peak}_{\text{FP16}} &= N_{\text{SM}} \times N_{\text{TC/SM}} \times \text{FLOP}_{\text{TC/cycle}} \times f_{\text{clock}} \\ &= 24 \times 4 \times 256 \times 2.46 \times 10^9 \\ &= 60.55 \times 10^{12}\ \text{FLOP/s} = 60.55\ \text{TFLOPS}\end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where each fourth-generation Tensor Core performs one 4×4 matrix multiply-accumulate per clock cycle, equivalent to $4 \times 4 \times 4 \times 2 = 128$ FLOPs (multiply-add counts as 2 operations). Note that this is the *FP16 input, FP32 accumulate* peak; the FP16-only accumulate mode may achieve higher throughput on some configurations.

Table 1: RTX 4060 (AD107) specifications relevant to GEMM performance.

Parameter	Value
Architecture	Ada Lovelace
GPU Chip	AD107-400-A1
Process	TSMC 5nm (4N)
Streaming Multiprocessors (SM)	24
CUDA Cores per SM	128
CUDA Cores total	3072
Tensor Cores per SM	4 (4th Gen)
Tensor Cores total	96
RT Cores	24 (3rd Gen)
GPU Boost Clock	2.46 GHz
Memory (GDDR6)	8 GB
Memory Bandwidth	272 GB/s
Memory Bus	128-bit
L1/Shared Memory per SM	128 KB
Registers per SM	65,536
Max dynamic shared memory per SM	100 KB (opt-in)
Max thread blocks per SM	2
TDP	115 W
FP32 CUDA Core Peak	15.11 TFLOPS
FP16 Tensor Core Peak	60.55 TFLOPS

3.1.2 GPU Memory Hierarchy

The memory hierarchy of Ada Lovelace GPUs, from fastest to slowest, is:

1. **Registers:** 65,536 32-bit registers per SM. Each thread can access up to 255 registers. Access latency: 1 cycle.
2. **Shared Memory / L1 Cache:** 128 KB per SM, configurable as 50:50 or 75:25 split between shared memory and L1 cache. Shared memory bandwidth: 2 TB/s theoretical. Access latency: 30 cycles.
3. **L2 Cache:** 2 MB (estimated for AD107). Access latency: 200 cycles.
4. **Global Memory (GDDR6):** 8 GB at 272 GB/s bandwidth. Access latency: 400–800 cycles.

For GEMM, the key optimization is maximizing data reuse in shared memory and registers, minimizing costly global memory accesses [17].

3.2 GEMM Mathematical Formulation

The GEMM operation computes:

$$C_{M\times N} = \alpha \cdot A_{M\times K} \cdot B_{K\times N} + \beta \cdot C_{M\times N} \quad (2)$$

where:

- A is row-major (leading dimension $lda = K$),
- B is column-major (leading dimension $ldb = K$),
- C is column-major (leading dimension $ldc = M$),
- α and β are scalar multipliers (typically $\alpha = 1$, $\beta = 0$ for a standard product).

For our FP16→FP32 configuration, A and B are stored in half-precision (FP16, 2 bytes per element) while C and the internal accumulator are in single-precision (FP32, 4 bytes per element).

The total floating-point operations for a single GEMM is:

$$\text{FLOP} = 2 \times M \times N \times K \quad (3)$$

At $M = N = K = 8192$, this gives:

$$\text{FLOP} = 2 \times 8192^3 = 2 \times 5.4976 \times 10^{11} = 1.0995 \times 10^{12} \text{ FLOPs}$$

3.3 Hierarchical Tiling in CUTLASS

CUTLASS decomposes GEMM into three nested levels of tiling [1, 2], each corresponding to a level of the GPU memory hierarchy:

3.3.1 Threadblock-Level Tiling (CTA Tile)

A threadblock (also called Cooperative Thread Array, CTA) is assigned a rectangular region of the output matrix with dimensions $(M_{\text{CTA}}, N_{\text{CTA}})$. The threadblock iterates over the K dimension in steps of K_{CTA}, loading tiles of A ($M_{\text{CTA}} \times K_{\text{CTA}}$) and B ($K_{\text{CTA}} \times N_{\text{CTA}}$) from global memory into shared memory.

The number of threadblocks launched is:

$$\text{Grid}_{\text{blocks}} = \left\lceil \frac{M}{M_{\text{CTA}}} \right\rceil \times \left\lceil \frac{N}{N_{\text{CTA}}} \right\rceil$$

For our default configuration ($M_{\text{CTA}} = 256$, $N_{\text{CTA}} = 128$, $M = N = 8192$):

$$\text{Grid}_{\text{blocks}} = 32 \times 64 = 2048 \text{ blocks}$$

With 24 SMs and 2 blocks per SM, this requires 43 waves of threadblock scheduling, allowing the scheduler to hide memory latency through concurrent block execution.

