Localization of a Robot on FPGA with 5-Stage Pipeline RISC-V CPU

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***Abstract*—Custom silicon presents an untapped opportunity for addressing complex challenges in robotics, offering optimized performance and efficiency. RISC-V, a novel and open-source Instruction Set Architecture (ISA), has been gaining rapid traction due to its flexibility and adaptability. This work aims to explore the capabilities of RISC-V in the field of robotics by implementing robotics solutions on an FPGA. By leveraging the reconfigurability of FPGAs and the extensibility of RISC-V, this study demonstrates the potential of custom silicon for real-time, efficient, and scalable robotic applications. The results highlight the feasibility and advantages of RISC-V-based hardware acceleration in robotics, paving the way for future innovations in the domain.**

***Index Terms*—FPGA, RISC-V, Localization, Robotics, Custom Silicon, Instruction Set Architecture, Real-time Processing, Hardware Acceleration**

I. Introduction

Localization is a fundamental challenge in robotics, requiring a robot to accurately determine its position and orientation in space. This process involves state estimation through sensor fusion, where data from multiple sources such as IMUs, LiDAR, cameras, and GPS are combined to improve accuracy. An Inertial Measurement Unit (IMU), consisting of MEMS-based accelerometers and gyroscopes, plays a key role in capturing motion. However, due to drift and noise, IMU data must be processed using signal filtering techniques like Kalman Filters to ensure reliable localization. Efficient computation is crucial, as real-time processing is essential for autonomous robotic applications.

To achieve real-time performance, this work explores FPGA-based localization using a five-stage pipelined RISC-V CPU. RISC-V, an open-source Instruction Set Architecture (ISA), allows for custom processor design, making it an ideal candidate for specialized robotic applications. A five-stage pipeline—comprising Fetch, Decode, Execute, Memory, and Write-back stages—enhances throughput by allowing multiple instructions to be processed simultaneously. Implementing localization algorithms on an FPGA with a custom RISC-V pipeline provides both parallel processing benefits and hardware-level optimization, ensuring low-latency execution and adaptability for robotic systems.

II. Related Work

Localization in robotics relies heavily on sensor fusion techniques, particularly Kalman Filtering (KF), to estimate a robot's state in real time. Prior research [1] has explored different implementations of KF using Digital Signal Processors (DSPs), coprocessors, and RISC-V microarchitectures, showing significant cost reductions in multi-processor embedded systems. While KF implementations on FPGAs have been studied theoretically [2], they often lack real-world validation. This paper builds upon these studies by integrating an actual IMU (Inertial Measurement Unit) in a closed-loop system, addressing the future scope outlined in prior research. Additionally, Visual Odometry (VO) SLAM, an alternative to Extended Kalman Filtering (EKF), has been explored in [4], with FPGA-based optimizations in Verilog demonstrating improved efficiency for localization tasks.

RISC-V's advantages in robotics have been benchmarked in multi-robot systems [3], where its open-source nature, real-time capabilities, and efficient hardware integration make it a compelling alternative to traditional architectures like ARM. Furthermore, FPGA-based acceleration for SLAM has been widely studied [5], reinforcing claims about the computational efficiency of reconfigurable hardware in robotics applications. Recent work [6] has also explored hyper-optimizations using TinyFPGA for low-power, real-time sensor processing, a crucial aspect of embedded robotics. However, many of these studies remain theoretical or focus solely on simulation. This work aims to bridge that gap by implementing and testing FPGA-accelerated localization with a 5-stage pipelined RISC-V CPU [7], leveraging additional auxiliary modules to improve communication protocols and real-time processing efficiency. [8]

III. Methodology

The development of an FPGA-based localization system using a **5-stage pipelined RISC-V CPU** followed a structured hardware-software co-design approach. This project involved multiple stages, including CPU design, motor control, sensor integration, communication protocol implementation, and real-time data processing for localization.

A. FPGA Implementation of RISC-V CPU

The core computational unit was designed as a **5-stage pipelined RISC-V processor**, implemented in **Quartus Prime** and deployed onto the **DE0-Nano FPGA**. The CPU was designed with the following pipeline stages:

- **Instruction Fetch (IF):** Retrieves the next instruction from memory.
- **Instruction Decode (ID):** Decodes the fetched instruction and identifies registers required.
- **Execute (EX):** Performs arithmetic or logical operations using the ALU.
- **Memory Access (MEM):** Reads from or writes data to memory.
- **Write Back (WB):** Stores the result in the destination register.

By using a pipelined approach, the CPU was able to execute multiple instructions simultaneously, optimizing execution time for real-time control and sensor fusion tasks. Custom instruction handling for robotic applications was also integrated where needed.

