International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

A Comparative Study of Static and Dynamic Memory Allocation in Demonstrating them into Windows Subsystem Linux with C, Java, and Python

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Abstract

Memory allocation is a fundamental aspect of program execution that directly influences performance, reliability, and resource utilization. This study presents a comparative analysis of static and dynamic memory allocation techniques across three widely used programming languages: C, Java, and Python. The research evaluates their behavior in real-world code scenarios through a series of benchmark tests measuring allocation time, memory consumption, and execution efficiency. To ensure a consistent and replicable testing environment, all C-based implementations and profiling were conducted using Windows Subsystem for Linux (WSL) running Ubuntu, providing native Linux compatibility within a Windows setup. Static allocation, typically associated with compile-time efficiency, is contrasted with dynamic allocation strategies that offer runtime flexibility but incur additional overhead. Using tools such as Valgrind, VisualVM, and Tracemalloc, empirical data were collected under controlled conditions. Results reveal that while static memory allocation generally offers faster access and lower memory footprint, dynamic allocation provides scalability and adaptability at the cost of increased runtime overhead. The study aims to guide developers and educators in selecting appropriate memory models depending on application requirements. Ultimately, this work contributes to a deeper understanding of memory behavior across different language paradigms, profiling tools, and execution environments including hybrid Windows–Linux systems.

Keywords: memory allocation, static allocation, dynamic allocation, memory profiling, C, Java, Python, valgrind, visualvm, tracemalloc

1. Introduction

Memory management plays a pivotal role in the efficiency and reliability of modern software systems. It governs how applications allocate, use, and release resources during execution, directly influencing both system performance and stability. Among the fundamental strategies in this domain are static and dynamic memory allocation, which determine whether memory is reserved during compile time or at runtime [1]. Understanding the operational differences between these approaches is essential for software engineers seeking to optimize execution speed, minimize fragmentation, and improve overall computational efficiency.

Research indicates that static memory allocation enhances predictability and execution speed because memory is pre-determined before runtime. However, it lacks flexibility in handling variable data sizes, which can limit scalability in complex applications [2]. Conversely, dynamic memory allocation enables more adaptive resource management by allowing programs to allocate and release memory as needed, but this flexibility introduces additional overhead and the potential for issues such as fragmentation and memory leaks [3].

Comparative analyses conducted across different programming languages have highlighted the varying impacts of these allocation strategies. For example, studies show that languages like C provide explicit memory control, offering fine-grained optimization but requiring careful management to avoid leaks and invalid accesses [4]. In contrast, higher-level languages such as Java and Python employ automatic garbage collection mechanisms that simplify memory handling but reduce execution determinism [5].

In recent years, benchmarking efforts have demonstrated that the performance gap between statically and dynamically managed languages remains significant. Baroudi et al. (2020) found that static allocation models in linear algebra kernels provide lower latency and better cache utilization, whereas dynamic models improve scalability for larger datasets [6]. Similarly, empirical evaluations by Zehra et al. (2020) and Prechelt (2000) observed that interpreted languages like Python, while user-friendly, incur additional overhead compared to compiled languages such as C and Java, particularly in memory-intensive operations [7].

To provide a consistent and replicable experimental framework, this study integrates the use of Windows Subsystem for Linux (WSL) running Ubuntu, ensuring native Linux compatibility within a Windows environment. Through this setup, programs written in C, Java, and Python were executed and analyzed using profiling tools such as Valgrind, VisualVM, and Tracemalloc. This approach ensures cross-platform consistency while demonstrating real-time differences in heap behavior, memory allocation efficiency, and garbage collection performance.

Ultimately, this comparative study seeks to deepen the understanding of how memory allocation techniques influence performance across different language paradigms. The findings aim to assist both developers and educators in selecting appropriate programming models for specific computational requirements, while also highlighting the benefits of using hybrid Windows–Linux environments for empirical software testing and system profiling.

2. Methodologies

This study employs a hands-on comparative analysis using three programming languages: C, Java, and Python, extending the approaches used in prior comparative works (Prechelt, 2000; Zehra et al., 2020; Li et al., 2018). Equivalent programs are implemented to demonstrate both static and dynamic allocation under controlled conditions. The following profiling tools are utilized:

- Valgrind and Massif for C (heap and leak detection),
- VisualVM for Java (object heap profiling), and
- Tracemalloc for Python (memory tracing and allocation tracking).

Data collected includes heap usage, allocation/deallocation frequency, and runtime efficiency metrics. The design ensures that performance data is comparable across languages, allowing direct observation of allocation-time trade-offs, as emphasized by prior studies (Baroudi et al., 2020; Parveen & Fatima, 2016).