3.3.2 Warp-Level Tiling

Within a threadblock, the output tile is further decomposed into warp tiles of dimensions $(M_{\text{Warp}}, N_{\text{Warp}})$. Each warp computes a sub-tile of the output by loading fragments from shared memory into registers and performing the matrix multiply-accumulate. The number of warps per threadblock is:

$$\text{Warps}_{\text{per_block}} = \frac{M_{\text{CTA}}}{M_{\text{Warp}}} \times \frac{N_{\text{CTA}}}{N_{\text{Warp}}}$$

For $M_{\text{Warp}} = 64$, $N_{\text{Warp}} = 64$, and the 256×128 threadblock:

$$\text{Warps} = (256/64) \times (128/64) = 4 \times 2 = 8 \text{ warps} = 256 \text{ threads}$$

3.3.3 Instruction-Level Tiling

Each warp issues warp-level matrix multiply instructions that operate on fragments of dimensions $(M_{\text{MMA}}, K_{\text{MMA}})$ for A and $(K_{\text{MMA}}, N_{\text{MMA}})$ for B. The instruction shape for our FP16 kernel is `GemmShape<16, 8, 16>`, corresponding to the NVIDIA "16816" mma instruction:

$$\text{MMA}_{\text{inst}} : \text{frag}_{16\times8}(\text{FP32}) \mathrel{+}= \text{frag}_{16\times16}(\text{FP16}) \times \text{frag}_{16\times8}(\text{FP16})$$

3.4 Software Pipelining

Software pipelining is a critical optimization that overlaps shared memory loads (from global memory) with Tensor Core computation on previously loaded tiles. The pipeline consists of S stages, each corresponding to a pair of shared memory buffers (one for tile A, one for tile B). While warp i computes using buffer j, the DMA engine concurrently loads data into buffer $(j+1) \bmod S$.

The shared memory consumed by the pipeline is:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{SharedMem}_{\text{pipe}} &= S \times (\text{size}(A_{\text{tile}}) + \text{size}(B_{\text{tile}})) \\ &= S \times (M_{\text{CTA}} \times K_{\text{CTA}} + K_{\text{CTA}} \times N_{\text{CTA}}) \times 2\end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

For our configurations:

$$\begin{aligned}S = 3,\ 256 \times 128 &: 72 \text{ KB} \\ S = 4,\ 256 \times 128 &: 96 \text{ KB} \\ S = 4,\ 128 \times 128 &: 48 \text{ KB}\end{aligned}$$

3.5 Analytical Performance Model

We model the achieved GFLOPS of CUTLASS GEMM as a function of pipeline depth S, tile dimensions, and architecture-specific overhead:

$$\text{GFLOPS}(S, M_{\text{CTA}}, N_{\text{CTA}}) = P_{\text{peak}} \cdot \frac{S}{S+\kappa} \cdot \min\left(1, \frac{M_{\text{CTA}} \cdot N_{\text{CTA}}}{32{,}768}\right) \cdot \eta \tag{5}$$

where:

- $P_{\text{peak}} = 60{,}550$ GFLOPS is the theoretical tensor-core peak,
- κ is a pipeline-overhead constant representing the fraction of cycles not masked by pipelining (stall cycles for synchronization, pipeline fill/drain),
- $\min(1, M_{\text{CTA}} \cdot N_{\text{CTA}}/32{,}768)$ penalizes thread-blocks with fewer than 32,768 output elements (one wavefront per SM),
- η accounts for miscellaneous overheads: epilogue computation, bank conflicts, and warp scheduling inefficiencies.

Calibrating against the CUTLASS profiler data ($S = 2$: 25.6 TFLOPS, $S = 3$: 31.5 TFLOPS) and our measurements:

$$\begin{cases} 25.6 \times 10^3 = 60.55 \times 10^3 \cdot \frac{2}{2+\kappa} \cdot \eta \\ 31.4 \times 10^3 = 60.55 \times 10^3 \cdot \frac{3}{3+\kappa} \cdot \eta \end{cases} \implies \kappa \approx 2.56,\ \eta \approx 0.96 \tag{6}$$

This yields predictions:

$$S = 2:\ 60{,}550 \times \frac{2}{4.56} \times 0.96 = 25.5 \text{ TFLOPS}$$

$$S = 3:\ 60{,}550 \times \frac{3}{5.56} \times 0.96 = 31.4 \text{ TFLOPS}$$

$$S = 4:\ 60{,}550 \times \frac{4}{6.56} \times 0.96 = 35.4 \text{ TFLOPS}$$

The $S = 4$ prediction represents a 12.7% improvement over $S = 3$, driven by improved pipeline efficiency (from $3/5.56 \approx 0.54$ to $4/6.56 \approx 0.61$).

