Hybrid Vulnerability Detection System for C/C++ Code

Vernet Emmanuel Adjobi

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

This report presents the development and evaluation of a novel hybrid vulnerability detection system designed specifically for C/C++ code, with particular emphasis on Linux kernel functions. Our approach extends the VulRAG methodology proposed by Du et al. (2024) through the strategic integration of structural pre-filtering using Code Property Graphs (CPGs) with sophisticated semantic re-ranking capabilities. This hybrid methodology synergistically combines the precision of structural pattern analysis with the contextual understanding capabilities of large language models.

Key Results : Our comprehensive evaluation on a carefully curated corpus of 100 functions demonstrates promising performance outcomes. The **Structural VulRAG** hybrid method achieved the highest F1-score of **56.5%** with **68.6% precision** and **48.0% recall** , establishing superior balanced performance compared to mono-modal approaches. Notably, the system maintained **100% operational reliability** across all test samples, indicating robust implementation suitable for production deployment.

Performance Comparison :

- **Hybrid Method (Structural VulRAG)** : F1=56.5%, Precision=68.6%, Recall=48.0%
- **VulRAG Baseline** : F1=55.4%, Precision=69.7%, Recall=46.0%
- **Raw LLM** : F1=45.5%, Precision=52.6%, Recall=40.0%
- **Structural Only** : F1=39.4%, Precision=66.7%, Recall=28.0%

These results demonstrate that hybrid approaches combining structural and semantic analysis deliver measurable improvements over purely structural or semantic methods, opening promising avenues for enhanced vulnerability detection systems with potential for industrial deployment.

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Software vulnerabilities pose an escalating threat to cybersecurity infrastructure, with over 90,000 documented vulnerabilities now affecting critical systems worldwide. The exponential growth in software complexity, coupled with increasingly sophisticated attack vectors, necessitates robust automated vulnerability detection solutions capable of operating at scale while maintaining exceptional accuracy.

Current vulnerability detection approaches suffer from a fundamental architectural limitation: they typically operate in isolation, relying either purely on structural patterns captured through static analysis or on semantic understanding derived from language models. This mono-modal approach creates critical gaps in detection capability. Structural methods excel at identifying recurring patterns but **miss context-dependent vulnerabilities** where the same code construct may be safe or vulnerable depending on surrounding conditions. Conversely, semantic methods provide rich contextual understanding but **lack the precise pattern recognition** essential for systematic vulnerability identification.

The VulRAG approach introduced by Du et al. (2024) demonstrated the transformative potential of retrieval-augmented generation for vulnerability detection. However, this methodology operates exclusively in the semantic domain, overlooking valuable opportunities to leverage structural similarities that could significantly enhance retrieval quality and detection accuracy.

Research Hypothesis

We hypothesize that **neither semantic similarities alone nor structural similarities alone are sufficient** to comprehensively identify similar vulnerability patterns. The following motivating examples illustrate why a hybrid approach is necessary.

Motivating Examples

1. Structural limitation: two functions with near-identical CPG signatures but different safety properties

```c
// Function A - Safe
void safe_copy(char *dest, const char *src, size_t dest_size) {
    strncpy(dest, src, dest_size - 1);  // leave room for \0
    dest[dest_size - 1] = '\0';
}

// Function B - Vulnerable (off-by-one)
void unsafe_copy(char *dest, const char *src, size_t dest_size) {
    strncpy(dest, src, dest_size);      // subtle bug: no -1
    dest[dest_size - 1] = '\0';        // potential overflow
}
```

Purely structural analysis will often mark these as nearly identical: same API (strncpy), same parameter count and types, similar cyclomatic complexity, and similar control-flow patterns. Yet Function B contains a critical off-by-one that can trigger a buffer overflow when `src` length equals `dest_size`. The difference is a small arithmetic nuance (`dest_size` vs. `dest_size - 1`) that typical structural metrics fail to capture.

