**Comparative Analysis of Sort Algorithms: Implementing and Evaluating Sorting Techniques in Python**

Overview of Sorting Algorithms

Quicksort, a renowned sorting algorithm introduced by Tony Hoare in 1959, is acknowledged for its efficiency. The algorithm selects a 'pivot' element from the array and divides the other elements into two sub-arrays: those less than the pivot value and those greater than the pivot value. This process continues recursively until a sorted array is achieved. According to Zehra et al. (2020), in many practical cases, Quicksort demonstrates an average time complexity of O(n log n), making it a highly effective sorting algorithm. However, in its worst-case scenario, its time complexity can be O(n^2) if the pivot elements are poorly chosen.

Bubble sort is a simple sorting algorithm where each element is compared with the previous one and immediately swapped if they are in the wrong order. This process continues until the array is sorted from least to greatest value. While bubble sort works well for smaller datasets, it becomes inefficient for larger arrays due to its time complexity of O(n^2). According to Ahmad (2020), it is primarily utilised in educational settings and applications that handle smaller, more manageable datasets where performance is less critical.

Timsort is Python's implemented sorting algorithm derived from merge sort and insertion sort. It was designed to handle a wide range of real-world applications. Timsort utilises a technique of dividing the array into small sub-arrays and then applying insertion sort to each of them. Afterwards, the sorted sub-arrays are merged using a modified merge sort. According to Vierstraete and Braeckman (2022), this approach allows Timsort to maintain stable sorting performance over a long period without being affected by the worst-case time complexity of O(n2), achieving an average time complexity of O(n log n) and the best-case time complexity of O(n). This makes Timsort particularly advantageous for large data sets, establishing it as the most recommended sorting algorithm in Python for general use.

Quicksort Implementation in Python

The sorting technique is efficient and useful in everyday scenarios due to its minimal swap requirement. It involves selecting a midpoint element, sorting the array by placing smaller and larger elements in sets, and repeating this process until the entire array is sorted.

A computer screen shot of a program code

Description automatically generated

Quicksort implementation in Pidata

The code splits integers into two arrays for black (pidataB) and white (pidataW) values, writes them to a new file, reads them back, and sorts them using the quicksort algorithm. The output file starts with the specified name and student number, with the name randomly placed in a specific format.

Python’s Built-in Sort

A screen shot of a computer program

Description automatically generated Python's built-in sort function, sorted(), utilises Timsort, a merge and insertion sort. Timsort is designed for practical use in real data handling scenarios, using the most efficient characteristics of parent algorithms. It organises an array using insertion sort and merges all sorted parts using the merging process, as stated by Ahmad et al. (2021). This new sorting method is intended for real-world data processing scenarios.

Creation of a new Text file with sorted Data

The script processes integers from a file named "pidata.txt" using the quicksort algorithm. It then stores the sorted list in a new list called "final\_data". The script inserts "MustafaHussein" and numbers from 01 to 10 at ten positions within "final\_data" using a loop. The contents of "final\_data" are then written to a new file named "sorted\_data.txt". It includes a header with "MustafaHussein" and "Student Number 12696467" before writing each element of "final\_data" to the file. The process is enclosed within the main function, executed only when the script is run directly, not when imported as a module.

Bubble Sorting in C Program

Bubble sort, a C-based algorithm, is often used as a benchmark for large data sets due to its inefficiency. However, it can be an educational tool for demonstrating fundamental sorting principles, as it involves a sequential scan of a list, wherein two consecutive elements are compared at each step, and if they are found to be out of order, they are swapped.

A computer screen shot of a program code

Description automatically generated

Bubble Sort in a C program

The C program reads data from a file, calculates average, performs bubble sort, and writes sorted integers to a file. It includes student's name, number, sorted integers, and name insertions.

Execution and Timing

The study compares the efficiency of various sorting algorithms using Python's time function and a Unix-based C program's 'time' command. It focuses on the implementation and execution of each sorting algorithm for a given task, ensuring a good fit for detailed performance comparison and analysis. Tests were conducted on a standard machine with average processor and memory specifications, with Python implementations (quicksort and Timsort) measured using the time module and C implementation (bubble sort) timed using the Unix-based system time command.

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New Text File with Sorted Data

The dataset sorting execution times were as follows:

- Quicksort (Python): 2.5 seconds

- Python's Built-in Sort (Timsort): 1.2 seconds

- Bubble Sort (C): 15 seconds

These results indicate noticeable differences in the efficiency of the three sorting algorithms.

Analysis

Quicksort is a fast sorting algorithm that can sort a dataset in just 2.5 seconds, with a Big O value of O(n log n). Its divide-and-conquer strategy reduces problem size with each recursive call. However, its worst-case time complexity is O(n^2) when a poorly chosen pivot is used although this is uncommon.   
Python's Built-in Sort (Timsort) outperforms Quicksort by sorting the vector in just 1.2 seconds, efficiently handling various data patterns, making it ideal for partially ordered data. Timsort's efficiency and ability to handle large data sets make it ideal for raw data.   
Bubble Sort in C is slow, taking approximately 15 seconds to sort the given dataset, with a big-O complexity of O(n^2), which can be resource-intensive for larger datasets. The test results indicate a lack of efficiency when sorting large datasets, contradicting the typical use case for Bubble Sort.

Practical Implications

The performance of Quicksort and Timsort is compared, with Timsort offering slightly better performance due to its adaptive and stable nature. Bubble sort is inefficient even under worst-case scenarios, resulting in subpar results. Timsort is recommended for hybrid sorting in stable sorting or point-of-sale operations. Quicksort is commendable if worst-case times are not consistently problematic and additional strategies are employed to mitigate worst-case or near-worst-case outcomes.

Discussion

Sorting algorithms' efficiency and practicality are crucial when analysing their performance. Sorting algorithm with a 2.5-second execution time initially demonstrated impressive performance of O(n log n) when handling large datasets but may degrade to O(n^2) in the worst case.

Timsort, which completed sorting in 1.2 seconds, is a versatile sorting algorithm that optimises real-world data with an average logarithmic complexity of O(n log n). According to Kristo et al. (2020), Its versatility makes it a strong candidate for Python's default sorting algorithm due to its stability and efficiency in handling complex sequences.  
  
Bubble sort, on the other hand, takes 15 seconds to complete and is inefficient for large datasets due to its extensive comparisons and swaps. Its value lies in providing a fundamental understanding of sorting mechanics and algorithms.

Conclusion

The comparison study analysed three sorting algorithms: quicksort, Python's built-in Timsort, and bubble sort. The results revealed notable discrepancies in their efficiency when processing large datasets. Timsort demonstrated the highest efficiency, completing the task in 1.2 seconds, attributed to its exceptional hardware and software design. Quicksort also proved to be efficient, taking 2.5 seconds, but it showed limitations in worst-case scenarios. Selecting the appropriate pivot significantly impacts its performance. On the other hand, bubble sort exhibited slower performance, taking 15 seconds, making it more suitable for smaller datasets. The study emphasizes the importance of efficient algorithms for large-scale sorting tasks, recommending Timsort for smaller Python items and Quicksort for predictable worst-case scenarios.

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Word Count (Excluding References, Images, Titles): 1228