# Design and Implementation of a 32-bit Single-Cycle RISC-V Processor

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Abstract—This project presents the design and implementation of a 32-bit single-cycle RISC-V processor, compliant with the RV32I instruction set architecture. The processor executes each instruction in a single clock cycle, ensuring minimal control complexity and predictable performance. The design includes key components such as the ALU, register file, immediate generator, instruction and data memory units, and a control unit orchestrating datapath operation. Verilog HDL is used for modeling, and implementation is carried out on the Digilent BASYS3 FPGA board featuring the Xilinx Artix-7 (XC7A35T-CPG236C) chip. The processor implements a sub set of total RISC-V processor. Functional correctness is validated through simulation and onchip testing(Xilinix Design Suite) using custom programs written in C, compiled with the RISC-V GCC toolchain, and converted into memory initialization files. The implementation showcases the practical feasibility of a simple yet functional processor core for educational and embedded applications.

Index Terms—RISC-V,Cache,ALU,CPU

## I. INTRODUCTION

The RISC-V architecture has emerged as a revolutionary open-source instruction set architecture (ISA), offering a compelling alternative to proprietary ISAs like ARM, x86, or MIPS. Designed at the University of California, Berkeley, RISC-V is grounded in the principles of simplicity, modularity, and extensibility. Its open and license-free nature has accelerated adoption across both academic research and industrial product development. As described by Patterson and Waterman (2017), RISC-V is suitable not only for teaching but also for real-world implementations ranging from microcontrollers to high-performance processors [1].

In the context of computer architecture education and early-stage system design, **single-cycle processor architectures** play a pivotal role. In such designs, each instruction is completed in a single clock cycle, simplifying timing and control logic. While this simplicity limits achievable clock frequency, it offers an ideal platform for learning, functional validation, and performance profiling. Harris and Harris (2015) emphasize that single-cycle designs help students grasp the entire instruction execution process without the complexity of pipelining or hazard resolution [2].

This project focuses on the design and implementation of a **32-bit single-cycle RISC-V processor** that supports a subset

of the RV32I instruction set. The instruction set includes basic arithmetic, logical, load/store, branch, and LUI instructions. However, instructions such as JALR, AUIPC, and system-level instructions like ECALL are deliberately excluded to simplify the control path and datapath design.

To enhance performance without adding significant architectural complexity, this processor integrates a direct-mapped instruction cache. As noted in classic architectural texts by Hennessy and Patterson (2017), cache memories are essential for mitigating latency issues inherent in memory access. A **direct-mapped cache**—the simplest cache organization—assigns each memory block to exactly one cache line, enabling fast lookup and reduced hardware overhead [4]. The implemented instruction cache uses a **4-word block size** to improve spatial locality during instruction fetches.

Previous research and open-source hardware projects serve as important benchmarks. The PicoRV32 core is an example of a compact, resource-efficient RISC-V core with flexible configurability, though it typically adopts multi-cycle or finite-state execution strategies. The VScale processor, developed by UC Berkeley, provides a single-cycle implementation but includes **broader instruction support**. These efforts demonstrate the feasibility of implementing RISC-V processors on resource-constrained platforms like FPGAs.

Further, Lopes et al. (2020) present a single-cycle RISC-V processor tailored for educational use and implemented on an FPGA. Their work emphasizes the trade-offs between **clock frequency**, **area usage**, and instruction support in minimalist RISC-V designs [5]. This project builds upon such insights, emphasizing **FPGA efficiency** and **architectural clarity** while adding cache support—an often-overlooked yet vital component for practical performance in real-time applications.

The processor is modeled using *Verilog HDL* and implemented on a Digilent BASYS3 FPGA development board, which houses the Xilinx Artix-7 XC7A35T-CPG236C. Programs written in C are compiled using the **RISC-V GCC toolchain**, translated into binary, and stored in instruction memory for execution. Simulation and on-board validation verify functionality, performance, and instruction compliance.

Overall, this work demonstrates the feasibility and advantages of a cache-enabled **single-cycle RISC-V processor** tailored for both educational and embedded system applications.

It serves as a foundational platform for future enhancements such as pipelining, branch prediction, forwarding logic, and multi-level cache hierarchies.

