Comparing Android Runtime with native code:
Fast Fourier Transform on Android
Specification

André Danielsson
anddani@kth.se

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Bontouch Supervisor :	Erik Westenius	erik.westenius@bontouch.com
CSC Supervisor :	Erik Isaksson	erikis@kth.se
Examiner :	Olle Bälter	balter@kth.se

Background and Objective

Android applications are written in Java to ensure portability in form of architecture independence. By using a virtual machine to run a Java app, you can use the same byte code on multiple platforms. To ensure efficiency on low resources devices, a virtual machine called Dalvik was developed. Applications on Android have been using the Dalvik virtual machine until Android version 5[1] in November of 2014[2]. Since then, Dalvik has been replaced by Android Runtime. Android Runtime, ART for short, differs from Dalvik in that it uses Ahead-Of-Time (AOT) compilation. This means that it compiles during the installation of the app. Dalvik, however, exclusively uses a concept called Just-In-Time (JIT) compilation meaning that code is compiled during runtime, when needed.

This report is a study that evaluates when and where there is a gain in writing a component of an Android application in C++. One purpose of this report is to educate the reader about the process of porting parts of an app to native code using the Native Development Kit (NDK). Another is to explore the topic of performance differences between Android Runtime (ART) and native code compiled with Clang/LLVM. Because ART is relatively new (Nov 2014)[2], this report would contribute with more information related to the performance of ART and how it performs compared to native code.

Some of the findings in this report might help decide which programming language that should be used for a given problem in Android development. For some problems, it is necessary to choose the appropriate programming language to ensure that an application is smooth and responsive. It is therefore important to know when and where it is necessary to optimize code. Further, there are multiple types of problems that occur when developing complex applications and it is relevant to know which problems that are worth solving in a given language.

The objective of this report is to investigate when and where it would be beneficial to use C++ instead of Java when programming for Android. This report will cover how an

implementation of the Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) benefits from being written in Java or C++ for Android. In Android programming, you want to use Java when you control how the application should behave and call native functions when a lot of processing is needed. The overhead caused by calling a native function via the Java Native Interface (JNI) is something that must be taken into account when measuring the execution time of the programs.

There is already some previous work regarding how FFT performs on the Android platform. The article "FFT benchmark on Android devices: Java versus JNI"[3] compares two implementations of FFT, one written in Java and one written in C++. This article does not go into detail on its subject although it does state that their Java library of FFT is faster than their C++ library of FFT for small data. This report was written in 2013 and versions of both GCC and Clang/LLVM compilers has been changed multiple times since then. With new versions of Android, making testing on later versions of Android good in terms of relevance in the field.

The results from the experiments are expected to confirm or deny my problem statement and answer my research question. By thoroughly examining multiple methods and choosing the correct one, it is possible to correctly answer the research question. When constructing the experiments, a lot of time will be spent on finding the most appropriate approach of evaluating the FFT algorithm.

Research Question and Method

The research question of this report is the following:

Is there a performance difference in the implementation of an FFT in Java compared to native C++ code on an Android platform using ART?.

The goal of this report is to examine the efficiency of ART and how it compares to native code written in C++ using the NDK in combination with the JNI. This report presents a study that investigates the relevance of using the NDK to produce efficient code. Further, the cost to pass through the JNI will also be a factor when analysing the code. A discussion about to what extent the simplicity of the code outweighs the performance of the code will also be present. For people who are interested in knowing about the performance impacts of implementing algorithms in C++ for Android, this report might be of some use.

Finding how to accurately test the implemented algorithms is done by using knowledge gathered from literature and previous courses. The experiments will consist of programs, written in both Java and C++, that are compiled and executed on a mobile device. The execution time of these programs will be measured and compared with each other. Different versions of Android will also be tested to find if the performance upgrades are different.

The execution time of the programs will vary because of factors such as scheduling, dynamic frequency scaling and other uncontrollable behaviour caused by the operating system. To get accurate measurements, each program need to be run multiple times to get a statistically more precise measurement. Additionally, it is also necessary to calculate the standard error

of each set of execution times. With the standard error we can determine if the difference in execution time between two programs are statistically significant or not.

Evaluation

As mentioned previously, a statistical analysis will be carried out to ensure that the statements made regarding the data are reasonable. The discussion of the report will also contain some thoughts on some factors that might have influenced the result of the experiments. Furthermore, a discussion about how the results would change by factors that are not reproducible for example which apps the users will have in the background while running your application.