2.1 Demonstration of Valgrind for C

2.1.1 Complete Initial Setup

- After entering your username (xlales), it will ask for a password. Set one and remember it.
- Once done, you'll land in a Ubuntu terminal like this:

Figure 1. Initial Setup in Ubuntu

```bash
xlales@your-pc-name:~$
```

2.1.2 Update Package Manager

Figure 2. Update package manager

```bash
sudo apt update && sudo apt upgrade -y
```

2.1.3 Install Development Tools

Figure 3. Installation of valgrind

```bash
sudo apt install build-essential valgrind gdb
```

This installs:

- gcc (C compiler)
- make (for Makefiles)
- valgrind (for memory profiling)
- gdb (debugger)

2.1.4 Create a C Test File

- **You can use nano or any text editor:**

Figure 4. Make editing access in Ubuntu and file name test.c

```bash
nano test.c
```

Figure 5. Simple Code for memory allocation in Valgrind for C

Figure 6. Outputs in Valgrind compilation for memory allocation

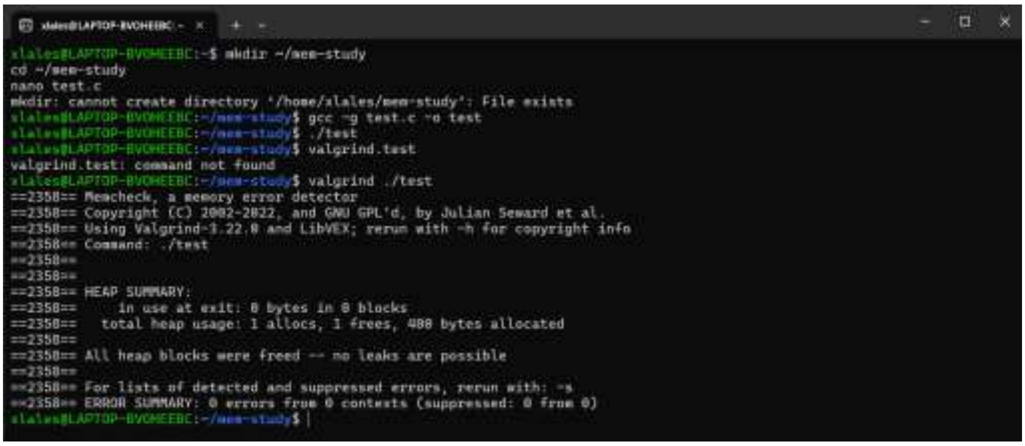
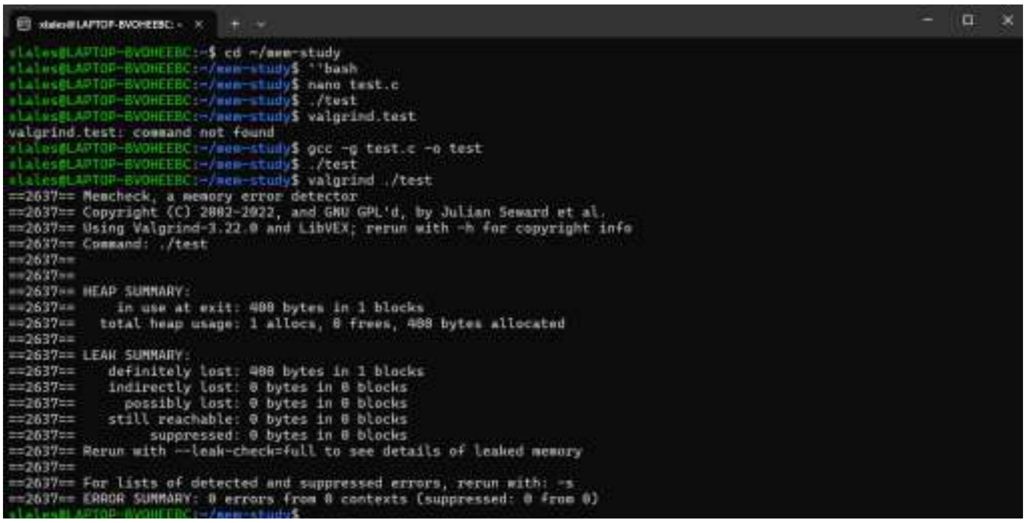


Figure 7. Summary of heap and leak results from Valgrind



2.2 Demonstration of VisualVM for Java

2.2.1 Install Java

Make sure WSL and Ubuntu are already set up (as you did for GCC/Valgrind). Then open your Ubuntu terminal and install Java & VisualVM:

Figure 8. Install Java in Ubuntu terminal

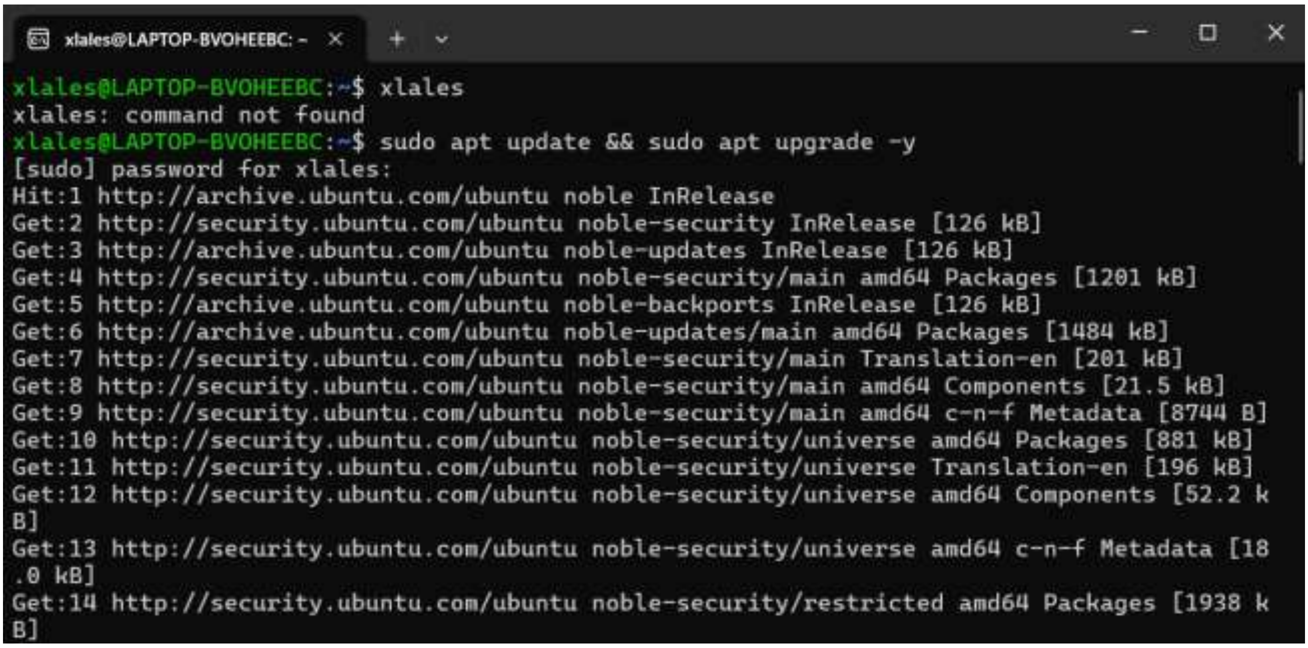
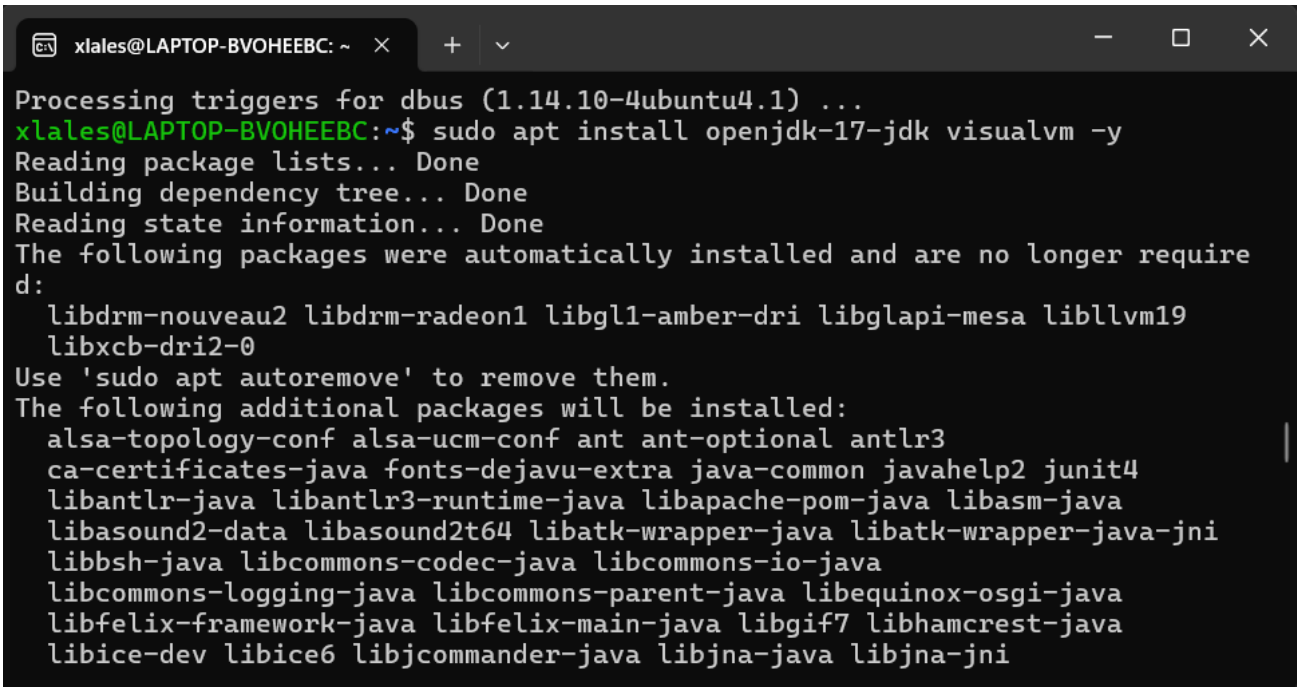