#### II. MOTIVATION

The driving need to create and deploy a **32-bit single-cycle** RISC-V processor is derived from the increasing demand for open-source, customizable, and pedagogically friendly processor architectures. RISC-V is unique because it has a modular architecture and open licensing, meaning developers and researchers are free to experiment and implement processor cores without either legal entanglements or financial considerations. This openness renders it extremely appropriate in academic settings, embedded systems, and researchoriented development. A **one-cycle design**, while constraining in performance, is a great learning base because it makes the process of executing instruction and the logic of control easier, which makes the inner working of a CPU more understandable to students and programmers alike. Adding a directmapped instruction cache in the processor design helps close this learning gap between theoretical education and actual performance, bringing in ideas of memory hierarchy without increasing the level of complexity. In addition, the utilization of FPGA platforms such as the BASYS3 facilitates learning by doing and quick prototyping, promoting greater insight into digital systems and hardware-software co-design. In total, this project is a learning aid as well as a stepping stone toward future processor architectures.

# III. BACKGROUND STUDY

Processor architecture has seen considerable development, with milestones in the evolution of RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computing) and CISC (Complex Instruction Set Computing) systems. RISC architectures such as RISC-V, emphasize simplifying the instruction set to enable faster execution and pipelining in more complicated designs. This simplicity is in contrast to the more complex CISC designs, employing a wider instruction set, yet at times being more flexible but more difficult to optimize for performance. RISC-V, as an open-standard and extensible architecture, has been found to be broadly used in both academia and industry. Its design encourages ease of implementation, with a modular instruction set that facilitates customization depending on the particular application needs.

In processor design, the performance of a system relies significantly on how well it can access and process instructions and data. A single-cycle processor processes all phases of instruction processing, including fetch, decode, execute, access to memory and write-back, within a single clock cycle. This kind of design makes the control logic simpler and easier to verify, although it places constraints on the clock speed and performance efficiency that can be achieved. Although more sophisticated processor architectures tend to implement multi-cycle or pipelined designs, single-cycle processors allow a basic grasp of CPU operation fundamentals.

To enhance instruction-fetching efficiency, **instruction** caches are widely used in contemporary processors. Instructions most often accessed are cached near the processor to reduce the time required to fetch instructions from main memory by a large factor. **Direct-mapped cache** is one of the easiest forms of cache, whereby every block of memory directly corresponds to a unique cache line. This technique is easy to implement while still ensuring significant performance boosts over non-cache systems, particularly in terms of access time and performance.

Over the past few years, FPGAs (Field Programmable Gate Arrays) have gained increased popularity as a platform to implement processor cores, especially for educational and prototyping reasons. FPGAs enable dynamic hardware designs that can be adjusted and tuned in real time, allowing designers to rapidly test and experiment with different processor configurations. FPGA-based systems in processor design offer a low-cost, highly programmable environment to learn the complexity of CPU architectures and conduct hardware-software co-design.

The embedding of **RISC-V processors** in FPGA platforms enables students, engineers, and researchers to investigate processor design, try out various memory systems, and analyze the complexity-performance-resource trade-offs. This background provides the context for the design and implementation of a **32-bit single-cycle RISC-V processor** with on-chip instruction cache with the goal of achieving both educational simplicity and realistic performance.

## IV. DESIGN SPACE EXPLORATION

Design space exploration (DSE) is an essential step in the development of any hardware system, but especially for processor architectures. DSE entails exploring systematically various design alternatives and trading off among performance, resource consumption, power dissipation, and other factors to arrive at the best possible design solution. In the case of a 32-bit single-cycle RISC-V processor, DSE assists in deciding the optimal configuration of the processor's datapath, control unit, memory system, and other critical components. This facilitates the designer to realize the effect of different architectural choices and to select the most appropriate according to the objectives of the project.

# A. Instruction Set Architecture(ISA)

The first step in the design space exploration for a RISC-V processor involves determining the subset of the RISC-V ISA to implement. The RISC-V instruction set is modular, with different base and optional extensions. In this project, the base RV32I instruction set has been chosen, which includes 32-bit instructions for integer arithmetic, logical operations, and control flow. A careful selection of the instruction set is critical to ensure that the processor meets the performance and resource requirements while maintaining simplicity for educational purposes. Excluding certain instructions such as JALR (Jump and Link Register) and AUIPC (Add Upper Immediate to PC) reduces complexity and streamlines the

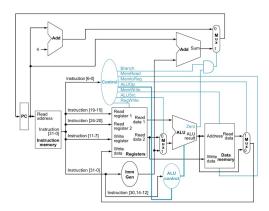


Fig. 1: Block Diagram

implementation of the processor, allowing for easier debugging and performance evaluation.