2. Semantic limitation: structurally similar overflow patterns with divergent textual context

```c
// Vulnerability A - Network parser
int parse_network_packet(unsigned char *packet, int len) {
    char buffer[256];
    int payload_len = *(int*)packet;          // unvalidated length
    memcpy(buffer, packet + 4, payload_len);  // potential overflow
    return process_network_data(buffer);
}
```

```c
// Vulnerability B - Image file parser
int parse_image_header(FILE *fp) {
    char buffer[256];
    int header_size;
    fread(&header_size, sizeof(int), 1, fp);  // unvalidated size
    fread(buffer, 1, header_size, fp);        // potential overflow
    return parse_image_metadata(buffer);
}
```

Both functions exhibit the same structural vulnerability pattern (read unvalidated size → copy into fixed buffer), but their semantic descriptions differ substantially: networking/protocol keywords versus image/file-format terms. A pure text-based search (e.g., BM25) over descriptions can miss this match because the lexical fields are disjoint despite identical structural risk.

Hybrid hypothesis validation

- **Structural pre-filtering** captures the vulnerability-pattern similarity (unvalidated length → fixed-size copy), surfacing candidates that semantics alone may miss.
- **Semantic re-ranking** then refines contextual relevance, rewarding examples whose purposes/behaviors align with the target.

This combination identifies vulnerabilities that either approach alone would miss, improving both coverage and accuracy.

1.2 Research Objectives

This research addresses these limitations through the following objectives:

1. **Develop a unified hybrid approach** that seamlessly integrates structural Code Property Graph (CPG) analysis with semantic understanding through large language models
2. **Evaluate the effectiveness** of structural pre-filtering in enhancing retrieval quality for RAG-based vulnerability detection systems
3. **Conduct comprehensive performance analysis** across multiple detection methodologies using standardized benchmarks
4. **Analyze the fundamental trade-offs** between precision, recall, and computational efficiency in hybrid detection systems

1.3 Contributions

Our research delivers several key contributions to the vulnerability detection domain:

- **Novel hybrid architecture** that combines CPG structural pre-filtering with multi-field semantic re-ranking in an integrated pipeline
- **Comprehensive evaluation framework** enabling systematic comparison across four distinct detection approaches
- **Empirical analysis** of structural-semantic integration benefits in real-world vulnerability detection scenarios
- **Open-source implementation** facilitating reproducible research and practical deployment in production environments

2. Related Work

2.1 Structural Vulnerability Detection

The foundation of structural vulnerability detection was established by Yamaguchi et al. (2014) through their introduction of **Code Property Graphs (CPGs)** . This groundbreaking approach unified Abstract Syntax Trees (AST), Control Flow Graphs (CFG), and Program Dependence Graphs (PDG) into a comprehensive representation capable of capturing both syntactic structure and semantic dependencies. The effectiveness of this methodology was demonstrated through the discovery of 88 vulnerabilities in the Linux kernel, including 18 previously unknown cases.

Building upon this foundation, subsequent research has extended CPG-based analysis through machine learning integration. **Devign** (Zhou et al., 2019) pioneered the application of Graph Neural Networks to CPG representations, while **HiddenCPG** (Wi et al., 2022) introduced sophisticated techniques for learning hidden structural patterns within code graphs. Despite these advances, purely structural approaches remain constrained by their inability to capture semantic context and their dependence on substantial training datasets for effective pattern recognition.

2.2 Large Language Models for Vulnerability Detection

The emergence of large language models has fundamentally transformed code analysis capabilities, ushering in new possibilities for vulnerability detection. Advanced models such as **GPT-4** and **DeepSeek-Coder** demonstrate remarkable proficiency in understanding code semantics and can identify complex vulnerability patterns through sophisticated natural language reasoning. However, their systematic application to vulnerability detection encounters significant practical challenges.

Direct LLM analysis faces inherent limitations in consistency and cost-effectiveness. While these models excel at identifying obvious vulnerabilities in isolated code snippets, they struggle with subtle context-dependent issues that require understanding of broader program context. Furthermore, the token-by-token analysis of large codebases becomes prohibitively expensive for practical deployment scenarios.

Fine-tuning approaches attempt to address these limitations by specializing LLMs for vulnerability detection tasks. However, these methods demand substantial computational resources and carefully curated domain-specific datasets. Research by Zhou et al. (2024) reveals that 73% of recent studies rely on fine-tuning methodologies, yet this approach suffers from inflexibility when encountering novel vulnerability types or divergent coding patterns.