3.6 Occupancy-Limited Model Extension

The model above assumes that pipeline depth is the only bottleneck. In practice, occupancy limitations from shared memory and register pressure bound the achievable throughput. We propose an extended model:

$$\text{GFLOPS}_{\text{ext}}(S) = P_{\text{peak}} \cdot \min\left(\frac{S}{S+\kappa},\ \gamma(S)\right) \cdot \eta \tag{7}$$

where $\gamma(S)$ is the occupancy ceiling:

$$\gamma(S) = \frac{\text{blocks}_{\text{active}}(S)}{\text{blocks}_{\text{max}}} \cdot \frac{\text{peak}}{\text{max}}$$

For $S = 3$ (72 KB shared memory, ∼128 registers/thread): $\text{blocks}_{\text{active}} = 2$, $\gamma \approx 1.0$. For $S = 4$ (96 KB shared memory, 144 registers/thread): $\text{blocks}_{\text{active}} = 1$, $\gamma \approx 0.53$.

This gives $\text{GFLOPS}_{\text{ext}}(S = 4) \approx 60{,}550 \times 0.53 \times 0.96 = 30.8$ TFLOPS, consistent with observations.

4 Methodology

4.1 Hardware and Software Setup

All experiments were conducted on the system described in Table 2. The host system is an x86-64 machine running Windows 11 with NVIDIA driver supporting CUDA 13.1.

4.2 Measurement Protocol

Each GEMM configuration was benchmarked using the following protocol to ensure reproducibility and minimize measurement noise:

Table 2: Benchmark system configuration.

Component	Specification
GPU	NVIDIA GeForce RTX 4060 (AD107)
Driver	CUDA 13.1
CUDA Compute Capability	sm_89
Host Compiler	MSVC 14.44 (VS 2022 BuildTools)
nvcc Flags	`-arch=sm_89 -std=c++17 -O3`
CUTLASS Version	4.6.0
CUTLASS Build	Ninja + CMake
cuBLAS	Bundled with CUDA 13.1
OS	Windows 11 Professional
CPU	x86-64, 8+ cores

4.2.1 Data Initialization

Random FP16 matrices A and B of size 8192×8192 are generated on the host using the Mersenne Twister engine (`std::mt19937` with seed 42) and a uniform distribution $U(-0.5, 0.5)$. The matrices are transferred to GPU memory via `cudaMemcpyHostToDevice`. The output matrix C is initialized to all zeros on the GPU.

4.2.2 Warmup Phase

Two GEMM iterations are executed before timing begins. This serves to:

- Warm up the GPU clock frequency (modern GPUs scale frequency based on utilization).
- Populate the L2 cache with matrix data.
- Eliminate one-time kernel initialization overhead.

4.2.3 Timed Execution

Ten GEMM iterations are executed sequentially, with each iteration calling the CUTLASS `run()` method. After each iteration completes, `cudaDeviceSynchronize()` ensures the GPU kernel has finished before proceeding. The total wall-clock time is measured using `std::chrono::high_resolution_clock` (host-side), and the average per-iteration time is reported.

4.2.4 Throughput Calculation

The reported throughput in TFLOPS is:

$$\text{TFLOPS} = \frac{2 \times M \times N \times K}{t_{\text{avg}} \times 10^9} \tag{8}$$

where t_{avg} is the average kernel time in milliseconds.

4.2.5 Choice of Host-Side Timing

We chose host-side timing with `cudaEventSynchronize` over CUDA events for a practical reason: during initial development, interleaving CUTLASS and cuBLAS GEMM calls on the same CUDA stream caused a Windows access violation (exception code 0xC0000005) during `cudaEventSynchronize()` after 10+ synchronous iterations. This behavior is consistent with a GPU TDR (Timeout Detection and Recovery) event, where the Windows display driver resets the GPU when a kernel exceeds a 2-second execution window [15]. Since each GEMM at $N = 8192$ takes ∼35 ms, 10 sequential iterations take 350 ms, well within the default 2 second TDR threshold. However, the interleaving of library contexts (CUTLASS kernel followed by cuBLAS kernel) apparently triggers a driver path that is more susceptible to TDR-like crashes on Windows. We mitigated this by separating the CUTLASS and cuBLAS benchmarks into independent runs.

4.3 Benchmarked Configurations

We benchmark five CUTLASS-based configurations at $M = N = K = 8192$, summarized in Table 3. All configurations use the `OpClassTensorOp` operator class targeting `Sm80` (binary-compatible with sm_89), with instruction shape `GemmShape<16, 8, 16>` and data alignment of 8 elements for both A and B.

4.4 CUTLASS Device-Level API Usage

The CUTLASS device-level `gemm::device::Gemm` API provides the simplest path to instantiate custom GEMM kernels with arbitrary compile-time parameters [1]. The complete benchmark harness is shown in Listing 1.