## B. Data-Path Design

The 32-bit single-cycle RISC-V processor follows a simplified datapath design, where each instruction is executed in a single clock cycle. This design integrates several core components, including the Program Counter (PC), Instruction Memory, Register File, Arithmetic Logic Unit (ALU), Immediate Generator, and Data Memory.

Key Components of the Datapath:

- 1) **Program Counter (PC)**: The PC holds the address of the next instruction to be fetched from the instruction memory.
- 2) *Instruction Memory*: This memory module stores the instructions to be executed. Register File: The processor includes a register file with **32 registers** (**x0 to x31**).
- 3) Arithmetic Logic Unit(ALU): The ALU performs arithmetic and logical operations such as addition, subtraction, AND, OR, and comparisons.
- 4) Immediate Value generator: For I-type and S-type instructions, the immediate generator extracts the immediate values from the instruction and extends them to 32 bits.
- 5) **Data Memory**: The processor includes a data memory module for load and store operations.

Single-Cycle Datapath Execution In this design, all operations—fetching, decoding, execution, memory access, and write-back are completed in one clock cycle. Although this simplifies control, it means that the critical path must be optimized.

#### C. Control Unit

This diagram[1] is a **RISC-V Instruction Table** with Control Signals. It's used to guide the implementation of a RISC-V processor, especially the control unit and ALU control logic.

- Instruction type (R, I, S, B, U, UJ)
- Opcode, funct3, funct7 fields (used in instruction decoding)
- The operation name (e.g., add, sub, and)

Type	Mnemonic	Opcode	funct3	funct7	Operation	RegWrite	ALUSrc	MemRead	MemWrite	MemtoReg	Branch	ALUOp	ALU Ctrl
R-type	add	0110011	000	0000000	Add	1	0	0	0	00	- 0	10	ADD
R-type	sub	0110011	000	0100000	Sub	1	0	0	0	00	-0	10	SUB
R-type	and	0110011	111	0000000	Bitwise AND	1	0	0	0	00	0	10	AND
R-type	or	0110011	110	0000000	Bitwise OR	1	0	0	0	00	-0	10	OR
R-type	3000	0110011	100	0000000	Bitwise XOR	1	0	0	0	00	0	10	XOR
R-type	sII	0110011	001	0000000	Shift Left Logical	1	0	0	0	00	0	10	SLL
R-type	srl	0110011	101	0000000	Shift Right Logical	1	0	0	0	00	0	10	SRL
R-type	878	0110011	101	0100000	Shift Right Arithmetic	1	0	0	0	00	-0	10	SRA
R-type	slt	0110011	010	0000000	Set Less Than	1	0	0	0	00	0	10	SLT
R-type	sltu	0110011	011	0000000	Set Less Than Unsigned	1	0	0	0	00	-0	10	SLTU
I-type	addi	0010011	000		Add Immediate	1	1	0	0	00	0	11	ADD
I-type	andi	0010011	111		AND Immediate	1	1	0	0	00	0	11	AND
I-type	ori	0010011	110		OR Immediate	1	1	0	0	00	0	11	OR
I-type	xori	0010011	100		XOR Immediate	1	1	0	0	00	0	11	XOR
I-type	slli	0010011	001	0000000	Shift Left Logical Imm	1	1	0	0	00	-0	11	SLL
I-type	srli	0010011	101	0000000	Shift Right Logical Imm	1	1	0	0	00	0	11	SRL
I-type	srai	0010011	101	0100000	Shift Right Arithmetic Imm	1	1	0	0	00	-0	11	SRA
I-type	slti	0010011	010		Set Less Than Imm	1	1	0	0	00	0	11	SLT
I-type	sltiu	0010011	011		Set Less Than Imm Unsigned	1	1	0	0	00	-0	11	SLTU
I-type	lw	0000011	010		Load Word	1	1	1	0	01	0	00	ADD
I-type	lh .	0000011	001		Load Halfword	1	1	1	0	01	-0	00	ADD
I-type	lhu	0000011	101		Load Halfword Unsigned	1	1	1	0	01	0	00	ADD
I-type	lb.	0000011	000		Load Byte	1	1	1	0	01	-0	00	ADD
I-type	Ibu	0000011	100		Load Byte Unsigned	1	1	1	0	01	0	00	ADD
S-type	SW	0100011	010	-	Store Word	0	1	0	1	00	- 0	.00	ADD
S-type	sh	0100011	001		Store Halfword	0	1	0	1	00	0	00	ADD
S-type	sb	0100011	000		Store Byte	0	1	0	1	00	-0	00	ADD
U-type	lui	0110111			Load Upper Imm	1	×	0	0	10	- 0	XX	XX
U-type	auipc	0010111			Add Upper Imm to PC	1	×	0	0	11	-0	XX	XX
B-type	beq	1100011	000	-	Branch if Equal	0	0	0	0	00	1	01	SUB
B-type	bne	1100011	001		Branch if Not Equal	0	0	0	0	00	1	01	SUB
B-type	blt	1100011	100		Branch if Less Than	0	0	0	0	00	1	01	SLT
B-type	bge	1100011	101		Branch if Greater/Eq	0	0	0	0	00	1	01	SLT
B-type	bltu	1100011	110		Branch if LT Unsigned	0	0	0	0	00	1	01	SLTU
B-type	bgeu	1100011	111		Branch if GE Unsigned	0	0	0	0	00	1	01	SLTU
UJ-type	jal	1101111			Jump and Link	1	x	×	x	x	1	X	x

