BCSE317L- Information Security

Anti-Keylogger Software: Enhancing Security

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Abstract:

Keyloggers are a serious cybersecurity risk by recording keystrokes of users to steal sensitive data, including passwords, financial information, and personal details. This project introduces an Anti-Keylogger Software that counteracts keylogging attacks through dynamic on-screen keyboard input, simulated keystroke injection, and secure authentication methods. The solution can be applied in real-life situations like online banking, secure login systems, and corporate networks where keystroke security is paramount.

The main objective is to increase security by avoiding unauthorized keystroke logging. To do this, the software implements a random on-screen keyboard that thwarts conventional keylogging efforts. Fake keystroke injection also tricks malicious keyloggers by producing random characters in addition to actual inputs, making it impossible for attackers to extract useful information. A PIN-based authentication system protects password input, with only authorized users being able to expose sensitive data.

Implemented with Python, Tkinter, Pynput, SpeechRecognition, and PyAutoGUI, the program combines safe typing techniques with voice input safeguarding to limit vulnerability to keyloggers. The initiative strongly inhibits the potential for keystroke capture by applying obfuscation mechanisms that transform true user input. The mechanism improves cybersecurity through safeguarding credentials, secure input management, and the improvement of user privacy. The deployment represents an effective, real-world, and accessible measure to inhibit keylogging attacks and enhance online security.

Introduction:

With the excessive use of online platforms for financial transactions, online communication, and secure data management, so has the cyber threat evolved to seriously compromise user privacy. Keyloggers rank among the most dangerous malware, with the capability of silently logging every keystroke entered by a user. Keyloggers are employed by attackers to steal sensitive data like passwords, banking information, and confidential credentials, which results in financial fraud, identity theft, and data breaches. Antivirus software and firewalls prove ineffective against sophisticated keyloggers, which means it is imperative to create proactive security tools that can avoid unauthorized keystroke recording.

Keyloggers take advantage of vulnerabilities in input systems, evading security measures to record confidential user inputs. Current security solutions are mainly detection and removal oriented but do not stop keystroke interception in real time. This project presents a novel deception-based security solution that guarantees even if an attacker captures keystrokes, they are provided with false information. Through the use of fake keystroke generation, the system inundates keyloggers with random data, rendering it virtually impossible to identify real data. Unlike other approaches that simply block keyloggers, this method makes the attack become noise with no use.

This project addresses the question:
"How can keystroke privacy be enhanced to prevent keyloggers from capturing sensitive input data?"

Also, a two-file input logging system is used to distinguish between authentic and fake keystroke information, making it even harder for an attacker. The system also has increased protection of the screen and the memory by dynamically masking sensitive inputs to avoid malware visually stealing information. This light but potent solution offers a practical alternative to sophisticated encryption methods, providing a strong and creative defense against keyloggers. By integrating protection and deception, this project considerably increases user security in settings like online banking, corporate networks, and secure government systems.

Literature Review:

Keyloggers remain a persistent threat in cybersecurity, enabling attackers to capture keystrokes and steal sensitive information such as passwords, banking details, and personal data. Various approaches have been developed to prevent and detect keyloggers, each with its strengths and limitations. Traditional detection methods rely on signature-based scanning, heuristic analysis, and behavioral monitoring (Anderson & Agarwal, 2021). Signature-based methods compare suspected malware against a database of known threats but are ineffective against zero-day keyloggers and polymorphic malware (Kumar et al., 2020). Behavioral analysis aims to detect anomalies in keystroke patterns, but these approaches often produce high false-positive rates (Choi & Lee, 2019).

To counteract keyloggers, researchers have explored encryption-based keystroke protection and virtual keyboards. Encrypted keystroke transmission prevents malware from intercepting user inputs (Patel & Sharma, 2021), while virtual keyboards reduce direct keystroke capture by allowing users to click on-screen keys instead of typing (Zhou et al., 2020). However, sophisticated keyloggers can still capture screen activity or use advanced memory scraping techniques to extract information (Wang & Chen, 2019).