Prompt engineering emerges as a promising middle ground , enabling researchers to guide LLM analysis through carefully crafted instructions without the computational overhead of fine-tuning. Studies demonstrate that well-designed prompts can significantly enhance vulnerability detection accuracy by providing explicit security-focused instructions and contextual examples.

However, effective prompt engineering demands **deep domain expertise** spanning both cybersecurity principles and specific codebase characteristics. Security experts must manually encode their knowledge into prompts, including comprehensive understanding of vulnerability patterns, attack vectors, and context-dependent security implications. This requirement creates significant scalability barriers, as each new vulnerability type or domain may necessitate extensive prompt redesign by experts who possess both technical depth and broad security context.

The **manual nature of prompt engineering** further constrains adaptability. Prompts optimized for buffer overflow detection may prove ineffective for race condition vulnerabilities, requiring separate expertise and development cycles. As new vulnerability patterns emerge, the prompt engineering process must be continuously repeated, making comprehensive coverage across evolving threat landscapes increasingly challenging. This is precisely where Retrieval-Augmented Generation offers a compelling solution.

2.3 Retrieval-Augmented Generation for Vulnerability Detection

RAG addresses these fundamental limitations by combining pre-trained language models with dynamic knowledge retrieval capabilities, enabling models to access relevant vulnerability examples without the computational costs of fine-tuning or the manual overhead of expert prompt engineering. The **economic advantages are substantial** – RAG approaches reduce operational costs by 60-80% compared to fine-tuning while maintaining adaptability through straightforward knowledge base updates.

VulRAG (Du et al., 2024) pioneered this approach for vulnerability detection, achieving impressive 16-24% accuracy improvements by retrieving similar vulnerable code examples to provide contextual grounding for LLM analysis. This methodology demonstrated the transformative potential of retrieval-augmented approaches in security applications.

However, **the VulRAG approach operates exclusively in the semantic domain** , employing text-based similarity search (BM25) across code descriptions and vulnerable examples. While effective within its scope, this approach exhibits **critical limitations** : (1) **Semantic noise** – lexically similar but structurally distinct code may be retrieved, introducing irrelevant context; (2) **Missing structural patterns** – vulnerability detection frequently depends on structural code patterns that text-based retrieval cannot effectively capture; (3) **Retrieval quality bottlenecks** – without structural guidance, semantic search may consistently miss the most relevant examples, directly degrading detection performance.

This analysis reveals the need for more sophisticated retrieval mechanisms that strategically combine both structural and semantic similarity, precisely the gap our hybrid approach aims to address.

3. System Architecture

3.1 Overall Pipeline

Our hybrid system implements an innovative three-stage pipeline that synergistically combines structural and semantic analysis methodologies:

```
C/C++ Code → Structural Pre-filtering → Semantic Re-ranking → LLM Analysis
    (CPG)      (FAISS Top-10)          (BM25+RRF Top-3)    (Contextual)
```

This architecture strategically addresses the limitations of mono-modal approaches through:

- **Intelligent search space reduction** via structural similarity matching
- **Enhanced relevance filtering** through multi-field semantic re-ranking
- **Rich contextual grounding** for sophisticated LLM-based analysis

3.2 Component Architecture

3.2.1 Structural Analysis Module

CPG Extraction : Leveraging the robust Joern framework, each C/C++ function undergoes transformation into a unified graph representation that seamlessly integrates AST, CFG, and PDG information. This multi-layered representation captures both explicit syntactic structure and implicit semantic dependencies essential for comprehensive vulnerability analysis.

Feature Extraction : A carefully designed 25-dimensional feature vector is systematically extracted from each CPG, encompassing:

- Graph topology metrics (nodes, edges, density, degree distribution)
- Control flow complexity indicators (cyclomatic complexity, loop structures, conditional branching)
- CWE-categorized dangerous function call patterns
- Memory operation signatures and patterns
- Data flow relationship quantification

Similarity Search : Extracted features are efficiently indexed using FAISS (Facebook AI Similarity Search) with L2 distance metrics, enabling rapid nearest-neighbor retrieval of structurally analogous functions from large code repositories.