The result of the report can be used to value the decision of implementing a given algorithm or other solutions in native code instead of Java. The FFT is frequently used for signal processing when you want to analyse a signal in the frequency domain. It is therefore valuable to know how efficient an implementation in native code is depending on the size of the data. Although this report focuses on the FFT algorithm, FFT does compute the Discrete Fourier Transform which is used in other fields as well.

Pilot Study

During the first weeks of my project, I will focus on writing the introduction and start with the background to confirm that I have a clear view on how the project will progress. It is here where I will go through all the relevant literature that is needed to advance. Some articles will be related to how Android Runtime performs and others about JNI and NDK related topics. There is a lot of change in the field of mobile software and some articles can be considered irrelevant for my report due to its age. I will ensure that the articles are still relevant before using them as a source.

Additionally, the details of the Discrete Fourier Transform will be expanded to give understanding about its details and where it can be applied. An article published by Cooley and Tukey on the Fast Fourier Transform algorithm [4] which computes the DFT in $O(n \log n)$ time instead of $O(n^2)$ (where n is the number of data points) will be of some use in the literature review.

The general topics that are going to be covered in the literature review are:

- *Android Runtime*
- *Clang/LLVM*
- *Native Development Kit and Java Native Interface*
- *Discrete Fourier Transform and Fast Fourier Transform*

Conditions and Schedule

Some literature that might be of interest are listed on the last pages of this document. All other resources such as Android device(s) used for testing are provided by Bontouch.

Due to time constraints this report does only cover a performance evaluation of the FFT algorithm. If there is time there might be some other evaluation of a different algorithm. The decision of choosing the FFT was due to it being a common algorithm to use for signal analysis. This report will not investigate the performance differences for FFT in parallel due to the complexity of the Android kernel.

Scheduling and power saving functionality will start come into play and those topics are large in scope by themselves. This would require more knowledge outside the scope of this report and would result in a more broad subject. Another limitation is to only use one phone to perform the experiments on. This is because we would otherwise just compare phones.

My supervisor at Bontouch, Erik, will help me with technical questions as well as direct me throughout my project to ensure that I don't deviate from the subject. We will also have regular meetings to discuss my work so far.

Week #	Goal
4	Pilot Study - Introduction
5 – 7	Pilot Study - Background/Literature review
8 – 10	Prepare experiment and Write on report, methodology
11 – 12	Write on report, result
13 – 14	Write on report, discussion
15	Write on report, conclusion
16 – 17	Write on report, fine-tune
18 – 19	Prepare for presentation
20	Hand in report
21 –	Presentation

Detailed Schedule

- **Week 4:** This week, I will try to familiarize myself with the NDK and start with the pilot study. My goal for the end of this week is to have a general view on the whole project. The first draft of the introduction chapter will also be completed.
- **Week 5:** For the first week of the Literature Review, I will spend time reading about the different topics and other articles to try to broaden my understanding of this area. My plan is to focus on how the NDK works and the process of calling native subroutines from Java using the JNI.
- **Week 6:** The second week will be dedicated to write about the FFT and look through different implementations of the algorithm.
- **Week 7:** The focus of this week will be to finish the first draft of the Background chapter.
- **Week 8:** The first part of the experiment will be to do research about different

methodologies and of setting up the experiments as well as how to interpret the results. All of this will be added to the Methodology chapter.

- **Week 9:** The second week of the experiment block will be to continue with the Methodology chapter and start with the implementation of the benchmark program.
- **Week 10:** The goal of this week is to have completed most of the Methodology chapter as well as the implementation of the benchmark program.
- **Week 11:** This week will be dedicated to performing all the tests that will be the basis of the report. All the relevant data will be added to the report.
- **Week 12:** Extra week to finish with the result of the report.
- **Week 13:** Start with the discussion of the report, start with the abstract.
- **Week 14:** Finish the Discussion chapter.
- **Week 15:** Write the Conclusion chapter of the report and finish the abstract.
- **Week 16:** Extra time for report writing as well as fine-tuning of the report.
- **Week 17:** Extra time for report writing as well as fine-tuning of the report.
- **Week 18:** This week will be dedicated to prepare for presentation and extra time for report writing if needed. If done, hand in report before opposition.
- **Week 19:** This week will be dedicated to prepare for presentation and extra time for report writing if needed. Write the written opposition report
- **Week 20:** The goal of this week is to hand in the report, do the presentation, self-evaluation and other.

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