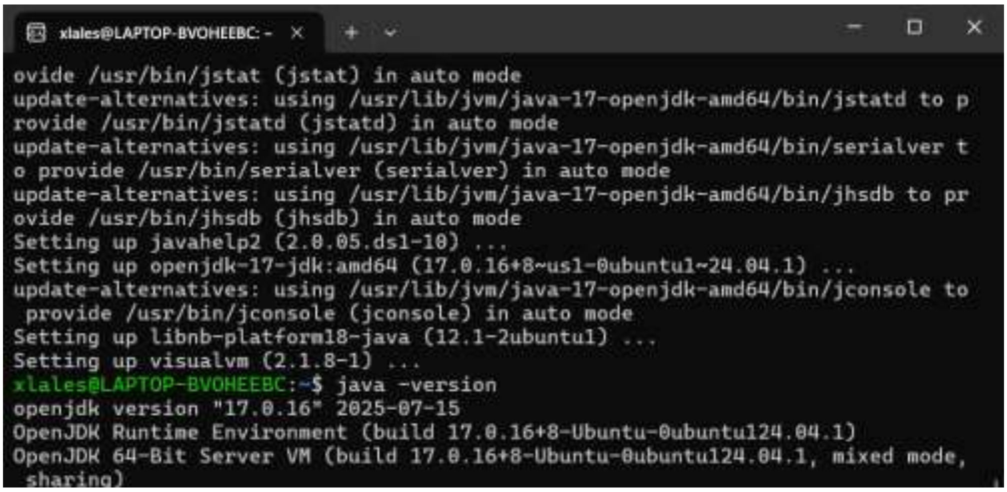
Figure 9. Install VisualVM after Java in Ubuntu Terminal



2.2.2 Verify Version

If the installation is successful and complete in packages

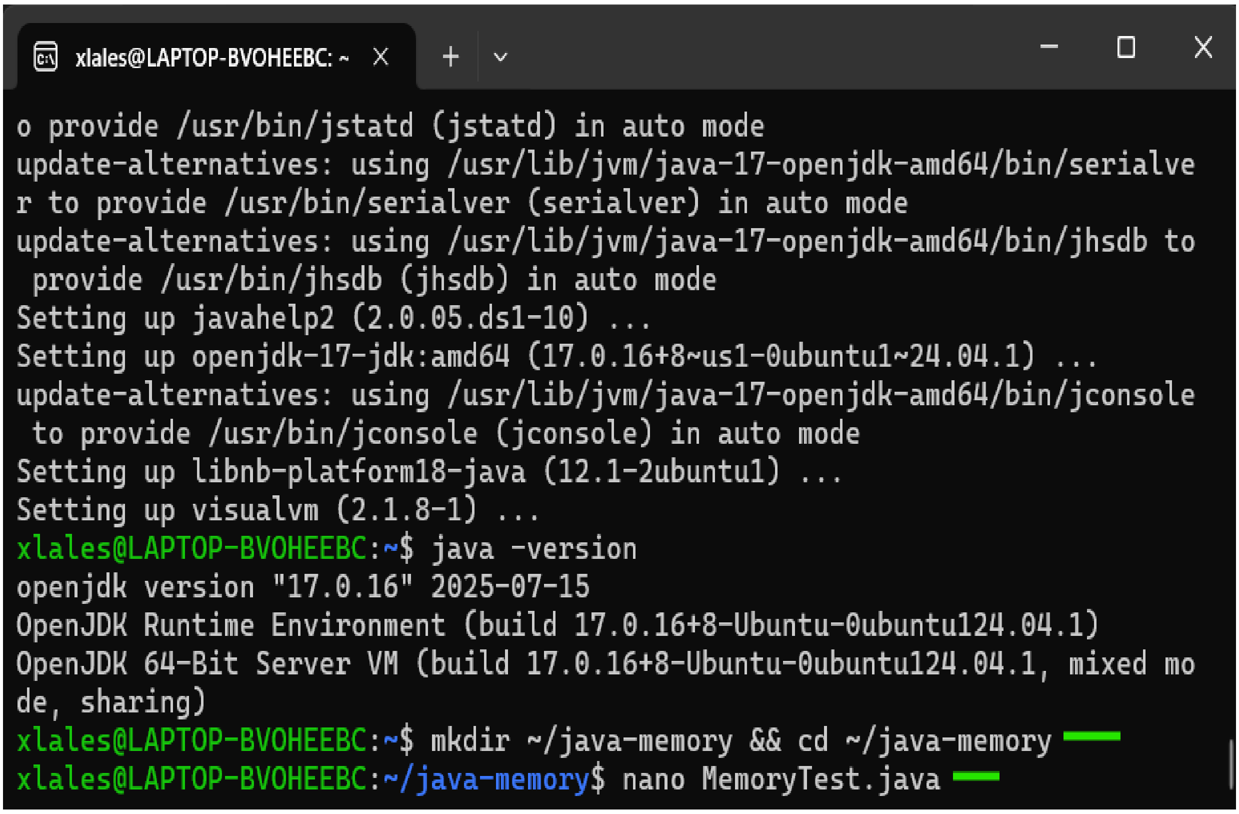
Figure 10. Verifying version of Java for compatibility