Fig. 2: Control Unit

- Control signals needed to execute that instruction properly:
  - RegWrite: Write to register file
  - ALUSrc: Choose ALU second operand from register or immediate.
  - MemRead: Read from memory.
  - **MemWrite**: Write to memory.
  - MemtoReg: Choose data to write to register from ALU or memory.
  - Branch: Is it a branch instruction.
  - ALUOp: 2-bit code passed to ALU control unit.
  - ALU Ctrl: Final ALU operation selected

## D. Instruction Set

#### 1) R-type Instruction:

- Opcode: 0110011
- Uses both funct3 and funct7
- RegWrite = 1, ALUSrc = 0 (use both registers), no memory access

#### 2) I-type Instruction:

- Opcode varies depending on the instruction
- ALUSrc = 1 (immediate operand)
- MemRead = 1 for load instructions, MemtoReg = 01 to write from memory

# 3) **S-type Instruction**:

- Opcode: 0100011
- MemWrite = 1, RegWrite = 0
- ALUSrc = 1 (address = base + offset), MemRead = 0

## 4) **B-type Instruction**:

- Opcode: 1100011.
- Uses register comparisons.
- Branch = 1, RegWrite = 0, ALUOp = 01

## 5) U-type (upper immediate):

- Opcode: 0110111 for LUI, 0010111 for AUIPC
- LUI: load upper 20 bits; AUIPC: PC + immediate.
- AUIPC sets ALUOp = 00 (adds PC + immediate), LUI uses MemtoReg = 10.

## 6) **UJ-type**:

- Opcode: 1101111
- Writes PC + 4 to rd, jumps to PC + offset
- RegWrite = 1, uses PC logic, control signals: x or custom logic

## E. ALUOp and ALU Ctrl

- The ALUOp signal (from control unit) tells the ALU Control Unit what type of instruction this is.
- The ALU Ctrl is the final operation passed to the ALU:ADD, SUB, AND, OR, XOR, SLT, etc.Determined using funct3, funct7, and ALUOp.

#### F. Data Path Schematics

## 1) Program Counter:

- PC holds the address of the current instruction.
- It sends this address to the Instruction Memory.
- After fetching an instruction, the PC is updated (typically PC + 4 or to a branch/jump target).

### 2) Instruction Memory:

- Input: PC address. Output: The 32-bit instruction.
- The instruction is split into fields: [31-26] opcode, [25-21] rs, [20-16] rt, [15-11] rd,[15-0] immediate value (for I-type),[25-0] address (for J-type)

## 3) Control Unit:

- Takes the opcode Instruction[31:26] as input.
- Generates control signals.