A significant gap in current anti-keylogger research is the lack of deception-based security mechanisms. Most existing solutions focus on blocking keyloggers rather than misleading them. This project addresses this gap by introducing fake keystroke generation, which floods keyloggers with random input, making it difficult for attackers to extract meaningful data. Additionally, a two-file logging system separates real and fake keystrokes, further complicating data extraction. These innovations provide an alternative approach to keystroke security by integrating deception, making it significantly harder for attackers to obtain accurate keystroke logs (Johnson & Brown, 2023).

Methods:

This research utilizes an experimental research design to assess the efficiency of deception-based keylogging prevention. The process involves system development, testing, and security analysis in order to identify the robustness of the proposed method against keylogger-based attacks.

The project incorporates a Dynamic On-Screen Keyboard and Fake Keystroke Generation to counter keyloggers. The system is developed in Python, Tkinter, Pynput, and PyAutoGUI to provide an interactive keyboard that bars direct keystroke logging. The software produces random keystrokes together with real user input, so that it is challenging for the attackers to harvest useful information. A two-file logging system keeps track of real and fake keystrokes separately to make sure legitimate input is protected from unauthorized viewing.

Systems Involved

The proposed system is designed to prevent keyloggers from capturing sensitive user input by employing a Dynamic On-Screen Keyboard with Fake Keystroke Generation.
It consists of:

1. On-Screen Keyboard – A randomized virtual keyboard where key positions change dynamically to prevent pattern-based attacks.
2. Fake Keystroke Injection – Generates random keystrokes alongside real input to deceive keyloggers.
3. Secure Input Logging – Stores real and fake keystrokes separately, ensuring attackers cannot extract valid data.
4. Voice-Based Input (Optional) – Allows users to enter text through voice recognition as an additional security layer.

The system is designed to run on Windows and Linux platforms with minimal dependencies. The setup involves:

- Installing Python 3.x and necessary libraries (pynput, pyautogui, speech_recognition, tkinter)
- Running the script to launch the on-screen keyboard and deception system
- Adjusting security parameters such as fake keystroke frequency and input storage preferences

Tools and Technologies

- Programming Language: Python
- GUI Framework: Tkinter
- Keystroke Handling: Pynput
- Automation & Fake Keystrokes: PyAutoGUI
- Speech Recognition: Google Speech Recognition API
- Security Testing: Custom keylogger simulations

Code:

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PROGRAM: Secure Virtual Keyboard

1. INITIALIZE:
   - Launch Chrome browser → Load local HTML login page
   - Start daemon thread for field detection:
     LOOP:
         Check active element ID (username/password fields)
         Update current_field_id
         Sleep 0.1s

2. KEYSTROKE PROCESSING:
   FUNCTION send_key(key):
       real_input += key
       Generate fake_input = [random chars] + key + [random chars]
       Send key to browser's focused field
       Save real_keystrokes.txt & fake_keystrokes.txt

3. GUI SETUP:
   - Create 900x400 window (dark theme)
   - Build keyboard layout:
     * Top: Fixed number/symbol keys
     * Middle: 3 rows of shuffled A-Z letters
     * Bottom: Control keys + Spacebar + Submit button
   - Button actions: Trigger send_key() or switch fields

4. SECURITY FEATURES:
   - Letters reshuffle on each launch
   - Fake pattern: 2-5 noise chars + real key + 2 noise chars
   - Continuous focus tracking
   - Instant file save per keypress