2.2.3 Create a directory

For the new demonstration and filing of code to test run in VisualVM

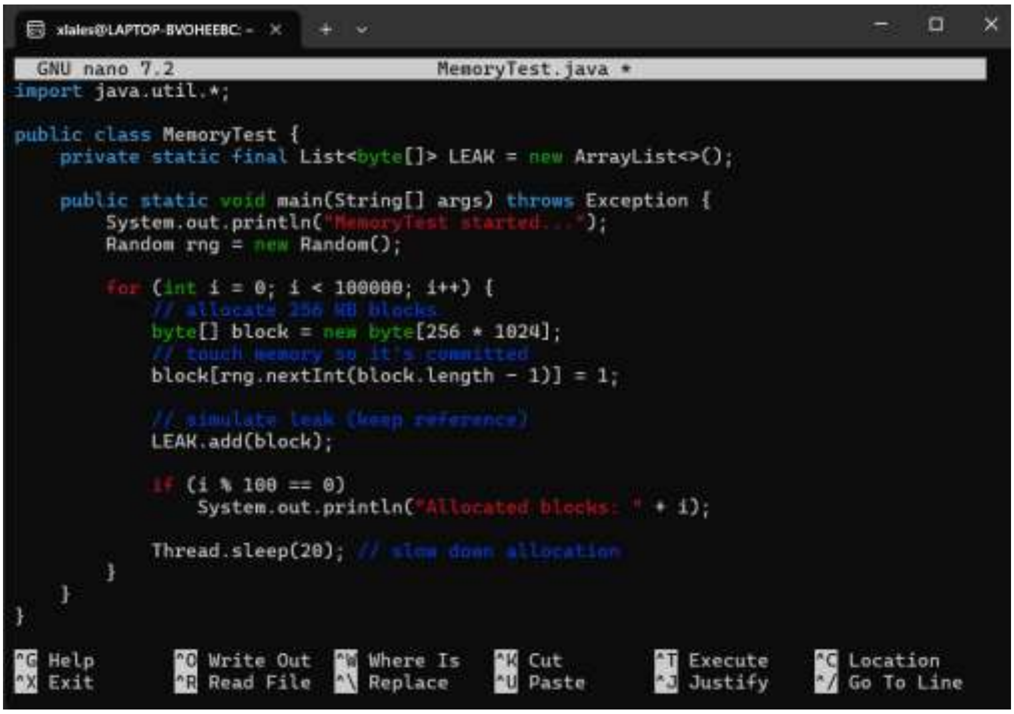
Figure 11. Create a directory namely MemoryTest.java



2.2.4 Run code for simple allocations and intentional leaks

To intentionally show the result of intentional leaks in memory allocations

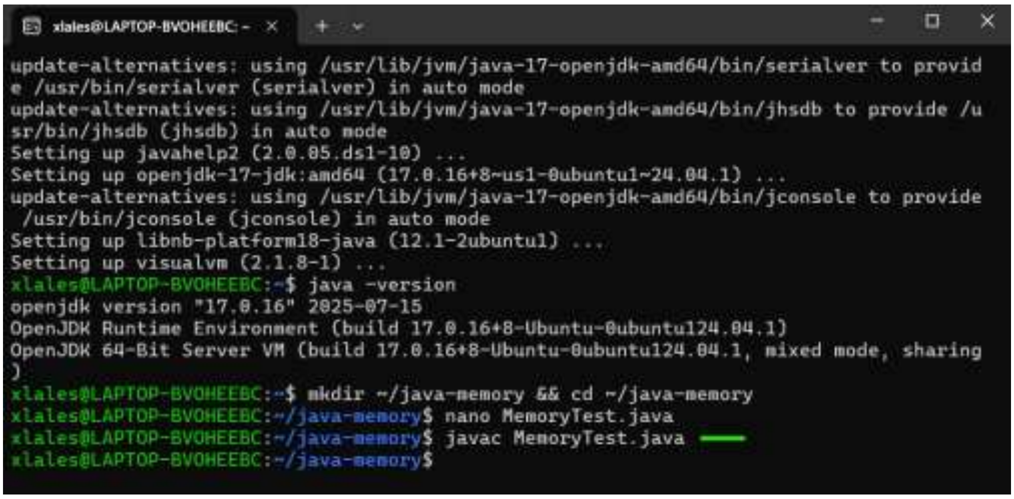
Figure 12. Heap usage graph showing steady memory growth under intentional leak in Java



```
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC: ~
GNU nano 7.2                    MemoryTest.java *
import java.util.*;

public class MemoryTest {
    private static final List<byte[]> LEAK = new ArrayList<>();

    public static void main(String[] args) throws Exception {
        System.out.println("MemoryTest started...");
        Random rng = new Random();

        for (int i = 0; i < 100000; i++) {
            // allocate 256 KB blocks
            byte[] block = new byte[256 * 1024];
            // touch memory so it's committed
            block[rng.nextInt(block.length - 1)] = 1;

            // simulate leak (keep reference)
            LEAK.add(block);

            if (i % 100 == 0)
                System.out.println("Allocated blocks: " + i);

            Thread.sleep(20); // slow down allocation
        }
    }
}
^G Help      ^O Write Out  ^W Where Is  ^K Cut    ^T Execute  ^C Location
^X Exit      ^R Read File  ^\ Replace   ^U Paste  ^J Justify  ^/ Go To Line
```

