Performance Evaluation in Ethernet and WiFi Scenarios

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ABSTRACT

This report examines the performance of wireless and device-to-device communication by comparing theoretical predictions with experimental results in three scenarios: WiFi-only, Ethernet-only, and a mixed configuration. Using iperf3 and Wireshark, we measured goodput and analyzed its variability under different conditions. The experimental data were contrasted with theoretical estimates based on protocol efficiencies and network overheads. Our findings underscore Ethernet's stability and highlight the challenges of WiFi's shared medium and half-duplex constraints.

1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

This laboratory evaluates and compares the performance of wired and wireless communication in a local area network by setting up three scenarios: both devices on WiFi, both on Ethernet, and a mixed configuration with one on each. The main objectives of the lab are to:

- Measure performances using iperf3 and Wireshark [7, 8].
- Analyze the variability and stability of the connection in each scenario by collecting data over multiple test runs.
- Compare the experimental results against theoretical predictions based on protocol efficiencies and network overhead.
- Investigate potential sources of performance degradation in wireless communication, such as interference, half-duplex operation, and shared medium limitations.

These experiments provide practical insights into the strengths and limitations of both Ethernet and WiFi, crucial for optimizing mixed network performance.

2 METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTS

This section outlines the experimental setup, the tools employed for the measurements, and the theoretical basis for estimating goodput.

2.1 Selected Tools

To evaluate the performance of both Ethernet and WiFi connections, we utilized several specialized tools:

- **iperf3**: Used to generate traffic and measure goodput in both TCP and UDP modes. By executing repeated tests, iperf3 provides key metrics such as minimum, maximum, average, and standard deviation of the throughput.
- **Wireshark**: Used to capture and analyze network traffic, Wireshark helped inspect data flows, identify frames, and validate results. It also generated useful charts for analyzing TCP streams.
- **Automation Script**: A Python script was developed to automate the entire measurement process. This script manages both server and client modes of iperf3, logs output, and computes summary statistics. The script accepts several command-line flags, as detailed in the Appendix A.

2.2 Goodput Estimation

Goodput represents the rate at which useful data is delivered to the application layer, excluding protocol overheads and retransmitted packets. The theoretical estimation of goodput is based on the efficiency of the protocol and the capacity of the network link:

$$G \leq \eta_{\text{protocol}} \times C,$$

where C is the capacity of the bottleneck link and η_{protocol} is the protocol efficiency.

1. For **Ethernet** [1], the efficiency for TCP is computed as:

   $$\eta_{TCP}^{Eth} = \frac{MSS}{MSS + \text{TCP headers} + \text{IP headers} + \text{Eth. overhead}},$$

   with the Maximum Segment Size (MSS) defined as the MTU minus the headers. For a standard MTU of 1500 bytes, we obtain:
   - MSS ≈ 1460 bytes (after subtracting 20 bytes for the IP header and 20 bytes for the TCP header),
   - An additional Ethernet overhead of approximately 38 bytes.

   Thus, the efficiency for TCP over Ethernet is approximately:

   $$\eta_{TCP}^{Eth} \approx \frac{1460}{1460 + 20 + 20 + 38} \approx 94.9\%.$$

   Similarly, the efficiency for UDP is computed as follows. Since UDP has an 8-byte header, its MSS is given by:
   - MSS ≈ 1472 bytes (after subtracting 20 bytes for the IP header and 8 bytes for the UDP header).

   Thus, the efficiency for UDP over Ethernet is given by:

   $$\eta_{UDP}^{Eth} \approx \frac{1472}{1472 + 20 + 8 + 38} \approx 95.7\%.$$

2. For **WiFi** [2], additional factors must be considered due to its half-duplex nature and the inherent overhead of the 802.11 protocol (e.g., control frames, retransmissions, and channel contention). In the case of **TCP over WiFi**, the effective efficiency is typically around 80% under optimal conditions. This lower efficiency arises from the extra overhead associated with TCP's connection-oriented features—such as congestion control, flow control, and the guarantee of in-order delivery—which require additional control packets and retransmissions.
   In contrast, **UDP over WiFi** generally attains an efficiency of approximately 85–90% by avoiding these mechanisms, leading to a simpler and faster data transmission process.

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$$\eta_{TCP}^{WiFi}(\approx 80\%) \quad \text{and} \quad \eta_{UDP}^{WiFi}(\approx 85\text{–}90\%).$$

These theoretical estimates set an upper bound on the achievable goodput, against which our experimental results are compared. Discrepancies between theory and practice are primarily due to dynamic environmental factors, such as interference, channel variability, and the inherent limitations of wireless communication.