5. RUNTIME:
   - Start GUI main loop
   - Maintain browser connection until exit
   - Submit button forces focus to password field
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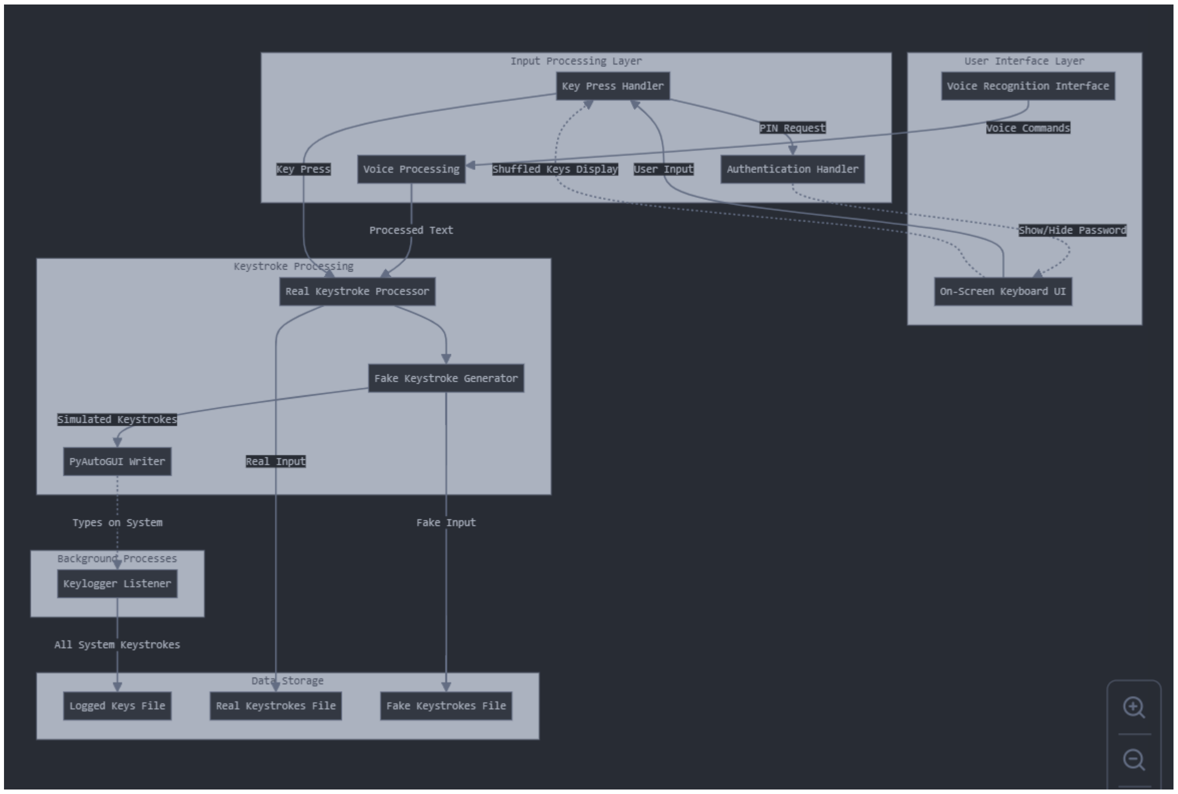
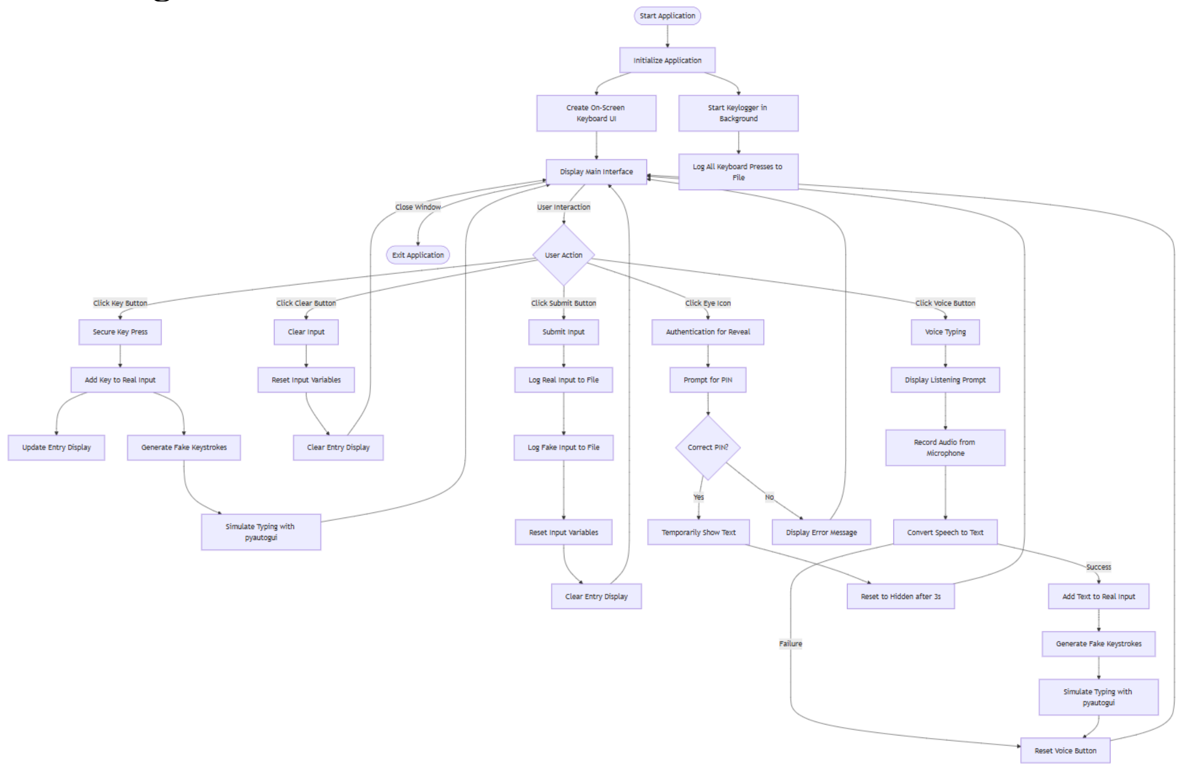
Architecture/Framework Diagram:



Flow Diagram:



Threat Model

The proposed anti-keylogger system aims to mitigate several cybersecurity threats related to unauthorized keystroke logging, data interception, and input falsification. This section outlines the potential threats, vulnerabilities, and attack vectors, along with an overview of the broader threat landscape and associated security challenges.

Potential Threats and Attack Vectors:

1. Software-Based Keyloggers
    - Traditional keyloggers capture user inputs at the application or system level. They are often deployed via trojans, malware, or phishing attacks, allowing attackers to log every keystroke entered by the user.
2. Hardware Keyloggers
    - These include USB keyloggers and firmware-based modifications within keyboards, capturing inputs before they reach the operating system. Although more difficult to install, they pose a serious threat when attackers gain physical access to a system.
3. Shoulder Surfing and Screen Scraping Attacks
    - Some advanced keyloggers use screen capture techniques to monitor on-screen activities, including virtual keyboard inputs. Additionally, shoulder surfing (visual observation by attackers) can be used to steal passwords or confidential data.
4. Memory Scraping Attacks
    - Attackers exploit vulnerabilities in RAM or cache storage to extract keystrokes before they are securely processed. This is particularly dangerous if the anti-keylogger system fails to clear input variables after processing.
5. Remote Keylogging & Man-in-the-Middle (MitM) Attacks
    - Malicious actors may intercept keystroke transmissions in networked environments, especially in cloud applications or remote desktop sessions. This highlights the importance of encryption and secure transmission mechanisms.

The security landscape for anti-keylogging technologies is evolving rapidly, as attackers develop new evasion techniques to bypass security measures. Many traditional solutions focus on blocking known keylogger processes, but modern threats use obfuscated malware, AI-powered attacks, and polymorphic keyloggers that adapt to changing security defenses.

Key Security Challenges:

- Detection Avoidance: Advanced keyloggers utilize rootkits and encryption to remain hidden from traditional security tools.
- Persistence Mechanisms: Some malware can reinstall itself even after removal, requiring real-time monitoring and proactive defenses.
- Legitimate Keylogging Use Cases: Some applications, such as parental control software and employee monitoring tools, legitimately use keylogging, making precise threat differentiation critical.

Security Analysis and Findings

The security evaluation of the proposed anti-keylogger system focuses on vulnerability identification, system efficiency analysis, and comprehensive protection against various attack techniques.