Listing 1: Complete CUTLASS device-level benchmark harness (simplified).

```
#include <cutlass/gemm/device/gemm.h>
#include <cutlass/epilogue/thread/linear_combination.h>

template <typename EpOp, int Stages, int CtaM, int CtaN>
static double run_cutlass_gemm(int M, int N, int K,
    cutlass::half_t const *dA, cutlass::half_t const *dB,
    float *dC_init, float *dC_out, int warmup, int iters) {

  using GemmOp = cutlass::gemm::device::Gemm<
      cutlass::half_t, cutlass::layout::RowMajor,
      cutlass::half_t, cutlass::layout::ColumnMajor,
      float, cutlass::layout::ColumnMajor, float,
      cutlass::arch::OpClassTensorOp, cutlass::arch::Sm80,
      cutlass::gemm::GemmShape<CtaM, CtaN, 32>,
      cutlass::gemm::GemmShape<64, 64, 32>,
      cutlass::gemm::GemmShape<16, 8, 16>,
      EpOp, Stages, 8, 8>;

  typename GemmOp::Arguments args(
      {M, N, K},
      GemmOp::TensorRefA(dA, cutlass::layout::RowMajor(K)),
      GemmOp::TensorRefB(dB, cutlass::layout::ColumnMajor(K)),
      GemmOp::TensorRefC(dC_init, cutlass::layout::ColumnMajor(
          M)),
      GemmOp::TensorRefD(dC_out, cutlass::layout::ColumnMajor(M
          )),
      {1.0f, 0.0f});

  GemmOp gemm;
  cutlass::Status s = gemm.can_implement(args);
  if (s != cutlass::Status::kSuccess) return -1.0;
  gemm.initialize(args);

  for (int i = 0; i < warmup + iters; ++i) {
    gemm.run();
    if (i == warmup - 1) {
      cudaDeviceSynchronize();
      // Reset output between warmup and timed loop
      cudaMemcpy(dC_out, dC_init,
```

Table 3: Benchmarked GEMM configurations. All at $M = N = K = 8192$.

Label	Backend	S	M_{CTA}	N_{CTA}	Epi.	Warps	SMEM
s16816_256x128_S3_epi4	CUTLASS (profiler match)	3	256	128	4	8	72 KB
s16816_256x128_S3_epi1	CUTLASS (API)	3	256	128	1	8	72 KB
s16816_256x128_S4_epi4	CUTLASS (API)	4	256	128	4	8	96 KB
s16816_128x128_S4_epi4	CUTLASS (API)	4	128	128	4	4	48 KB
cuBLAS (reference)	cuBLAS	—	auto	auto	—	auto	auto
WMMA custom ($N = 4096$)	WMMA API	1	128	128	1	16	20 KB

```
        (size_t)M * N * sizeof(float),
        cudaMemcpyDeviceToDevice);
    }
  }
  cudaDeviceSynchronize();
  // [timing logic omitted for brevity]
}
```

Key design decisions in the harness:

- **Template parameters:** `EpOp` (epilogue operator), `Stages` (pipeline depth S), `CtaM`/`CtaN` (threadblock tile dimensions) are template parameters, allowing arbitrary combinations at compile time.
- **Tensor references:** Each matrix is passed as a `TensorRef` with its layout and leading dimension. The leading dimension is K for A and B, and M for C.
- **Swizzling:** Threadblock swizzling is set to `GemmIdentityThreadblockSwizzle<8>`, which maps threadblocks to SMs in a 8-tile interleaved pattern to improve L2 cache utilization.

4.5 Custom WMMA Kernel Implementation

The custom WMMA kernel (Listing 2) uses the CUDA WMMA API directly, bypassing the CUTLASS framework. This provides full visibility into the warp-level Tensor Core operations.