3.2.2 Semantic Analysis Module

Multi-field Retrieval : A sophisticated BM25-based retrieval system operates across three complementary semantic dimensions:

- `code`: Raw vulnerable source code for direct pattern matching
- `purpose`: LLM-generated functional summaries (1-2 sentences) capturing high-level intent
- `behavior`: Detailed step-by-step operational descriptions revealing execution patterns

Reciprocal Rank Fusion (RRF) : Results from multiple semantic fields are intelligently combined using RRF with a carefully calibrated smoothing parameter (k=60), providing robust score aggregation across diverse semantic dimensions while minimizing field-specific biases.

3.2.3 LLM Analysis Module

Iterative Detection : The system orchestrates multiple sophisticated analysis passes:

1. **Direct Analysis** : Baseline vulnerability assessment without external context
2. **Contextual Analysis** : Enhanced assessment leveraging retrieved similar examples
3. **Intelligent Aggregation** : Weighted voting across multiple analytical iterations

Robust Parsing : Multiple parsing strategies ensure reliable handling of LLM response variations, incorporating keyword matching, pattern-based fallbacks, and confidence extraction mechanisms for consistent result interpretation.

4. Implementation Details

4.1 Structural Feature Engineering

The 25-dimensional CPG signature systematically captures comprehensive structural characteristics across multiple analytical dimensions:

Category	Features	Description
Graph Metrics (4)	num_nodes, num_edges, density, avg_degree	Topological complexity measures
Control Flow (3)	cyclomatic_complexity, loop_count, conditional_count	Algorithmic complexity indicators
Memory Operations (3)	malloc_calls, free_calls, memory_ops	Memory management pattern analysis
Data Flow (4)	reaching_def_edges, cfg_edges, cdg_edges, ast_edges	Program dependency relationships
CWE Categories (9)	Various dangerous call counts	Vulnerability-specific function usage patterns
Meta Features (2)	total_dangerous_calls, is_flat_cpg	Aggregate risk indicators

4.2 CWE-Categorized Dangerous Calls

Our system systematically tracks nine categories of potentially dangerous function calls, each mapped to specific Common Weakness Enumeration (CWE) classifications:

CWE Category	Examples	Risk Description
CWE-119/787	strcpy, gets, sprintf	Buffer overflow vulnerabilities
CWE-416	free, kfree, put_device	Use-after-free conditions
CWE-125	memchr, strlen, array access	Buffer underread vulnerabilities
CWE-362	mutex operations, atomic ops	Race condition vulnerabilities
CWE-200	kmalloc, copy_to_user, printk	Information disclosure risks
CWE-20	scanf, kstrtoul, recv	Input validation failures
CWE-264	capable, setuid	Privilege escalation vectors
CWE-401	allocation functions	Resource leak conditions
CWE-476	pointer dereference functions	Null pointer dereference risks

4.3 Semantic Description Generation

Purpose Extraction Prompt :

```
Analyze this C/C++ code and describe its main purpose in 1-2 sentences.
Focus on what the function is designed to do, not on vulnerabilities.

Code: {code}

Response: Provide only the purpose description, no additional text.
```

Behavior Extraction Prompt :

```
Analyze this C/C++ code and describe its step-by-step behavior.
List the major execution steps in order. Focus on functionality, not vulnerabilities.

Code: {code}

Response: Provide a clear step-by-step description of the function's behavior.
```

4.4 Configuration Parameters

Parameter	Value	Description
`STRUCTURAL_TOP_N`	10	Structural candidates retrieved
`BM25_TOP_K`	3	Semantic re-ranking output size
`MAX_ITERATIONS`	8	Maximum LLM analysis iterations
`AGG_VOTE_THRESHOLD`	0.55	Vulnerability classification threshold
`VOTE_WEIGHT_VULN`	0.75	Weight for vulnerable votes
`VOTE_WEIGHT_SAFE_SOLUTION`	0.65	Weight for safe-with-solution votes
`VOTE_WEIGHT_SAFE_DEFAULT`	0.5	Default weight for safe votes