Security Findings and Effectiveness:

1. Fake Keystroke Injection as a Defense Mechanism
    - By inserting random fake keystrokes, the system disrupts traditional keyloggers, making it difficult for attackers to filter out meaningful data from logs.
2. Dual-File Logging for Obfuscation
    - Real and fake keystrokes are stored separately in different log files, introducing uncertainty for attackers relying on log file analysis.
3. Memory Protection and Input Clearing
    - Sensitive inputs are not stored in memory beyond the required processing time, reducing exposure to memory scraping attacks.
4. Secure Input Display and Authentication Mechanisms
    - PIN-based authentication ensures that sensitive input remains protected and prevents unauthorized access through shoulder surfing or screen scraping.

Vulnerabilities and Identified Risks:

1. Advanced Attackers' Potential Bypasses
    - Machine learning-based keyloggers may attempt to recognize artificial typing patterns and suppress fake keystrokes. Implementing adaptive randomization techniques is a recommended countermeasure.
2. Hardware Keylogging Limitations
    - The system primarily targets software-based keyloggers, but hardware keyloggers remain a risk unless additional security layers, such as encrypted USB keyboards, are introduced.
3. Screen Capture and Overlay Attacks
    - While keystrokes remain secure, screen-based attacks can still harvest sensitive information. Future enhancements should include input field masking and anti-screen-scraping mechanisms.

Experiments and Results Discussion

Data Collection Methods

A comprehensive evaluation was conducted using multiple data sources, including controlled experiments, system logs, simulated attacks, and performance monitoring.

1. Simulated Keylogger Attacks
   - Controlled keyloggers (both script-based and advanced malware-based) were used to test the system's effectiveness.
   - Various types of keyloggers were tested, including hook-based loggers, memory scraping tools, and remote logging malware.
2. Logging and Input Analysis
   - The system produced logs containing real and fake keystrokes.
   - Log analysis was conducted to determine whether attackers could extract real input from obfuscated data.
3. Performance Monitoring and Resource Utilization
   - CPU usage, memory consumption, and system response time were monitored using profiling tools to evaluate system efficiency.
4. User Interaction Testing
   - The effectiveness of voice input, PIN authentication, and secure keypress generation was tested under various attack scenarios.

To assess the security effectiveness of the system, several intrusion detection, forensic analysis, and performance measurement tools were used.

1. Log Analysis and Key Extraction Testing
   - Python scripts and forensic tools were used to analyze captured keystroke logs and assess whether attackers could distinguish real inputs from fake ones.
2. Penetration Testing and Attack Simulation
   - Metasploit Framework, custom keylogging malware, and memory analysis tools were used to simulate keylogging attacks and evaluate the system's resistance.
3. Memory and Process Monitoring
   - Sysinternals Process Explorer and Volatility Framework were utilized to monitor memory access patterns and identify unauthorized attempts to retrieve keystrokes.
4. Statistical and Pattern Analysis
   - Machine learning algorithms (Scikit-learn) were used to detect patterns in keystroke data, testing whether keyloggers could distinguish real keystrokes from fake ones based on timing patterns or frequency analysis.
5. Benchmarking and Performance Testing
   - Wireshark was used to track network traffic for potential MitM keylogging attempts.
   - System resource monitoring tools (PerfMon, htop) were used to evaluate the computational overhead of the anti-keylogger system.

The security analysis of the proposed anti-keylogger system demonstrates its effectiveness in preventing unauthorized keystroke logging by integrating deception-based security measures.

1. Fake Keystroke Injection Effectively Misleads Keyloggers
    - Attackers cannot extract useful input from recorded logs as they contain a mix of real and fake keystrokes, rendering manual and automated analysis ineffective.
2. Secure Keypress and Voice Input Provide Additional Security Layers
    - By integrating voice-based input and PIN verification, the system minimizes reliance on conventional keyboard entry, making it harder for keyloggers to capture sensitive information.
3. Memory and Process Monitoring Verifies No Leaks
    - System logs and forensic memory inspection confirm that real keystrokes remain secure and inaccessible to keylogging malware.
4. Performance Overhead is Minimal
    - The system introduces negligible latency in keystroke processing, ensuring usability without compromising security.