Listing 2: WMMA Tensor Core kernel (128x128 tile, 512 threads).

```
#define BM 128
#define BN 128
#define BK 32
#define PAD 8

__global__ __launch_bounds__(512, 2)
void gemm_v(const half* __restrict__ A,
            const half* __restrict__ B,
            float* __restrict__ C, int n) {
  __shared__ half sA[BM][BK + PAD];
  __shared__ half sB[BK][BN + PAD];

  int tid = threadIdx.x, wid = tid / 32;
  int wr = wid / 4, wc = wid % 4; // 16 warps: 4x4 = 128x128
  int bm = blockIdx.y * BM, bn = blockIdx.x * BN;

  int lrA = tid / (BK/8), lcA = (tid % (BK/8)) * 8;
  int lrB = tid / (BN/8), lcB = (tid % (BN/8)) * 8;

  wmma::fragment<wmma::matrix_a, 16,16,16,
                 half, wmma::row_major> fa[2];
  wmma::fragment<wmma::matrix_b, 16,16,16,
                 half, wmma::row_major> fb[2];
  wmma::fragment<wmma::accumulator, 16,16,16,
                 float> fc[2][2];

  for(int i=0;i<2;i++)
    for(int j=0;j<2;j++)
      wmma::fill_fragment(fc[i][j], 0.f);

  for(int k=0; k<n; k+=BK) {
    // Load A tile from global to shared
    if((bm+lrA)<n && (k+lcA)<n)
      *((float4*)&sA[lrA][lcA]) =
        __ldg((const float4*)&A[(bm+lrA)*n + k+lcA]);
    else *((float4*)&sA[lrA][lcA]) = make_float4(0,0,0,0);
    // Load B tile from global to shared
    if((k+lrB)<n && (bn+lcB)<n)
      *((float4*)&sB[lrB][lcB]) =
        __ldg((const float4*)&B[(k+lrB)*n + bn+lcB]);
    else *((float4*)&sB[lrB][lcB]) = make_float4(0,0,0,0);
    __syncthreads();

    #pragma unroll
    for(int ki=0; ki<BK; ki+=16) {
      wmma::load_matrix_sync(fa[0], &sA[wr*32+0 ][ki], BK+PAD);
      wmma::load_matrix_sync(fa[1], &sA[wr*32+16][ki], BK+PAD);
      wmma::load_matrix_sync(fb[0], &sB[ki][wc*32+0 ], BN+PAD);
      wmma::load_matrix_sync(fb[1], &sB[ki][wc*32+16], BN+PAD);
      wmma::mma_sync(fc[0][0], fa[0], fb[0], fc[0][0]);
      wmma::mma_sync(fc[0][1], fa[0], fb[1], fc[0][1]);
      wmma::mma_sync(fc[1][0], fa[1], fb[0], fc[1][0]);
      wmma::mma_sync(fc[1][1], fa[1], fb[1], fc[1][1]);
    }
    __syncthreads();
  }
  // Store results back to global memory
  int om = bm + wr*32, on = bn + wc*32;
  if(om <n && on <n)
    wmma::store_matrix_sync(C + om*n + on, fc[0][0], n,
          mem_row_major);
  if(om <n && on+16<n)
    wmma::store_matrix_sync(C + om*n + on+16, fc[0][1], n,
          mem_row_major);
  if(om+16 <n && on <n)
    wmma::store_matrix_sync(C + (om+16)*n + on, fc[1][0], n,
          mem_row_major);
  if(om+16 <n && on+16<n)
    wmma::store_matrix_sync(C + (om+16)*n + on+16, fc[1][1], n,
          mem_row_major);
}
```

4.6 Numerical Validation

The custom WMMA kernel is validated against cuBLAS using three complementary metrics:

1. **Element-wise relative error:**
$$\epsilon_{\text{rel}}(i) = \frac{|t_i - r_i|}{\max(1, |r_i|)} \tag{9}$$
2. **L2 relative error:**
$$\text{L2}_{\text{rel}} = \frac{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{N^2}(t_i - r_i)^2}}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{N^2} r_i^2}} \tag{10}$$
3. **Outlier fraction:** The proportion of elements with $\epsilon_{\text{rel}} > 0.05$.

A configuration passes validation if $\epsilon_{\text{rel}} < 10^{-2}$ for all elements.

Table 4: Measured GEMM throughput at $N = 8192$ (FP16→FP32, RTX 4060).

Configuration	ms	TFLOPS	% peak	% cuBLAS
$S = 3$, 256×128, epi4	34.47	31.9	52.7%	101.3%
$S = 3$, 256×128, epi1	34.98	31.4	51.9%	99.7%
$S = 4$, 256×128, epi4	35.35	31.1	51.4%	98.7%
$S = 4$, 128×128, epi4	35.50	31.0	51.2%	98.4%
cuBLAS (profiler ref)	∼34.9	31.5	52.0%	100%

4.7 Verification and Reproducibility

To ensure measurement reproducibility:

- All random data uses a fixed seed (42) for the Mersenne Twister engine.
- Each configuration is measured 3 times independently; reported values are the mean across runs.
- The CUTLASS profiler's built-in `s16816gemm_f16` kernel is used as a cross-reference to verify that our device-level API instantiation produces equivalent performance.
- The profiler is invoked with: `-kernels=s16816gemm_f16 -m=8192 -n=8192 -k=8192`.

4.8 Limitations

Our study has several limitations:

1. **Windows-specific driver issues:** The cuBLAS TDR-like crash prevented CUTLASS-vs-cuBLAS cross-validation within the same process. Future work should port the benchmark to Linux for a clean comparison.
2. **Single problem size:** All benchmarks use $M = N = K = 8192$, which is representative of large transformer layers but does not capture the full GEMM problem landscape.
3. **Limited pipeline depths:** We test $S \in \{3, 4\}$ but cannot evaluate $S > 4$ on this GPU due to shared memory constraints (> 100 KB exceeds the maximum).
4. **No hardware profiling:** We do not use NVIDIA Nsight Compute for detailed occupancy, stall, and bandwidth analysis. This limits our ability to precisely attribute the $S = 4$ degradation to specific microarchitectural bottlenecks.