## 4) Register File:

- Reads two registers: rs and rt.
- Outputs Read data 1 and Read data 2.
- These are sent to the ALU and/or Data Memory depending on the instruction.

## 5) Immediate Generator:

• Extends the 16-bit immediate value to 32 bits (Sign/Zero extension depending on instruction).

## 6) ALU and ALU Control:

- ALU Control takes ALUOp (from Control Unit) and funct (Instruction[5:0]) to decide the operation.
- ALU performs operations (add, sub, and, or, slt, etc.) between:
  - Read data 1
  - Either Read data 2 or the Immediate (depending on ALUSrc)

## 7) Data Memory:

- Address from ALU result.
- If MemRead is enabled, reads data from memory.
- If MemWrite is enabled, writes Read data 2 to memory.
- Output sent to Write Data MUX (MemtoReg).

# 8) Jump Logic:

- Upper 4 bits of PC+4
- 26-bit address from instruction shifted left by 2.

## 9) PC Update Logic:

- PC + 4 (default)
- Branch target (if Branch is taken)
- Jump target (if Jump)

## 10) Branch Logic:

- Checks the Zero output from ALU and Branch signal.
- If both are 1, enables branching.
- Target address is calculated by adding sign-extended offset (shifted left 2) to PC+4.

## V. DESIGN STRATEGIES

Loop Unrolling in a one-cycle RISC-V processor is achieved by expanding the loop body manually and decreasing the number of iterations. For instance, if a loop is used to process an array(bubble sort array), the loop body is repeated many times to process multiple elements within one iteration. This decreases the number of loop iterations and the branch instructions that go with them. To execute it, the assembly code for loading and storing array elements is replicated for several array elements within a single iteration of the loop. The loop counter is incremented correspondingly, advancing over several elements simultaneously (e.g., incrementing by 4 for unrolling by a factor of 4). The **register file of the processor** should be large enough to store the intermediate values of each unrolled iteration. Once unrolled, the number of iterations is less, and there are fewer branches, enhancing performance by reducing loop control overhead. But the increase in code size and register usage must be controlled carefully, lest too much unrolling would result in diminishing returns.

#### VI. INSTRUCTION CACHE DESIGN

#### 1. Parameters

Let the cache design parameters be:

- C: Total cache size in bytes
- B: Block size in bytes (number of bytes per cache block)
- $N = \frac{C}{B}$ : Number of cache lines (blocks)
- A: Address size in bits (e.g., 32 bits)
- $M = \frac{2^A}{B}$ : Number of blocks in memory

#### 2. Cache Address

Each memory address is divided into three fields in a directmapped cache:

Memory Address = 
$$\underbrace{\text{Tag}}_{A \text{ - Index - Offset}} \underbrace{\text{Index}}_{\log_2(N)} \underbrace{\text{Offset}}_{\log_2(R)}$$

- Offset: Identifies a byte within the block
- Index: Selects a cache line
- Tag: Used to verify if the correct block is stored

#### 3. Cache Access Process

On accessing an instruction at address X:

- 1) Extract the **Index** to select the cache line.
- Extract and compare the Tag with the stored tag at that line.
- 3) If they match and the valid bit is set  $\Rightarrow$  Cache Hit.
- 4) Else ⇒ **Cache Miss**, and the block is fetched from main memory.

### 4. Calculation

Assume the following:

- A = 32 bits (address size)
- C = 1024 bytes (cache size)
- B = 16 bytes (block size)

Then.

$$N = \frac{1024}{16} = 64 \quad \Rightarrow \quad \log_2(N) = 6 \text{ bits}$$
 
$$\log_2(B) = \log_2(16) = 4 \text{ bits}$$

Tag bits = 
$$32 - 6 - 4 = 22$$
 bits

So the 32-bit address is split as:

# 5. Hit/Miss Logic

- **Hit**: If Cache[Index].Tag == Address.Tag and Valid bit is set
- **Miss**: Otherwise, load the memory block into that cache line.