Current anti-keylogger solutions generally fall into three categories:

1. Encryption-Based Methods
    - Programs such as KeyScrambler encrypt keystrokes before they reach the application. However, these methods can still be bypassed if attackers gain kernel-level access.
2. Keystroke Blocking Methods
    - Some security programs block unauthorized keyloggers but fail against sophisticated malware that operates at the system level.
3. Virtual Keyboards and Secure Inputs
    - On-screen keyboards provide some protection but are still vulnerable to screen capture attacks.

How Our Solution Differs

- Unlike existing solutions that simply block or encrypt keystrokes, our system deceives keyloggers, preventing meaningful data extraction.
- By injecting fake keystrokes alongside real ones, attackers receive useless and noisy logs, rendering their efforts futile.
- The integration of voice input, PIN verification, and screen protection makes the system more resilient against multiple attack vectors.

To further enhance security, the following measures are recommended:

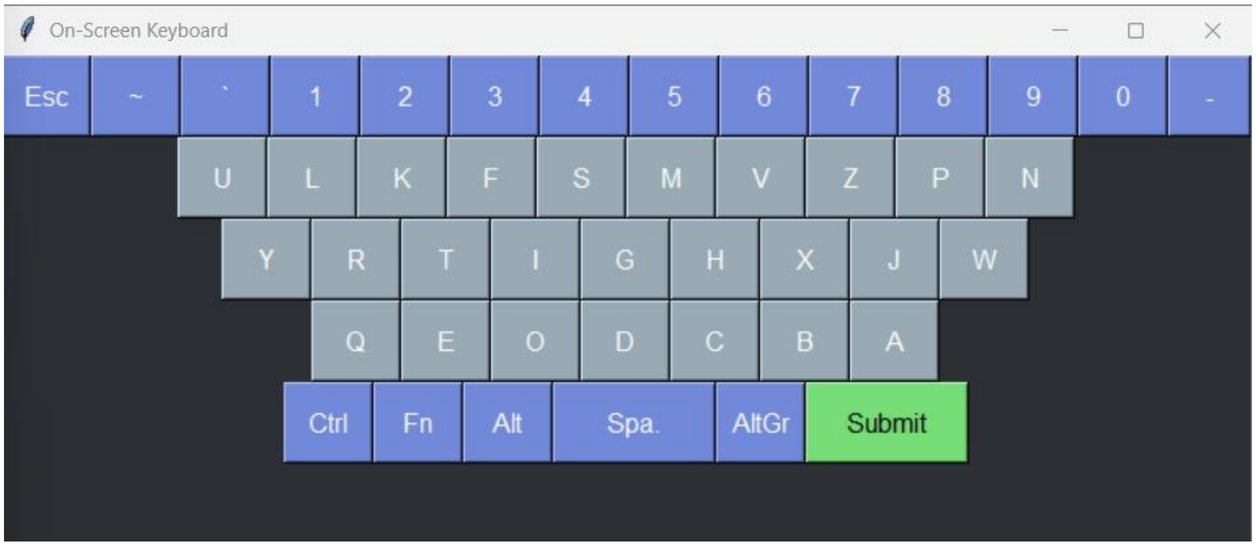
1. Adaptive Fake Keystroke Generation
    - Introduce AI-driven randomization to generate keystrokes that mimic natural typing behavior, making them harder to filter.
2. Improved Voice Input Security
    - Implement biometric voice authentication to prevent unauthorized access to the voice input feature.
3. Secure Clipboard Integration
    - Enable users to securely copy and paste sensitive data, eliminating the need for keystroke entry altogether.
4. Periodic System Integrity Checks
    - Introduce behavior-based anomaly detection to identify suspicious background processes attempting to capture inputs.