3 EXPERIMENTAL SETUP AND TEST CASES

3.1 Equipment and Configuration

In this section, we describe the hardware and software configuration used to perform our network performance measurements. Table 1 summarizes the main devices, their interfaces, and relevant specifications.

Device	Key Specifications
PC1	**Victus 16-s1005nl Notebook** *Operating System:* Ubuntu 24.04.2 LTS [11] *Ethernet Interface:* Realtek RTL8111/8168/8211/8411 [3] *Wireless Interface:* Realtek RTL8852BE (802.11ax) | 2x2 [4]
PC2	**Microsoft Surface Laptop Go 3** *Operating System:* Ubuntu 24.10 [11] *Ethernet Interface:* via Anker PowerExpand+ USB-C Hub [10] *Wireless Interface:* Intel Alder Lake-P CNVi (802.11ax) | 2x2 [5]
Router	**Vodafone Power Station Wi-Fi 6** *Ethernet Ports:* 4 × 1 GbE ports *Wi-Fi:* Dual-band 802.11ax (2.4 GHz | 2x2, 5 GHz | 4x4) [12] *Default gateway ip: 192.168.1.1*
Cables	CAT.5E (up to 1 Gbps)

Table 1: Summary of Hardware and Network Configuration

Connection	Key Specifications	
Ethernet	*Cabling:* CAT.5E *Nominal Speed:* 1 Gbps *Client ip:* 192.168.1.12	 *Protocol:* Ethernet II *Server ip:* 192.168.1.13
Wi-Fi	*Standard:* 802.11ax *Nominal Speed:* 1200 Mbps *Bandwidth:* 80 MHz *Client ip:* 192.168.1.8	*Security Protocol:* WPA2-AES *Frequency:* 5 GHz *Channel:* 100 *Server ip:* 192.168.1.4

Table 2: Ethernet and Wi-Fi Connection Specifications

This hardware setup allows us to compare Ethernet versus Wi-Fi performance under a consistent router and cabling environment. In the next section, we detail the evaluation scenarios and the measurement methodology.

3.2 Evaluation Scenarios

We considered three distinct network configurations to assess the performance differences between wired and wireless communications. For each scenario, the theoretical goodput is computed based on the nominal link capacity and protocol efficiency.

1. **Both Ethernet:**
   In this scenario, both PC1 and PC2 are connected to the router via CAT.5E cables, providing a nominal link capacity of 1 Gbps. The efficiency for Ethernet is calculated as follows:
$$\eta_{TCP}^{Eth} \approx \frac{1460}{1460+20+20+38} \approx 94.9\%,$$
$$\eta_{UDP}^{Eth} \approx \frac{1472}{1472+20+8+38} \approx 95.7\%.$$
   Thus, the expected goodput is:
$$G_{TCP}^{Eth} \leq 0.949 \times 1000\,\text{Mbps} \approx 949\,\text{Mbps},$$
$$G_{UDP}^{Eth} \leq 0.957 \times 1000\,\text{Mbps} \approx 957\,\text{Mbps}.$$
2. **Both Wi-Fi:**
   For this configuration, both devices use their wireless interfaces (802.11ax) to connect to the router. Although the nominal Wi-Fi link speed is assumed to be approximately 1.2 GbEbps, the half-duplex nature of Wi-Fi effectively halves the throughput available for data transfer. Assuming a Wi-Fi efficiency factor of about 80%, the expected goodput for TCP is:
$$G_{TCP}^{WiFi} \leq 0.80 \times 1.2\,\text{Gbps} \times \frac{1}{2} \approx 480\,\text{Mbps},$$
   and similarly for UDP, with a different efficiency factor:
$$G_{UDP}^{WiFi} \leq 0.85 \times 1.2\,\text{Gbps} \times \frac{1}{2} \approx 510\,\text{Mbps}.$$
3. **Mixed Scenario:**
   In this configuration, one device (PC1) is connected via Ethernet while the other (PC2) uses its Wi-Fi interface. Since only one side is on Wi-Fi, we average the Wi-Fi portion and the Ethernet portion rather than halving for two Wi-Fi paths. Hence, the expected goodput is:

$$G_{TCP}^{Mixed} \leq \frac{(0.80 \times 1.2\,\text{Gbps}) + (0.949 \times 1.0\,\text{Gbps})}{2} \approx 955\,\text{Mbps},$$

$$G_{UDP}^{Mixed} \leq \frac{(0.85 \times 1.2\,\text{Gbps}) + (0.957 \times 1.0\,\text{Gbps})}{2} \approx 989\,\text{Mbps}.$$

These calculations provide the theoretical upper bounds for goodput in each scenario. The experimental results, obtained via automated measurements using the provided Python script, are compared against these predictions to evaluate real-world performance.