#### 6. Performance Metrics

Average Memory Access Time (AMAT) is given by:

$$AMAT = Hit Time + (Miss Rate \times Miss Penalty)$$

## 7. Design Rationale

Direct-mapped caches are ideal for instruction fetches due to:

- Simplicity in address mapping
- Fast access due to single comparison
- · Low hardware cost

## VII. TESTING

- Writing Fibonacci Series Algorithm in C
- Converting C code to RISC-V Assembly code.
- The assembly code was then converted into binary instructions and loaded into the instruction memory.

## A. TESTING DIRECT MEMORY CACHE

We are using Bubble Sort Algorithm to test the functionality of direct memory cache. The figure[2] shows the binary isntruction for testing direct memory cache.



Fig. 3: Binary instructions for Bubble Sort

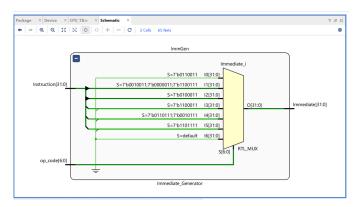


Fig. 4: Schematic for Immediate Value Generator

## VIII. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLANGES

- Supporting unaligned access (e.g., lh from an odd address) in a cache with word-aligned blocks was complex.
- RISC-V instructions come in different formats (R-type, I-type, S-type, B-type, U-type, J-type). Some caches fetch 32-bit blocks that might contain partial instructions or misaligned instructions.
- Instructions like lw may become multi-cycle if the cache misses, breaking assumptions in a single-cycle or simple pipelined processor.
- Instruction cache might prefetch ahead of the branch.
  If the branch is taken, these prefetched instructions are useless.

# IX. RESULTS

- Fig 4-13 shows the schematic for RISC-V processor.
- Fig 14-16 shows the timing analysis of Fibnoacci series algorithm.
- Fig 17 shows the timing analysis of bubble sort algorithm to understand use of direct memory cache
- Fig 18 shows the timing analysis for the RISC-V procrssor. The maximum frequncy attained is 37.037MHz.
- Fig 20 shows the resource utilization.
- Fig 19 shows the power analysis.
- Fig 21 shows the number of Luts Used.
- Energy per cycle

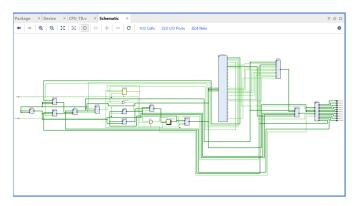


Fig. 5: Overall Schematic

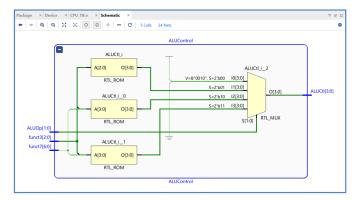


Fig. 6: Schematic for ALUControl



## Where:

- $P = 0.07 \,\mathrm{W}$  (measured or estimated power con-
- $T = \alpha = 100 \text{ ns} = 100 \times 10^{-9} \text{ s (clock period)}.$

# Substituting:

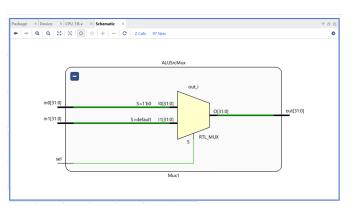


Fig. 7: Schematic for Branch

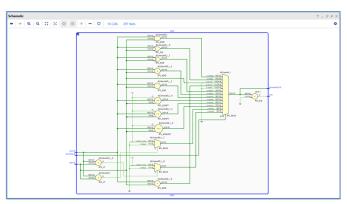


Fig. 8: Schematic for ALUSrc

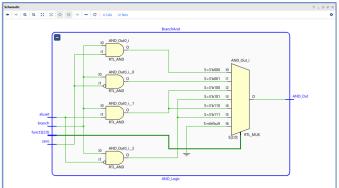


Fig. 9: Schematic for PC controlling MUX

# X. CONCLSUION

In this project, a 32-bit single-cycle RISC-V processor was successfully designed and implemented on the Digilent BASYS3 FPGA board. The processor supports a subset of RISC-V instructions, including arithmetic, logical, load/store, and branching operations. The processor was tested using a Fibonacci Series algorithm, which verified its functional correctness. The sorted array was stored in registers, and the pro- $E_{\rm cycle} = 0.07 \cdot (26.32 \times 10^{-9}) = 1.8424 \times 10^{-9} \, {\rm J} = 1.8424 \, {\rm nJ}$  cessor demonstrated stable performance during execution. The design process involved creating a complete datapath and