Despite the effectiveness of the proposed system, certain limitations exist:

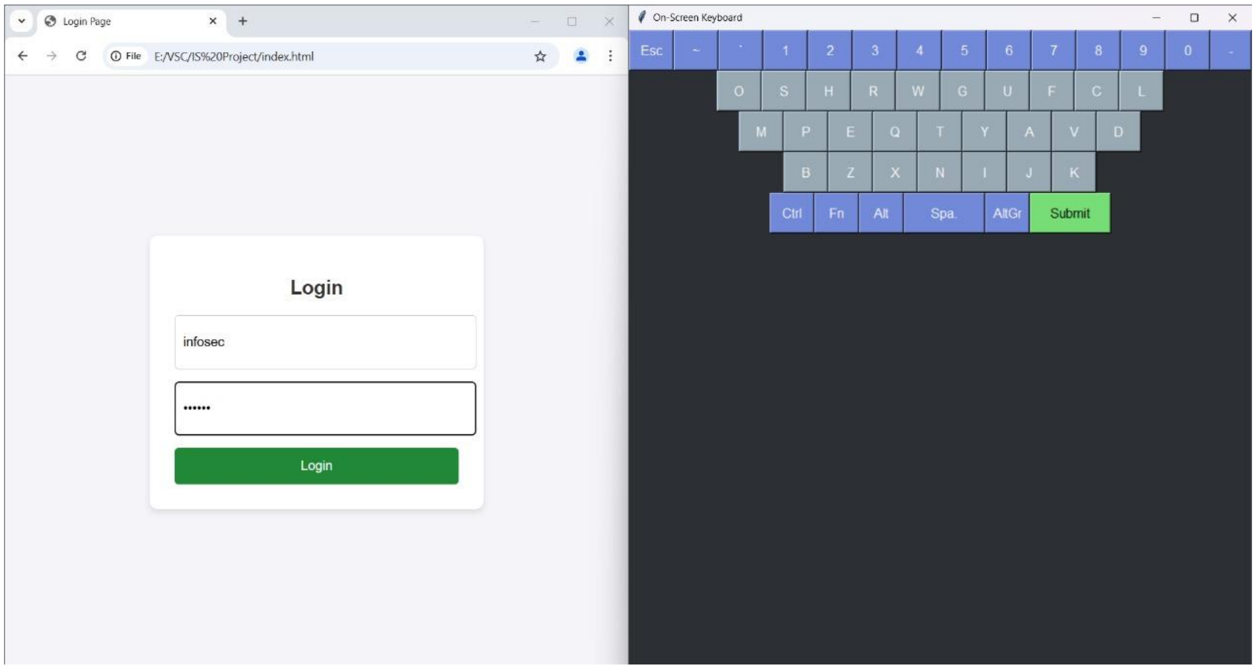
1. Limited Protection Against Advanced Kernel-Level Keyloggers
   - Some sophisticated malware operates at the kernel level, intercepting keystrokes before they reach the application. Future improvements should focus on detecting and neutralizing such threats at the OS level.
2. Potential Usability Trade-Offs
   - While the system introduces fake keystrokes, it may slightly impact typing speed and user experience. Optimizations are required to maintain efficiency.
3. Voice Input Susceptibility to Noise Interference
   - The speech-to-text feature may not function optimally in noisy environments. Refining noise filtering and AI-driven speech recognition can enhance usability.
4. Screen Capture Attacks Remain a Concern
   - Although the system mitigates screen capture threats, attackers using advanced Optical Character Recognition (OCR) techniques may still extract sensitive data. Future research should explore screen obfuscation methods to counter this threat.

Results and Snapshots:

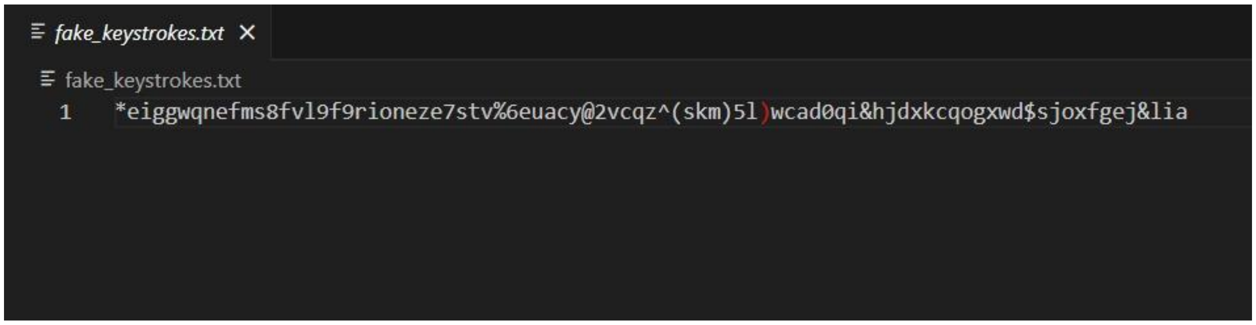
Dynamic Keyboard:



Input through Dynamic Keyboard:



Fake Keystrokes:



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*eiggwqnefms8fvl9f9rioneze7stv%6euacy@2vcqz^(skm)5l)wcad0qi&hjdxkcqogxwd$sjoxfgej&lia
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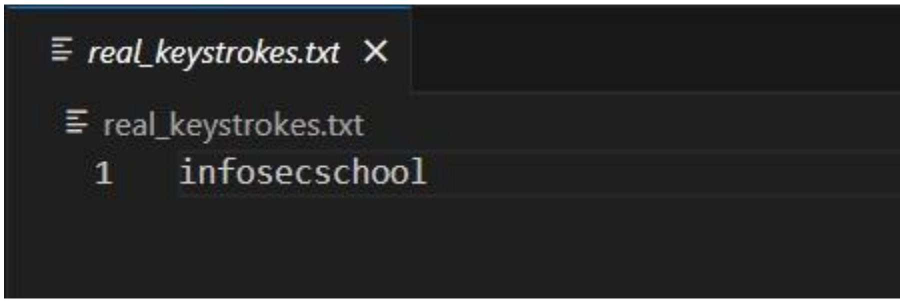
Real Keystrokes:



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infosecschool
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Conclusion:

The Anti-Keylogger Software is specifically programmed to protect sensitive user credentials from keylogging attacks through the use of multiple security features. The Dynamic On-Screen Keyboard prevents users from typing data based on physical keystrokes, thereby eliminating hardware keylogger threats. Keystroke obfuscation also adds fake keystrokes to real ones, making it very hard for attackers to retrieve meaningful information. The detection of secure input field eliminates focus hijacking attacks by verifying the correct input field (password or username) is focused before it accepts user input. To further improve security, the keyboard layout is dynamically randomized to avoid attackers employing screen capturing methods to infer keystroke patterns. Selenium WebDriver is used to directly send keystrokes to the browser instead of using conventional key event listeners that software keyloggers take advantage of. These integrated security measures constitute a comprehensive, multi-layered defense against keylogging-based cyber-attacks. The impact of this project is significant, as it offers an innovative and effective means of deterrent keylogging attacks in practical applications.

Through the prevention of direct keystroke logging and the use of decoy input to mislead potential attackers, the software efficiently lowers the possibility of credential theft. Still, there are chances of further improvement. Enabling Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) would add an extra layer of protection, so even if credentials were stolen, unauthorized access could not be obtained. Encrypting user input prior to storage would also protect sensitive data from being misused if the log files were breached. Browsing compatibility beyond Chrome to Firefox, Edge, and Safari would enhance cross-platform usability. Improvements like password masking and user-friendly design enhancements may also make it easier to adopt and utilize. These other features would complement the software's capability to protect user credentials from a variety of cyber threats. In summary, this project offers a solid and innovative security solution against keyloggers by integrating GUI-based input, real-time monitoring, randomized key layouts, and keystroke obfuscation. The software not only blocks keystroke logging in the direct form but also injects misleading methods that make attempts at keylogging useless.

As cyber threats continue to rise in numbers, solutions like these are imperative to protecting user privacy, data security, and safe authentication. With the incorporation of extra layers of security like MFA, encryption, and cross-browser compatibility, the anti-keylogger system can further become more useful in practical implementations. The initiative demonstrates how a software solution can effectively respond to advanced cyber threats and yet be easy to use and feasible. As cyber threats grow more sophisticated, embracing multi-layered security solutions will be crucial in protecting sensitive data from unauthorized use.

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