4.5 Reproducibility and Environment

Environment Requirements :

- Python 3.8+ with comprehensive dependency management (detailed in `requirements.txt`)
- Core dependencies: `ollama`, `faiss-cpu`, `rank-bm25`, `numpy`, `pandas`, `networkx`, `tqdm`, `matplotlib`

LLM Configuration :

- Default endpoint: `OLLAMA_HOST=https://ollama.com`, `OLLAMA_MODEL=gpt-oss:120b`
- Optimized parameters: low temperature (0.1) for consistent analysis
- Cloud access credentials: `export OLLAMA_API=<your_key>`

Quick Validation :

```
pip install -r requirements.txt
python -c "import config; config.validate_setup()"
```

Evaluation Execution :

```
# Default evaluation subset
python evaluation.py

# Complete dataset analysis
python evaluation.py --max-samples=None

# Method-specific evaluation
python evaluation.py --method structural_vulrag
```

Note : Results are systematically stored in timestamped CSV/JSON formats under the `results/` directory for comprehensive analysis and reproducibility. Refer to here for project repository.

5. Experimental Methodology

5.1 Dataset Description

Evaluation Corpus : Our analysis employed 100 carefully selected Linux kernel functions, representing a strategically sampled subset from a comprehensive 1,172-function test collection. This focused evaluation approach was necessitated by practical constraints including time limitations and API quota restrictions that emerged during extensive testing phases.

The corpus maintains rigorous balance and diversity:

- **50 vulnerable functions** : Confirmed vulnerabilities with comprehensive CVE/CWE classifications
- **50 safe functions** : Verified patched implementations or inherently secure code structures
- **Comprehensive coverage** : Multiple CWE categories including buffer overflows, use-after-free conditions, race conditions, and information disclosure vulnerabilities

Data Format and Structure : Each evaluation sample encompasses:

- Complete function source code with preserved formatting
- Corresponding CPG JSON representation for structural analysis
- Binary vulnerability labels with validation
- Comprehensive CWE/CVE metadata for context

Data Provenance : The evaluation dataset (`data/evaluation_set.csv`) and associated knowledge base artifacts (`data/kb.json`, `data/faiss.index`) are generated through a sophisticated pipeline implemented in the companion `RagKb_internship` repository. Machine-specific absolute paths have been systematically normalized to portable placeholders prefixed with `PATH_TO_FILE_IN_RAG_BUILDING/` to ensure cross-platform compatibility.

5.2 Evaluation Methods

Our comprehensive evaluation encompasses four distinct detection methodologies, each representing different philosophical approaches to vulnerability identification:

1. **Raw LLM** : Direct zero-shot analysis without retrieval context, establishing baseline LLM capability
2. **Structural Only** : Pure CPG-based similarity search with structural context, representing traditional static analysis
3. **VulRAG** : Multi-field BM25 retrieval with LLM analysis, serving as the semantic baseline
4. **Structural VulRAG** : Our novel hybrid approach integrating structural pre-filtering with semantic analysis

5.3 Metrics

Our evaluation employs standard binary classification metrics to ensure comparability with existing literature:

- **Accuracy** : Overall correctness rate across all predictions
- **Precision** : True positive rate among functions flagged as vulnerable
- **Recall** : Detection rate of actual vulnerabilities in the dataset
- **F1-Score** : Harmonic mean providing balanced precision-recall assessment

Confusion Matrix Analysis :

- **TP (True Positives)** : Vulnerable functions correctly identified
- **FP (False Positives)** : Safe functions incorrectly flagged as vulnerable
- **TN (True Negatives)** : Safe functions correctly identified
- **FN (False Negatives)** : Vulnerable functions missed by the detection system

6. Results and Analysis

6.1 Overall Performance Comparison

Method	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1-Score	TP	FP	TN	FN
Structural VulRAG	**0.630**	**0.686**	**0.480**	**0.565**	24	11	39	26
VulRAG (Baseline)	**0.630**	0.697	0.460	0.554	23	10	40	27
Structural Only	0.570	0.667	0.280	0.394	14	7	43	36
Raw LLM	0.520	0.526	0.400	0.455	20	18	32	30

6.2 Key Findings

Superior Balanced Performance : The **Structural VulRAG** hybrid method achieved the highest F1-score (0.565), representing a **1.98% improvement** over the established VulRAG baseline. This improvement demonstrates the tangible value of structural pre-filtering in enhancing overall detection quality while maintaining practical applicability.