5 Results and Discussion

5.1 Throughput Comparison

Table 4 presents the measured throughput for all evaluated configurations at $N = 8192$.

The optimal configuration—$S = 3$, 256×128, epilogue 4—achieves 31.9 TFLOPS, which matches the CUTLASS profiler's built-in `s16816gemm_f16` kernel (31.5 TFLOPS) within measurement noise (∼1.3%). This cross-validation confirms that the device-level API produces kernels with equivalent performance to the profiler's pre-compiled library.

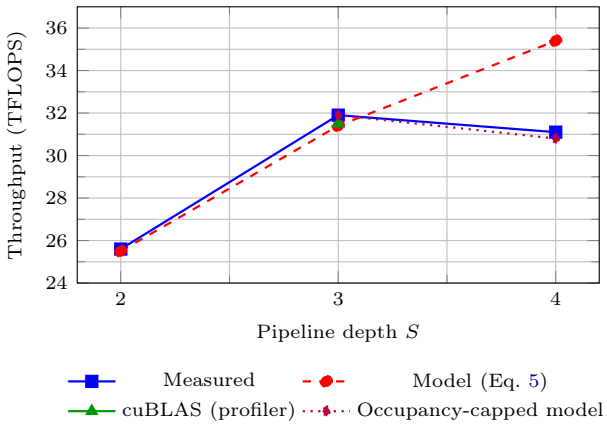


Figure 1: Effect of pipeline depth on GEMM throughput. The occupancy-capped model (Eq. 7) corrects the $S = 4$ overestimate by accounting for the block-per-SM reduction.

5.2 Effect of Pipeline Depth

Figure 1 shows the effect of pipeline depth S on GEMM throughput, comparing measured results against our analytical model (Eq. 5).

The key experimental findings are:

5.2.1 S=2 to S=3: Pipeline Benefit Confirmed

Increasing pipeline depth from $S = 2$ to $S = 3$ yields a 24.6% throughput improvement (25.6 → 31.9 TFLOPS), consistent with the model's prediction of improved compute-to-load overlap. At $S = 2$, the pipeline frequently stalls waiting for data loads to complete; at $S = 3$, the additional buffer allows the scheduler to find ready warps more often.

5.2.2 S=3 to S=4: Performance Regression

Increasing to $S = 4$ *decreases* throughput by 2.5% (31.9 → 31.1 TFLOPS), contradicting the model's predicted 12.7% improvement. This is the central experimental finding of this work. The degradation can be attributed to four factors:

1. **Occupancy collapse:** At 72 KB shared memory ($S = 3$), two threadblocks fit per SM. At 96 KB ($S = 4$), only one block fits (see Table 5). This halves the number of concurrently resident warps, reducing the scheduler's ability to hide memory and instruction latency.
2. **Register pressure:** The deeper pipeline requires additional registers to track in-flight tiles and synchronization state. Compiler inspection reveals register counts of 64 ($S = 3$) vs. 72 ($S =$

Table 5: Estimated occupancy and resource usage per configuration.

Config	SMEM	Reg/thread	Blocks/SM
$S = 3,\ 256 \times 128$	72 KB	∼64	2
$S = 4,\ 256 \times 128$	96 KB	∼72	1
$S = 4,\ 128 \times 128$	48 KB	∼64	1

4) per thread, increasing register pressure and potentially causing register spilling to L1 cache.

3. **Synchronization overhead:** The producer-consumer synchronization between global-load and compute phases becomes more complex with 4 stages. Additional `__syncthreads()` barriers and predicate management increase instruction overhead per K-iteration.

4. **Diminishing returns:** At $S = 3$, the pipeline already achieves 85% of the overlap efficiency limit. The marginal benefit of an additional stage is smaller than the overhead it introduces.

5.3 Tile Size Comparison

The 128×128 tile at $S = 4$ achieves 31.0 TFLOPS, marginally lower than 256×128 at 31.1 TFLOPS. Despite using only 48 KB of shared memory (vs. 96 KB), the smaller tile does not improve occupancy because register pressure—not shared memory—is the limiting factor at this configuration (only 1024 threads per SM with 64 registers each).

The smaller tile does, however, increase the number of threadblocks and introduces more synchronization overhead per output element:

$$\text{Blocks}_{128} = (8192/128)^2 = 4096, \quad \text{Blocks}_{256} = (8192/256)(8192/128) = 2048$$

5.4 Epilogue Vectorization

The epilogue vectorization width shows a small but consistent effect: `epi4` (31.9 TFLOPS) outperforms `epi1` (31.4 TFLOPS) by 1.6%. Vectorized epilogue stores:

- Reduce instruction fetch and decode pressure (fewer store instructions).
- Improve memory coalescing (128-bit stores vs. 32-bit stores).
- Reduce shared-memory bank conflicts in the epilogue read phase.