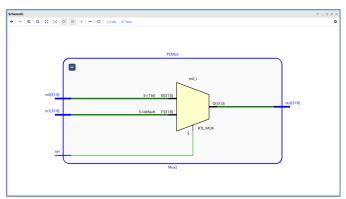


Fig. 10: Schematic for ALU

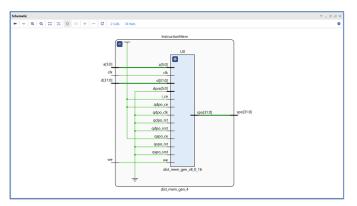


Fig. 11: Schematic for ImmedateMemory

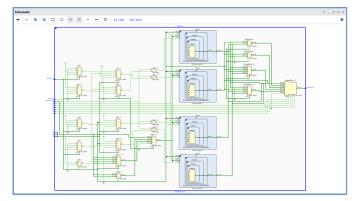


Fig. 12: Schematic for RISC-V processor

control unit, ensuring proper communication between various components such as the ALU, register file, and memory units. The FPGA implementation showed that the processor meets timing requirements with no violations at a 100 ns clock period, and resource utilization was kept within the available limits. Despite the processor's simplicity, it serves as a robust foundation for understanding single-cycle architectures. Future work could expand the instruction set to support more complex operations, such as multiplication and division, and optimize the design for better clock frequency performance. This project provides valuable insights into processor design and highlights

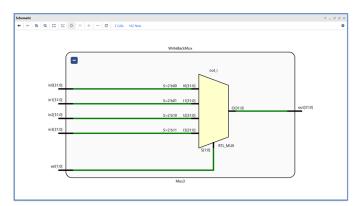


Fig. 13: Schematic for WriteBack multiplexer

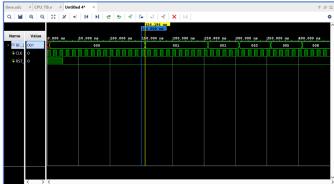


Fig. 14: Behaviour Simulation

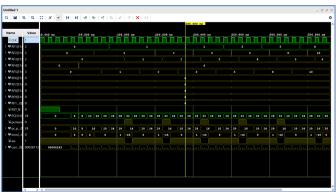


Fig. 15: Behaviour Simulation

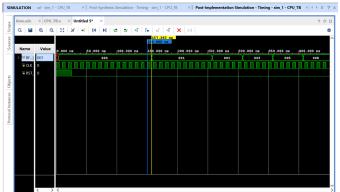


Fig. 16: Post Synthesis Simulation

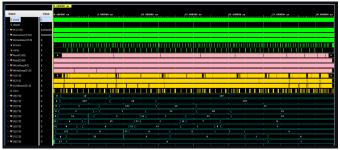


Fig. 17: Bubble Sort Algorithm

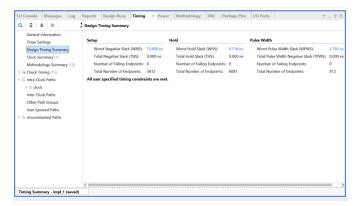


Fig. 18: Timing Analysis Fmax 37.93MHz

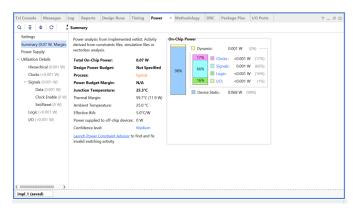


Fig. 19: Power Analysis

the importance of optimizing control signals and datapath elements for reliable execution on an FPGA platform.

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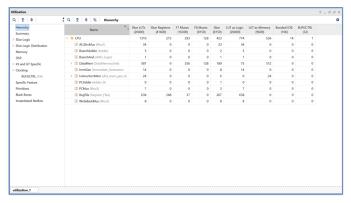


Fig. 20: Resource Utilization

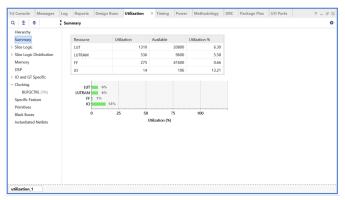


Fig. 21: LUT Used

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