2.2.5 Compile the program

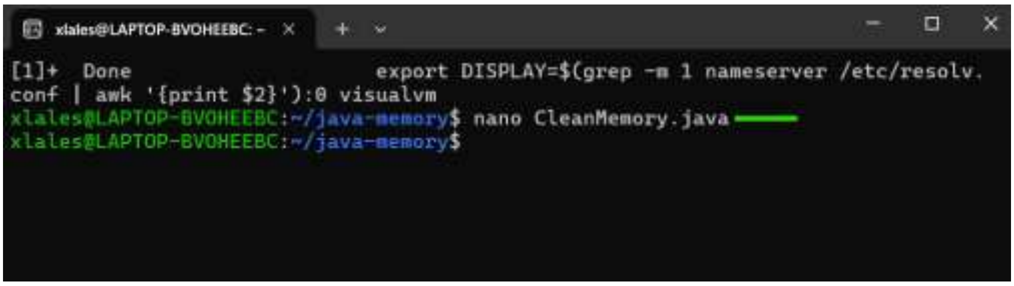
Figure 12. Compile the program with the MemoryTest.java filename



```
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC: ~
update-alternatives: using /usr/lib/jvm/java-17-openjdk-amd64/bin/serialver to provid
e /usr/bin/serialver (serialver) in auto mode
update-alternatives: using /usr/lib/jvm/java-17-openjdk-amd64/bin/jhsdb to provide /u
sr/bin/jhsdb (jhsdb) in auto mode
Setting up javahelp2 (2.0.05.ds1-10) ...
Setting up openjdk-17-jdk:amd64 (17.0.16+8~us1-0ubuntu1~24.04.1) ...
update-alternatives: using /usr/lib/jvm/java-17-openjdk-amd64/bin/jconsole to provide
 /usr/bin/jconsole (jconsole) in auto mode
Setting up libnb-platform18-java (12.1-2ubuntu1) ...
Setting up visualvm (2.1.8-1) ...
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~$ java -version
openjdk version "17.0.16" 2025-07-15
OpenJDK Runtime Environment (build 17.0.16+8-Ubuntu-0ubuntu124.04.1)
OpenJDK 64-Bit Server VM (build 17.0.16+8-Ubuntu-0ubuntu124.04.1, mixed mode, sharing
)
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~$ mkdir ~/java-memory && cd ~/java-memory
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/java-memory$ nano MemoryTest.java
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/java-memory$ javac MemoryTest.java
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/java-memory$
```

2.2.6 Create another file for non-leaking sample

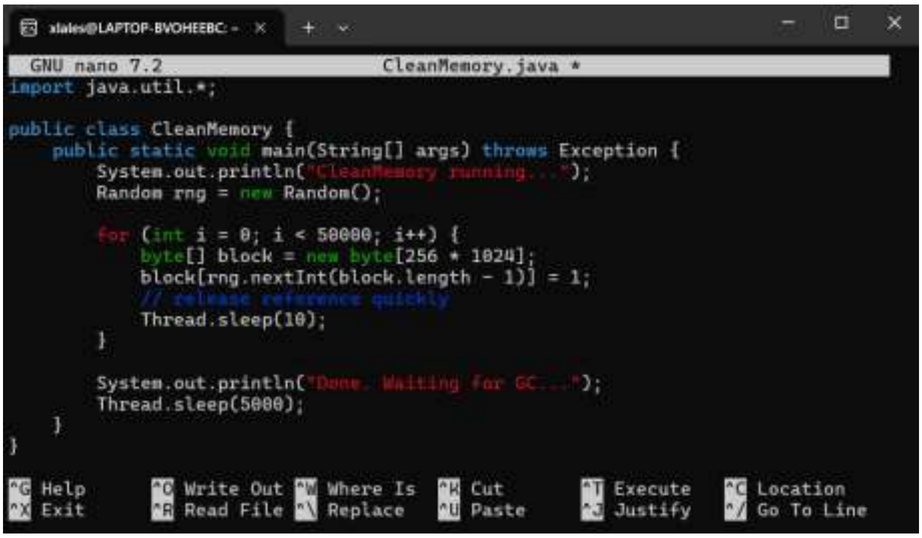
Figure 13. Non-leaking directory creation file name CleanMemory.java



```
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC: ~
[1]+  Done                    export DISPLAY=$(grep -m 1 nameserver /etc/resolv.
conf | awk '{print $2}'):0 visualvm
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/java-memory$ nano CleanMemory.java
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/java-memory$
```