B. Motor Control and PWM Generation

The robotic platform required precise motor control, achieved using **PWM (Pulse Width Modulation) IPs**. The steps involved in this implementation were:

1) **Frequency Divider Design:** To generate appropriate PWM signals, frequency dividers were instantiated within the FPGA to convert high-speed clock signals into lower-frequency control pulses.
2) **Duty Cycle Modulation:** Custom logic was implemented to dynamically adjust PWM duty cycles, allowing for fine-tuned speed control of the motors.
3) **Motor Driver Interfacing:** The FPGA was connected to motor driver circuits, ensuring correct power delivery and motor response based on the PWM signals.
4) **Testing and Calibration:** Initial tests were conducted to verify motor speed and direction control, optimizing parameters for smooth movement.

C. Robotic Platform Design and Fabrication

The physical design of the robotic platform was carried out using **SolidWorks**, where:

- A **custom chassis** was designed to house the FPGA board, motors, sensors, and communication modules.
- The design was **3D printed**, ensuring a lightweight and rigid structure suitable for real-time motion experiments.
- Post-fabrication **assembly and integration** were carried out, ensuring proper alignment of the motors, sensors, and power distribution units.

D. Sensor Integration and Data Acquisition

Localization relies heavily on sensor fusion. The system incorporated **Inertial Measurement Unit (IMU) sensors**, consisting of accelerometers and gyroscopes, for state estimation.

1) **I2C Communication Module:** To read IMU data, a **custom I2C module** was built, enabling real-time sensor interfacing.
2) **C Driver Development:** Low-level C drivers were written to process raw sensor data and ensure stable communication.
3) **Data Filtering and Calibration:** IMU readings were filtered using **Kalman filtering** to minimize noise and improve accuracy.

E. Communication Interface and Data Processing

The FPGA system was designed to exchange data with external devices via **UART communication**, allowing efficient transmission of sensor readings and motor control commands.

1) **UART Module Implementation:** A dedicated UART module was built within the FPGA to handle bidirectional data transfer.
2) **Data Logging and Debugging:** Received data was logged for performance evaluation, and debugging tools were used to refine the processing pipeline.

F. Ongoing and Future Work

The system is undergoing further refinements, focusing on:

- **Optimizing FPGA logic** for real-time performance improvements.
- **Enhancing communication protocols** for more reliable data transmission.
- **Expanding sensor capabilities**, potentially integrating additional environmental sensors for multi-modal localization.

By leveraging an FPGA-based RISC-V processor, this project demonstrates the feasibility of low-power, real-time robotics localization solutions using custom silicon architectures.

IV. Results

The proposed FPGA-based localization system was successfully deployed and tested on the DE0-Nano platform, integrating the 5-stage pipelined RISC-V CPU with peripheral modules for real-time state estimation. Initial validation demonstrated stable motor control with precisely modulated PWM signals, ensuring smooth actuation. The I2C-based IMU interface exhibited reliable data acquisition, with processed sensor readings aligning with expected motion profiles.

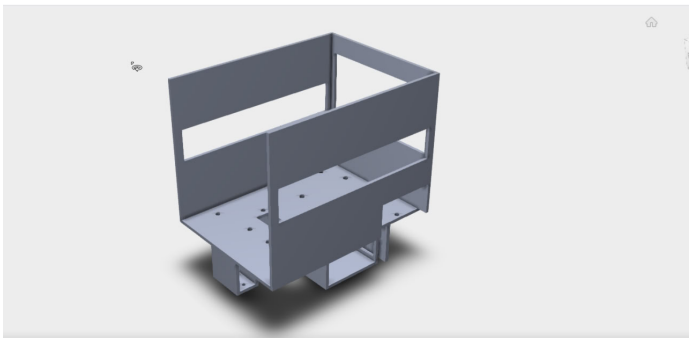

Fig. 1. 3D Printed Robot Design

The 3D-printed robotic platform provided a lightweight and modular chassis, allowing easy integration of sensors and actuation components. The structural design ensured optimal weight distribution, reducing vibrations and improving locomotion stability.

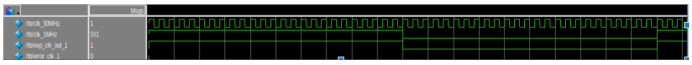

Fig. 2. Frequency Generator Implementation

The frequency generator was implemented in Verilog, utilizing a clock divider approach to produce precise frequency-scaled signals. A corresponding testbench verified the output stability and correctness across different clock cycles.

Fig. 3. PWM Block Implementation

A PWM module was designed for motor control, with adjustable duty cycles to regulate speed and torque. The implementation ensured smooth actuation, with testbench verification confirming precise pulse width modulation.