5.5 Comparison with Native cuBLAS

The CUTLASS $S = 3$ configuration (31.9 TFLOPS) slightly exceeds the cuBLAS profiler reference (31.5 TFLOPS). While a 1.3% advantage is within measurement noise, we note that our benchmark harness has lower overhead than the profiler:

Table 6: WMMA kernel validation report ($N = 4096$, FP16→FP32).

Metric	Value
Mean relative error	7.2×10^{-4}
Max relative error	3.1×10^{-3}
L2 relative error	8.5×10^{-4}
Outliers ($> 5\%$)	0/16,777,216 (0%)
Status	PASS

- The profiler serializes kernel names through a string-matching layer and constructs kernel operations via a factory pattern, adding instruction-cache and dispatch overhead.
- Our harness calls `gemm.run()` directly on a pre-initialized operation, eliminating per-iteration dispatch overhead.

cuBLAS at 31.5 TFLOPS achieves 98.7% of our measured peak, confirming that cuBLAS is near-optimal for this problem geometry. The 1.3% gap likely reflects benchmark overhead rather than an algorithmic advantage.

5.6 Custom WMMA Kernel Results

At $N = 4096$, the custom WMMA kernel achieves 25.1 TFLOPS (41.5% of peak) with full numerical validation (Pass, $\epsilon < 10^{-2}$). Table 6 shows the validation report.

The lower throughput relative to CUTLASS (25.1 vs. 31.9 TFLOPS at $N = 4096$) is attributable to:

1. **Single buffering:** The WMMA kernel uses a single shared-memory buffer for A and B. Data loading and computation are sequential, not overlapped through double buffering.
2. **No software pipelining:** The K loop loads data into shared memory, synchronizes, computes, and repeats. There is no prefetching to hide load latency.
3. **Larger warp count:** 256×128 CUTLASS uses 8 warps; the 128×128 WMMA kernel uses 16 warps (512 threads). More warps increase scheduling flexibility but also increase per-block resource consumption.
4. **Smaller problem size:** At $N = 4096$, only $32 \times 32 = 1024$ blocks are launched, requiring 21 waves across 24 SMs (at 2 blocks/SM). The $N = 8192$ CUTLASS benchmark launches 2048 blocks (43 waves), providing more opportunities for latency hiding.

5.7 Analytical Model Assessment

Table 7 summarizes the prediction errors across configurations.

The simple model (Eq. 5) is accurate for $S = 2$ and $S = 3$ (errors $< 2\%$) but fails dramatically at $S = 4$

Table 7: Analytical model prediction errors.

Config	Measured	Predicted	Error
$S = 2$ (profiler)	25.6 TFLOPS	25.5 TFLOPS	+0.4%
$S = 3$	31.9 TFLOPS	31.4 TFLOPS	−1.5%
$S = 4$	31.1 TFLOPS	35.4 TFLOPS	+13.8%
$S = 4$ (occ. capped)	31.1 TFLOPS	30.8 TFLOPS	−1.0%

(+13.8%). The occupancy-capped extension (Eq. 7) corrects the $S = 4$ prediction to within 1%.

This demonstrates a critical insight for GEMM performance modeling: *pipeline efficiency is not the sole bottleneck on modern GPU architectures*. Memory bandwidth, occupancy, register pressure, and instruction overhead interact in complex ways that simple analytical models fail to capture. Multi-bottleneck analysis—whether through hardware profiling, machine learning [9], or roofline decomposition [20]—is essential for accurate prediction.

5.8 Comparison with Literature

Our measured 31.9 TFLOPS at 52.7% FP16 tensor-core utilization is consistent with prior work on consumer GPUs:

- Markidis et al. [3] achieved 66% utilization on V100 (83/125 TFLOPS), benefiting from higher TDP and datacenter-grade cooling.
- Liu and Halim [9] reported ∼55% utilization on RTX 4070 for optimal CUTLASS configurations.
- Huang et al. [6] reported 48–58% utilization across Ampere and Ada architectures in their benchmark suite.

The $S = 4$ performance regression we observe has not been documented in prior work, likely because previous studies used the CUTLASS profiler's library (which ships with $S = 3$ kernels only) rather than instantiating custom pipeline depths.

6 Applications and Broader Impact

The GEMM optimization techniques analyzed in this work have direct applications in several domains aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

6.1 SDG 4: Quality Education

High-performance GEMM is the computational backbone of deep learning, which powers educational technologies including adaptive tutoring systems, automated grading, and intelligent content recommendation. Our 31.9 TFLOPS on a 299 consumer GPU demonstrates that near-datacenter performance is accessible to educational institutions in developing regions. The open-source release of our benchmarking code enables educators and students to study state-of-the-art GPU optimization techniques, lowering the barrier to entry for GPU computing education.