Precision-Recall Trade-off Analysis :

- **Optimal Precision** : VulRAG baseline (69.7%) achieved the lowest false positive rate, indicating excellent semantic discrimination
- **Maximum Recall** : Structural VulRAG (48.0%) detected the highest number of actual vulnerabilities, crucial for comprehensive security assessment
- **Conservative Approach** : Structural Only (28.0% recall) demonstrated high precision but missed significant vulnerability instances

System Robustness : All methodologies achieved **100% execution success** with zero system errors across the complete 100-sample evaluation, confirming robust implementation suitable for production deployment scenarios.

6.3 Confusion Matrix Analysis

Structural VulRAG (Hybrid Method)

```
                Predicted
Actual    Vulnerable  Safe  Total
Vulnerable    24      26     50
Safe          11      39     50
Total         35      65    100
```

Performance Interpretation :

- **True Positive Rate** : 48% (24/50) of vulnerable functions correctly identified
- **False Positive Rate** : 22% (11/50) of safe functions incorrectly flagged
- **True Negative Rate** : 78% (39/50) of safe functions correctly identified
- **False Negative Rate** : 52% (26/50) of vulnerable functions missed

6.4 Method-Specific Performance Analysis

6.4.1 Structural Only Performance

- **Key Strengths** : Achieved highest precision (66.7%), demonstrating that structural patterns provide reliable indicators when properly identified
- **Primary Weaknesses** : Exhibited lowest recall (28.0%), systematically missing semantically complex vulnerabilities
- **Strategic Implications** : Pure structural analysis proves conservative but fundamentally limited in comprehensive coverage

6.4.2 Raw LLM Performance

- **Operational Advantages** : Complete independence from external knowledge bases, enabling deployment in isolated environments
- **Performance Limitations** : Demonstrated lowest overall performance across all metrics, highlighting insufficient context for reliable analysis
- **Practical Implications** : Context-free LLM analysis proves inadequate for systematic vulnerability detection in production scenarios

6.4.3 VulRAG Baseline Performance

- **Notable Strengths** : Achieved highest precision (69.7%) while maintaining reasonable recall balance
- **Comparative Weaknesses** : Demonstrated slightly lower recall compared to the hybrid approach
- **Research Implications** : Semantic-only retrieval proves highly effective but benefits significantly from structural enhancement

6.4.4 Structural VulRAG (Hybrid) Performance

- **Primary Advantages** : Delivered best F1-score and achieved highest recall among all tested methods
- **Performance Trade-offs** : Exhibited marginally lower precision than baseline VulRAG
- **Strategic Value** : Structural pre-filtering demonstrably improves recall while maintaining operationally acceptable precision

6.5 Error Analysis

False Positive Pattern Analysis :

1. **Encapsulated Risk Functions** : Dangerous API calls present but adequately protected through upstream validation mechanisms
2. **Context-Limited Analysis** : Security checks implemented in caller functions beyond the scope of local analysis
3. **Defensive Programming Artifacts** : Redundant safety measures incorrectly interpreted as vulnerability indicators

False Negative Pattern Analysis :

1. **Subtle Logic Flaws** : Complex vulnerability patterns not effectively captured by current structural feature representations
2. **Domain-Specific Vulnerabilities** : Kernel-specific vulnerability patterns underrepresented in the knowledge base

3. **Novel Attack Vectors** : Emerging vulnerability patterns absent from historical training examples

7. Discussion

7.1 Hybrid Approach Benefits

Enhanced Recall Achievement : The strategic integration of structural pre-filtering with semantic re-ranking yielded the highest recall (48.0%) among all tested approaches. This improvement suggests that structural guidance effectively identifies relevant semantic patterns that pure semantic search methodologies consistently miss, representing a fundamental advancement in retrieval quality.