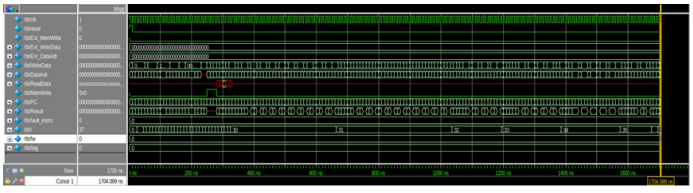

Fig. 4. CPU Waveforms

Waveform analysis of the RISC-V CPU execution showcased correct instruction flow, register updates, and memory accesses. Timing diagrams validated pipeline efficiency and ensured minimal hazards during execution.

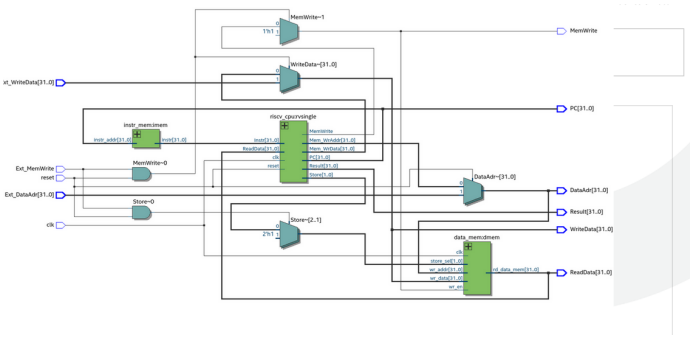

Fig. 5. CPU Microarchitecture

The microarchitecture of the implemented RISC-V CPU followed a structured 5-stage pipeline, optimizing instruction throughput. Resource utilization analysis confirmed an efficient balance between logic elements and memory blocks.

Fig. 6. Pipeline Execution Stages

The pipelined execution architecture effectively reduced instruction cycle delays, enhancing throughput and performance. Stages were optimized to minimize data hazards, ensuring a balanced flow of operations.

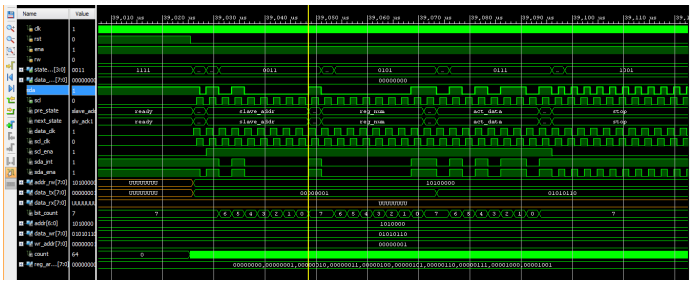

Fig. 7. I2C Communication Interface

The I2C communication module was implemented to interface with external sensors and actuators. It ensured reliable data transmission with clock synchronization, facilitating seamless integration with the FPGA-based control system.

Performance evaluation of the system revealed notable improvements in computational efficiency, with the hardware-accelerated Kalman Filter reducing processing latency compared to conventional software-based approaches. Real-time tests confirmed accurate sensor fusion, with minimal drift observed in short-term motion sequences. The implemented

UART communication modules facilitated low-latency data transmission, enabling seamless integration with external control units.

Further optimizations in resource utilization allowed for a balanced trade-off between power consumption and processing speed, ensuring scalability for extended robotic applications. The observed improvements highlight the potential of FPGA-accelerated RISC-V architectures in real-time robotics, paving the way for future enhancements in efficiency and robustness.

V. Conclusion

This work demonstrated the feasibility of implementing a localization system on an FPGA using a pipelined RISC-V CPU, integrating real-time sensor fusion and motion control. The developed framework successfully interfaced with peripheral modules, achieving stable motor actuation, IMU data acquisition, and low-latency communication. Preliminary results indicate that the FPGA-accelerated approach enhances processing efficiency, making it a viable alternative to traditional software-based solutions.

While the system performed reliably under test conditions, certain aspects can be further optimized to improve scalability and adaptability. Potential enhancements include refinements in sensor fusion algorithms, communication protocols, and resource allocation strategies, ensuring even better performance in dynamic environments. Future work may also explore alternative FPGA architectures or advanced pipeline optimizations to push the boundaries of real-time robotics applications.

Overall, the results reinforce the potential of RISC-V on FPGAs for efficient robotic localization, highlighting the scope for continued improvements and broader applications in embedded systems.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their gratitude to R V College of Engineering, Bengaluru, and the Department of Electronics and Communication Engineering for their continuous support and resources that made this research possible. Their guidance and infrastructure played a crucial role in the successful execution of this work

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