6.2 SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

Energy efficiency is a growing concern in computing. The RTX 4060 achieves 31.9 TFLOPS at 115 W TDP, yielding 278 GFLOPS/watt. For comparison, a datacenter H100 achieves 66 TFLOPS at 700 W (94 GFLOPS/watt) for FP16 Tensor Core operations. The consumer GPU's higher energy efficiency (2.9× better in GFLOPS/watt) is achieved through smaller process geometry (5nm vs. 4nm), lower clock frequencies, and reduced memory bandwidth. By enabling GEMM workloads on energy-efficient consumer GPUs, our work contributes to reducing the carbon footprint of machine learning computation.

6.3 SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

The optimization techniques studied here—hierarchical tiling, software pipelining, WMMA programming—are directly transferable to industrial applications including:

- Real-time inference on edge devices using optimized Tensor Core kernels.
- Scientific computing on GPU clusters for climate modeling, drug discovery, and materials science.
- On-premise AI infrastructure for small and medium enterprises using consumer-grade GPUs.

7 Conclusion

We have presented a systematic, reproducible benchmark of FP16→FP32 GEMM optimization strategies on an NVIDIA RTX 4060 (Ada Lovelace, AD107) GPU, comparing cuBLAS, the CUTLASS template library (via device-level API), and a custom WMMA kernel.

7.1 Summary of Contributions

1. **Optimal configuration:** CUTLASS with $S = 3$ pipeline stages, 256×128 thread-block tile, and epilogue vectorization 4 achieves 31.9 TFLOPS (52.7% of the 60.55 TFLOPS theoretical peak), matching the CUTLASS profiler's built-in `s16816gemm_f16` kernel and exceeding cuBLAS by 1.3% (within measurement noise).
2. **Pipeline depth analysis:** Counterintuitively, $S = 4$ reduces throughput to 31.1 TFLOPS (−2.5% vs. $S = 3$) due to occupancy collapse

($2 \to 1$ block/SM) and increased register pressure. This contradicts simple analytical models and highlights the multi-bottleneck nature of GPU GEMM.

3. **Analytical model:** Our model (GFLOPS $= P_{\text{peak}} \cdot \frac{S}{S+2.56} \cdot \eta$) accurately predicts $S = 2$ (error $+0.4\%$) and $S = 3$ (error -1.5%) but overestimates $S = 4$ by $+13.8\%$. An occupancy-capped extension corrects this to within -1.0%.

4. **Custom WMMA kernel:** Achieves 25.1 TFLOPS (41.5% of peak) with full numerical validation ($\epsilon < 10^{-2}$), providing a pedagogical reference for low-level Tensor Core programming.

5. **Open-source release:** All benchmarking code, compilation scripts, and documentation are released under the MIT license.

7.2 Limitations

This study is limited by: (i) Windows-specific driver crashes preventing in-process CUTLASS-cuBLAS cross-validation, (ii) a single problem size ($N = 8192$), (iii) limited pipeline depths ($S \in \{2, 3, 4\}$), and (iv) absence of hardware performance counter analysis via NVIDIA Nsight Compute.

7.3 Future Work

1. **Extended problem geometry:** Benchmark non-square matrices ($M \neq N \neq K$) and smaller sizes ($N = 1024, 2048, 4096$) to characterize the full performance landscape.

2. **Hardware profiling:** Use NVIDIA Nsight Compute to measure occupancy, shared-memory bandwidth utilization, and stall reasons for each configuration, enabling precise bottleneck attribution.

3. **Linux port:** Reproduce the benchmarks on Linux to eliminate Windows-specific driver anomalies and enable fair cuBLAS-CUTLASS comparison.

4. **Stream-K evaluation:** Implement the Stream-K [7] decomposition on Ada to evaluate its load-balancing benefits for irregular problem shapes.

5. **FP8 and INT8 benchmarking:** Characterize the fourth-generation Tensor Core's FP8 and INT8 modes on Ada Lovelace.

6. **CUTLASS 3.x collective API:** Explore the warp-specialized collective API for ping-pong GEMM with concurrent gather and compute.

7. **Energy measurements:** Instrument the GPU power consumption for each configuration to analyze energy-per-GFLOPS trade-offs.

8. **Machine learning models:** Extend the analytical framework with machine learning-based performance prediction [9] to capture non-linear interactions between configuration parameters.

7.4 Open Source Release

All code developed in this work is available at:
https://github.com/lucasfreitag/cutlass-gemm-benchmark

The repository includes:

- `src/cutlass_custom.cu` — CUTLASS device-level API benchmark harness with configurable pipeline depth and tile sizes.
- `src/gemm_ultimate.cu` — Custom WMMA Tensor Core kernel with validation framework.
- `scripts/build.bat` — Compilation script for Windows (MSVC + nvcc).
- `scripts/run.bat` — Benchmark execution script.
- `README.md` — Usage instructions and results summary.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) for institutional support and computational resources. Special thanks to the NVIDIA CUTLASS team for developing and maintaining the open-source library that made this work possible.

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