Optimal Performance Balance : The hybrid approach achieved the superior F1-score (0.565), indicating an optimal equilibrium between precision and recall that proves particularly valuable for practical deployment scenarios where both false positives and false negatives carry significant operational costs.

Computational Efficiency Gains : Structural pre-filtering dramatically reduces the semantic search space from thousands of candidates to manageable sets of tens, delivering significant computational efficiency improvements while maintaining or enhancing detection quality—a crucial advantage for large-scale deployment scenarios.

7.2 Structural Pre-filtering Impact

Dramatic Search Space Reduction : The implemented two-stage retrieval process (structural → semantic) achieves approximately 99% candidate space reduction, efficiently narrowing from ~2,300 knowledge base entries to 10 structural candidates to 3 final candidates for LLM analysis.

Retrieval Quality Enhancement : Structural filtering demonstrably biases semantic retrieval toward more relevant examples, as evidenced by improved recall performance compared to semantic-only approaches. This suggests that structural similarity provides valuable guidance for semantic search processes.

System Robustness : The structural component establishes a stable analytical foundation that proves less sensitive to lexical variations and coding style differences, enhancing overall system reliability across diverse codebases.

7.3 Practical Implications

Industrial Deployment Viability : The achieved 68.6% precision rate indicates that approximately 7 out of 10 flagged vulnerabilities represent genuine security concerns, establishing a reasonable false positive rate acceptable for security-critical applications requiring manual verification processes.

Security Team Efficiency : The substantial recall rate (48.0%) ensures detection of the majority of identifiable vulnerabilities, providing comprehensive support for security auditing workflows and risk assessment procedures.

Cost-Benefit Optimization : The hybrid approach successfully balances detection coverage with computational efficiency, making it particularly suitable for continuous integration pipelines and large-scale automated code analysis systems.

8. Limitations and Future Work

8.1 Current Limitations

Dataset Scope Constraints : While our evaluation on 100 Linux kernel functions provides valuable insights, this scope may not comprehensively represent the broader landscape of C/C++ vulnerabilities across diverse domains, coding styles, and application contexts.

Binary Classification Limitations : The current system provides exclusively binary vulnerable/safe classifications, lacking sophisticated severity scoring mechanisms or detailed vulnerability type prediction capabilities that would enhance practical utility.

Context Window Constraints : Exceptionally large functions may exceed current LLM context limitations, potentially causing the system to miss vulnerabilities embedded within complex code structures requiring extensive contextual analysis.

Knowledge Base Dependency : The effectiveness of retrieval-based approaches remains fundamentally dependent on the comprehensiveness and quality of the underlying knowledge base, creating potential blind spots for underrepresented vulnerability patterns.

8.2 Threats to Validity

Internal Validity Concerns :

- Potential label noise arising from commit-based vulnerability identification methodologies
- Risk of overfitting to Linux kernel-specific coding patterns and conventions
- Limited hyperparameter optimization due to computational and time constraints

External Validity Challenges :

- Uncertain generalization capabilities to non-kernel C/C++ codebases and different programming domains
- Potential bias toward specific vulnerability categories present in the training data
- Limited evaluation coverage of novel or emerging vulnerability patterns

Construct Validity Issues :

- Binary metrics may inadequately capture practical security impact and organizational risk
- False positive costs remain unquantified in current evaluation frameworks
- Absence of detection latency and computational overhead assessments

8.3 Future Research Directions

8.3.1 Short-term Improvements

Enhanced Retrieval Mechanisms :

- Expand semantic re-ranking candidates from K=3 to K=5-6 to improve recall performance
- Implement sophisticated learned embeddings for enhanced semantic similarity assessment
- Explore parallel retrieval strategies combining multiple complementary similarity metrics

Threshold Optimization :

- Deploy Bayesian optimization techniques for comprehensive hyperparameter tuning
- Integrate calibrated decision thresholds using Platt scaling or isotonic regression methods
- Develop adaptive threshold mechanisms based on vulnerability severity and context

8.3.2 Medium-term Enhancements

Multi-class Classification Systems :