2.2.7 Run code for a non-leaking demonstration

Figure 14. Input code for non-leaking demonstration

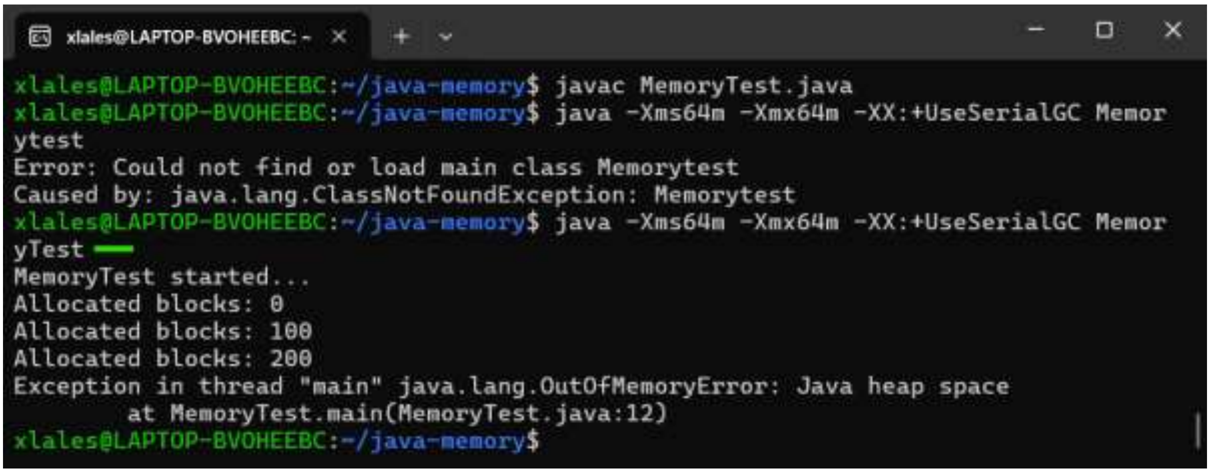


```
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC: ~
GNU nano 7.2                    CleanMemory.java *
import java.util.*;

public class CleanMemory {
    public static void main(String[] args) throws Exception {
        System.out.println("CleanMemory running...");
        Random rng = new Random();

        for (int i = 0; i < 50000; i++) {
            byte[] block = new byte[256 * 1024];
            block[rng.nextInt(block.length - 1)] = 1;
            // release reference quickly
            Thread.sleep(10);
        }

        System.out.println("Done. Waiting for GC...");
        Thread.sleep(5000);
    }
}

^G Help      ^O Write Out  ^W Where Is  ^K Cut    ^T Execute  ^C Location
^X Exit      ^R Read File  ^\ Replace   ^U Paste  ^J Justify  ^/ Go To Line
```

2.2.8 Output

This is for the leaking. The error is expected in this demo. As it is intentionally filling the heap faster than the GC can free it, so the JVM runs out of space and throws:

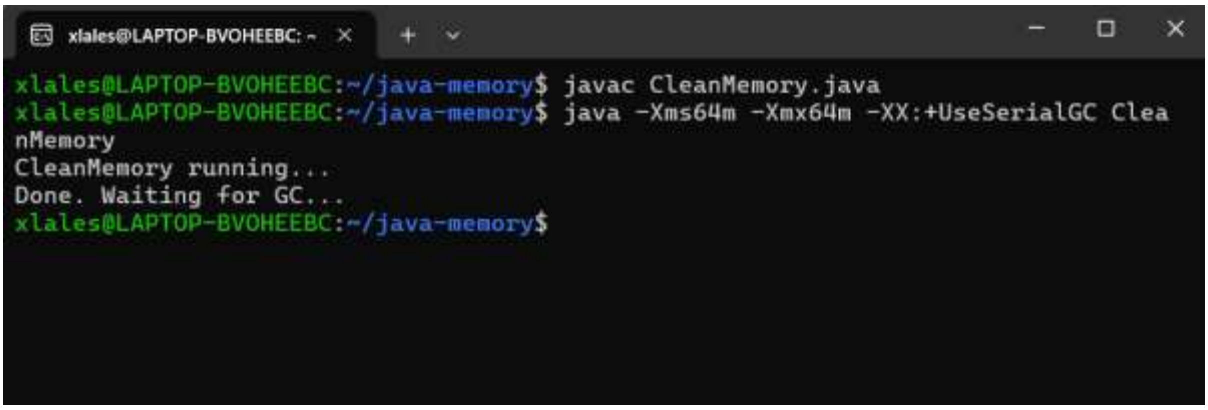
Figure 15. Output for leaking memory



```
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC: ~
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/java-memory$ javac MemoryTest.java
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/java-memory$ java -Xms64m -Xmx64m -XX:+UseSerialGC Memor
ytest
Error: Could not find or load main class Memorytest
Caused by: java.lang.ClassNotFoundException: Memorytest
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/java-memory$ java -Xms64m -Xmx64m -XX:+UseSerialGC Memor
yTest
MemoryTest started...
Allocated blocks: 0
Allocated blocks: 100
Allocated blocks: 200
Exception in thread "main" java.lang.OutOfMemoryError: Java heap space
        at MemoryTest.main(MemoryTest.java:12)
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/java-memory$
```