4 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 TCP Performance

The performance tests using TCP reveal several noteworthy trends. The analysis for TCP performance in different scenarios is organized as follows:

Test	TCP: Goodput per flow (Mbps)				
	Prediction	Average	Min	Max	Std
Both WiFi	480	434.7	396.3	461.96	22.5
Both Ethernet	949	939.6	938.2	942.7	1.5
Mixed	955	663.7	619.2	698.86	26.6

Table 3: TCP Results (Client → Server)

1. **Both Ethernet:**
   Figure 1 shows the TCP throughput measured in the Ethernet scenario. The graph reveals a rapid ramp-up in throughput during the first few seconds, followed by a stable transmission rate that approaches the theoretical value. The **Maximum Segment Size** (MSS) reaches and remains stable at 1500 bytes, as defined by the TCP protocol. Additionally, the **bandwidth** is stable at **950 Mbps**, as indicated by the results and the low standard deviation.

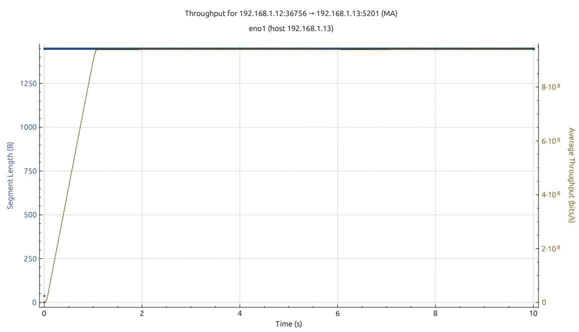

Figure 1: TCP Throughput in the Ethernet Scenario.

   Figure 2 illustrates the round-trip time (RTT), which remains very low (typically within 1-3 milliseconds), highlighting the minimal latency in wired connections.

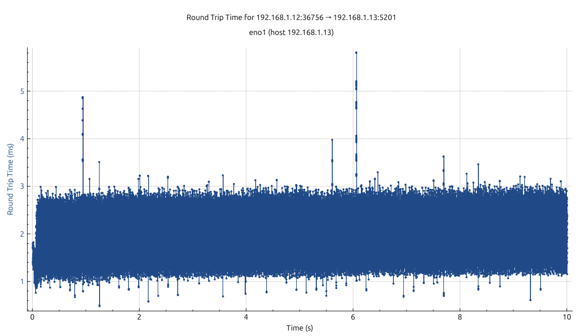

Figure 2: TCP Round Trip Time in the Ethernet Scenario.

   Overall, the Ethernet scenario demonstrates a near-ideal performance with high throughput and minimal latency, closely matching the theoretical predictions.

2. **Both WiFi:**
   In the WiFi scenario, the throughput graph (Fig. 3) shows an initial ramp-up phase during the first 2 seconds, after which the throughput fluctuates around an average value of 434.7 Mbps. These fluctuations suggest that protocol overhead, wireless interference, and the half-duplex nature of WiFi adversely affect performance.
   The round-trip time (RTT) measurements (Fig. 4) reveal RTT values ranging from about 20-50 ms, indicating intermittent delays likely due to congestion and contention in the wireless medium.
   Overall, while the theoretical capacity for TCP over WiFi is estimated to be around 480 Mbps, the experimental data indicate that real-world factors does not reduce that much the effective throughput of the WiFi network. This due to the fact that the network was in an ideal condition, where only the client and the server were connected to the access point, and no other devices were generating traffic.

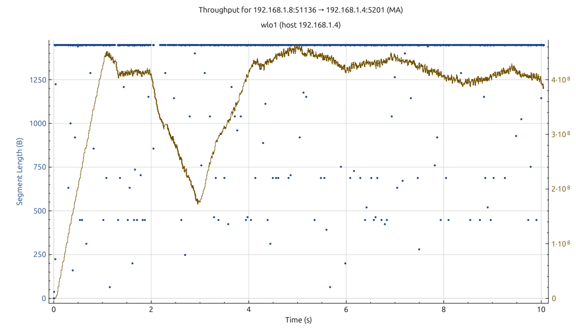

Figure 3: TCP Throughput in the WiFi Scenario.