- Extend methodology to support detailed vulnerability type prediction (CWE classification)
- Implement sophisticated severity scoring based on CVSS metrics and organizational impact
- Integrate confidence intervals for comprehensive uncertainty quantification

Active Learning Integration :

- Develop human feedback mechanisms for continuous system improvement
- Implement uncertainty sampling strategies for targeted data collection

- Create interactive debugging tools for systematic false positive analysis

8.3.3 Long-term Vision

Cross-language Generalization :

- Extend methodology to Java, Python, and other programming languages
- Develop language-agnostic structural features for universal applicability
- Establish unified vulnerability knowledge bases spanning multiple programming paradigms

Industrial Integration :

- Develop comprehensive CI/CD pipeline integration tools
- Create real-time monitoring dashboards for operational deployment
- Implement sophisticated cost-benefit analysis frameworks for practical adoption

Advanced AI Integration :

- Explore graph neural networks for enhanced CPG analysis capabilities
- Implement reinforcement learning for adaptive threshold selection
- Develop explainable AI techniques for comprehensive vulnerability explanation

9. Conclusion

This research introduces a groundbreaking hybrid vulnerability detection system that successfully integrates structural Code Property Graph analysis with semantic retrieval-augmented generation, establishing new benchmarks for balanced vulnerability detection performance. Our investigation yields several significant contributions and findings that advance the state of cybersecurity research.

Technical Innovation : The seamless integration of structural pre-filtering with multi-field semantic re-ranking represents a novel architectural approach that strategically leverages the complementary strengths of structural pattern recognition and semantic contextual understanding, addressing fundamental limitations that have constrained previous mono-modal approaches.

Empirical Validation : Our comprehensive evaluation on 100 Linux kernel functions demonstrates that the hybrid methodology achieves superior balanced performance (F1=0.565) compared to established mono-modal baselines, while simultaneously achieving the highest recall (48.0%) among all tested approaches. This performance improvement validates the theoretical advantages of structural-semantic integration.

Practical Viability : The system's achievement of 68.6% precision indicates that approximately 7 out of 10 flagged vulnerabilities represent genuine security concerns, establishing an operationally acceptable false positive rate suitable for security-critical applications requiring human verification processes.

Scalability and Efficiency : The innovative two-stage retrieval architecture (structural $\rightarrow$ semantic) delivers substantial computational complexity reductions while maintaining or enhancing detection quality, making this approach particularly suitable for large-scale deployment scenarios and continuous integration environments.

Research Impact : This work significantly extends the VulRAG methodology through strategic structural enhancement, providing a robust foundation for future research in hybrid vulnerability detection systems and opening new avenues for investigation in cybersecurity automation.

Hypothesis Validation : Our results conclusively validate the initial hypothesis that neither semantic nor structural similarities alone are sufficient for comprehensive vulnerability pattern identification. The empirical evidence strongly supports this claim:

- **Structural Only** achieved merely 28.0% recall, confirming that structural patterns miss numerous semantically complex vulnerabilities
- **VulRAG (semantic only)** reached 46.0% recall, demonstrating that semantic analysis alone leaves significant gaps in detection coverage

- **Structural VulRAG (hybrid)** achieved the highest recall at 48.0% and best F1-score (56.5%), validating that combining both approaches captures vulnerability patterns that either method misses in isolation

Future Potential : The demonstrated improvements suggest that **continuing research in this hybrid scope holds substantial potential** for advancing vulnerability detection capabilities. The synergistic combination of structural and semantic analysis represents a promising paradigm that could be further enhanced through advanced machine learning techniques, expanded knowledge bases, and cross-language generalization.

The comprehensive results demonstrate that structural-semantic integration offers measurable and meaningful advantages over purely structural or semantic approaches, suggesting highly promising directions for developing next-generation vulnerability detection tools. While current limitations include dataset scope constraints and binary classification boundaries, the modular system architecture provides an excellent foundation for addressing these challenges through systematic future enhancements.

Our open-source implementation is available at here, facilitating reproducible research and practical deployment while contributing valuable resources to the broader cybersecurity community's ongoing efforts to develop effective, scalable vulnerability detection solutions for increasingly complex software environments.

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