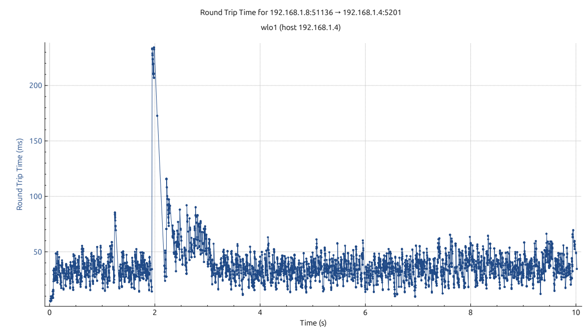

Figure 4: TCP Round Trip Time in the WiFi Scenario.

3. **Mixed:**
   Figure 5 displays the TCP throughput for the mixed configuration. The graph shows that the throughput reaches a stable level after an initial ramp-up phase, although it remains below the Ethernet scenario and is consistent with the expected reduction due to the reliance on the wireless link.

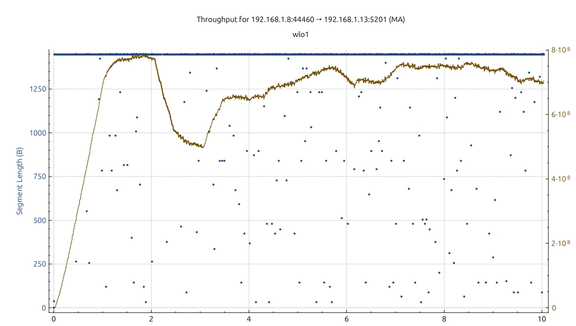

Figure 5: TCP Throughput in the Mixed Ethernet/WiFi Scenario.

   The round-trip time (RTT) measurements, presented in Figure 6, indicate moderate latency, with RTT values generally remaining within a lower range compared to the pure WiFi scenario. This suggests that the wired segment helps in reducing overall latency.

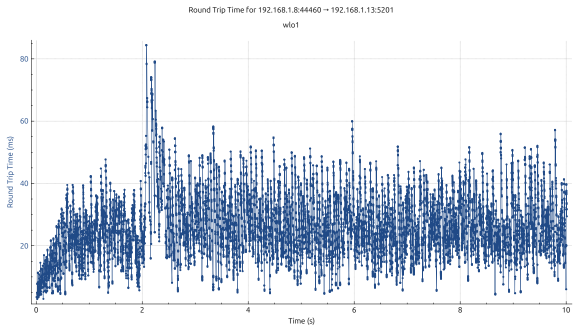

Figure 6: TCP Round Trip Time in the Mixed Ethernet/WiFi Scenario.

3a. **Shared Capacity:**
In this scenario, a third host connected to the same access point was concurrently downloading the film "Natale a Rio" [14] (directed by Neri Parenti), which introduced significant interference during the tests. This additional traffic compromised the available network capacity, leading to degraded performance. As we can see in (Fig. 7), the other host starts the download from the second test (~25 seconds). In fact the value of the throughtput, goes from the one of the standard Mixed Scenario (**~670Mbps**), to a lower one (**~500Mbps**), This behavior is due to the fact that the bandwidth is shared between the two hosts, and the download of the movie is consuming useful bandwidth.

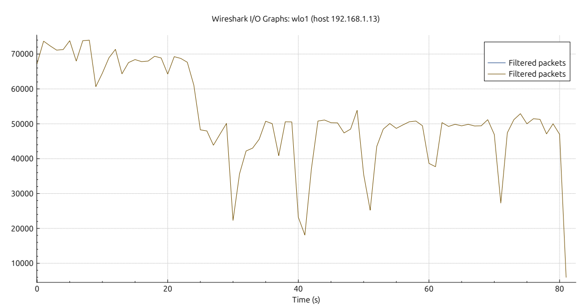

Figure 7: Wireshark I-O Graph for TCP in the Shared Capacity Scenario.

4.2 UDP Performance

The UDP tests offer an insightful comparison to the TCP results by eliminating congestion control and acknowledgment overhead. The analysis for UDP performance across different scenarios is structured as follows:

Test	UDP: Goodput per flow (Mbps)				
	Prediction	Average	Min	Max	Std
Both WiFi	510	487.8	453.1	499.9	15.8
Both Ethernet	957	952.8	948.3	954.6	1.73
Mixed	989	674.9	636.6	717.8	28

Table 4: UDP Results (Client → Server)

1. **Both Ethernet:**
The throughput achieved is very close to the theoretical prediction, confirming that the wired setup reliably supports high-speed data transfer. The absence of retransmission or congestion control overhead in UDP further contributes to this consistent performance. In summary, the wired (Ethernet) tests demonstrate that both TCP and UDP protocols achieve performance levels very close to their theoretical capaci This confirms that, in a controlled wired environment, network performance is minimally impacted by protocol overhead or environmental factors.

2. **Both WiFi:**
In the WiFi scenario, UDP shows a steadier flow than TCP. Although its reduced overhead allows for marginally higher instantaneous throughput, the overall performance still falls short of the theoretical maximum due to interference and channel contention. This comparison highlights how wireless limitations, such as interference and protocol overhead, impact real-world throughput.

3. **Mixed:**
In the mixed scenario, UDP transmissions exhibit a generally consistent flow, benefiting from the absence of congestion control overhead. The presence of a wired link on one end reduces overall latency and provides more stable performance compared to a fully wireless setup. Nonetheless, the wireless segment remains the principal bottleneck, limiting the achievable throughput. Overall, both TCP and UDP in the mixed scenario approximate their respective theoretical predictions, illustrating how partial reliance on Ethernet can mitigate some of the challenges inherent to WiFi.

3a. **Shared Capacity:**
The UDP tests under the shared capacity scenario also reveal the negative impact of the additional download traffic. Despite the inherent resilience of UDP to retransmission delays, the interference from the third host causes a noticeable reduction in performance. Overall, the shared capacity scenario clearly demonstrates that when a third host generates significant traffic (as in the case of streaming a movie), the available network resources are further divided, leading to performance degradation for both TCP and UDP protocols. This scenario highlights the importance of considering real-world usage patterns and interference when designing and evaluating network performance.

5 CONCLUSION

This project compared wired (Ethernet) and wireless (WiFi) network performance using iperf3 measurements and Wireshark analysis. Ethernet tests approached theoretical goodput with minimal latency, confirming the efficiency of controlled wired environments. In contrast, WiFi exhibited lower throughput and higher latency due to interference, contention, and half-duplex constraints. The mixed scenario showed that while a wired link can reduce latency, the wireless segment remains the bottleneck. Finally, adding a third host performing heavy traffic (movie streaming) further degraded both TCP and UDP results, highlighting how real-world congestion significantly impacts performance. These observations underscore the need to consider environmental and traffic factors in network design. While theoretical models provide upper bounds, practical limitations such as interference and shared medium contention ultimately determine real-world performance.

A APPENDIX

Server Mode Initialization

```python
def run_server():
    """
    Run iperf3 server with clean output handling.
    """
    server_logger.info("Starting iperf3 server...")

    proc = subprocess.Popen(
        ["iperf3", "-s", "-J"],
        stdout=subprocess.PIPE,
        stderr=subprocess.PIPE,
        text=True,
        bufsize=1,
    )
    # Handle server output and errors in a separate thread...
```

Listing 1: Excerpt for server mode initialization.

Client Mode Execution and Reporting

```python
def run_client(server_ip, udp=False, bitrate="1M",
    iterations=10):
    """
    Run iperf3 client tests and generate reports.
    """
    for i in range(iterations):
        cmd = ["iperf3", "-c", server_ip, "-J", "-t",
            "10", "-i", "1"]
        if udp:
            cmd.extend(["-u", "-b", bitrate])

        result = subprocess.run(
            cmd,
            capture_output=True,
            text=True,
            check=True
        )

        data = json.loads(result.stdout)
        # Extract test data, compute statistics, and log results...
```

Listing 2: Excerpt for client mode execution.

Logging and Output Management

```python
def setup_logger(log_file, name):
    logger = logging.getLogger(name)
    logger.setLevel(logging.DEBUG)
    handler = logging.FileHandler(log_file)
    formatter = logging.Formatter(
        '%(asctime)s - %(levelname)s - %(message)s'
    )
    handler.setFormatter(formatter)
    logger.addHandler(handler)
    return logger
```

Listing 3: Excerpt for logging setup.

These snippets illustrate how the script handles server mode initialization, client tests (both TCP and UDP), and logging. Error handling, multithreaded `stderr` management, and CSV report generation are also included in the complete script.

All the code for the report and lab material is available on the repository [13]: https://github.com/WDCSecure/LabWiFi.git

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