For the non-leaking, this result indicates that the Java program compiled and executed successfully, completing its allocation loop and terminating cleanly after printing “Done. Waiting for GC…” without any errors or memory leaks. However, the expected saw-tooth heap visualization did not appear because the program executed too quickly for VisualVM to capture significant sampling data, the memory load was insufficient to trigger noticeable garbage collection cycles, and the garbage collector efficiently reclaimed short-lived objects in the background, resulting in smooth and inconspicuous memory behavior.

Figure 16. Output for non-leaking compilation



2.3 Demonstration of Tracemalloc for Python

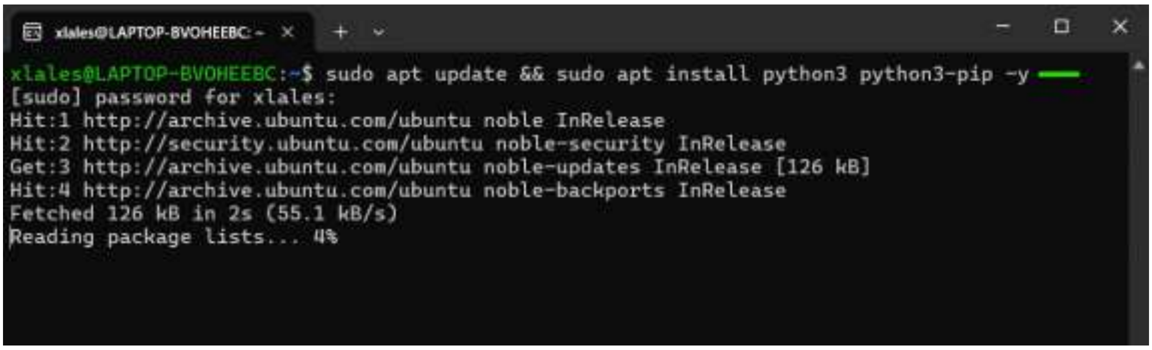
2.3.1 Verify the python version in the environment.

Figure 17. Verify python version in the Ubuntu terminal

2.3.2 Installations in python version

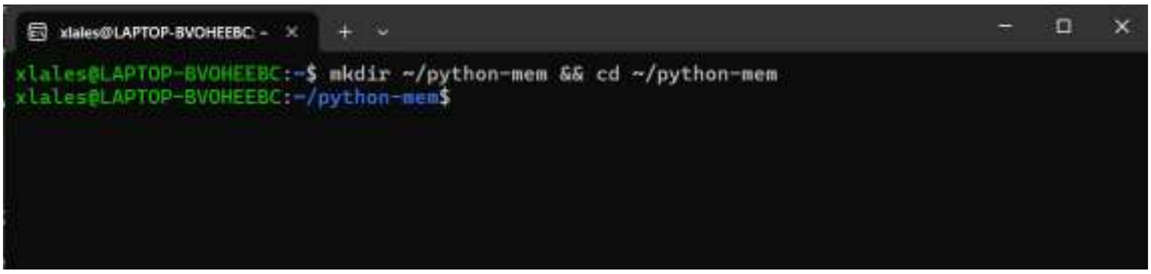
Ensure the necessary installation and packages to run python in ubuntu terminal without error.

Figure 18. Install missing and outdated packages in python version



2.3.3 Create directory

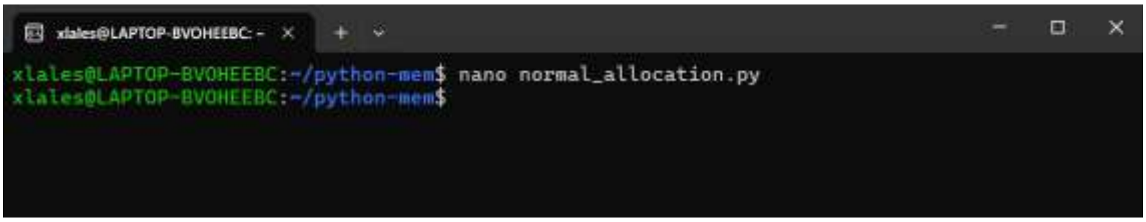
Figure 19. Install python-nem directory



2.3.4 Create the script for both leaking and non-leaking allocations in tracemalloc for python

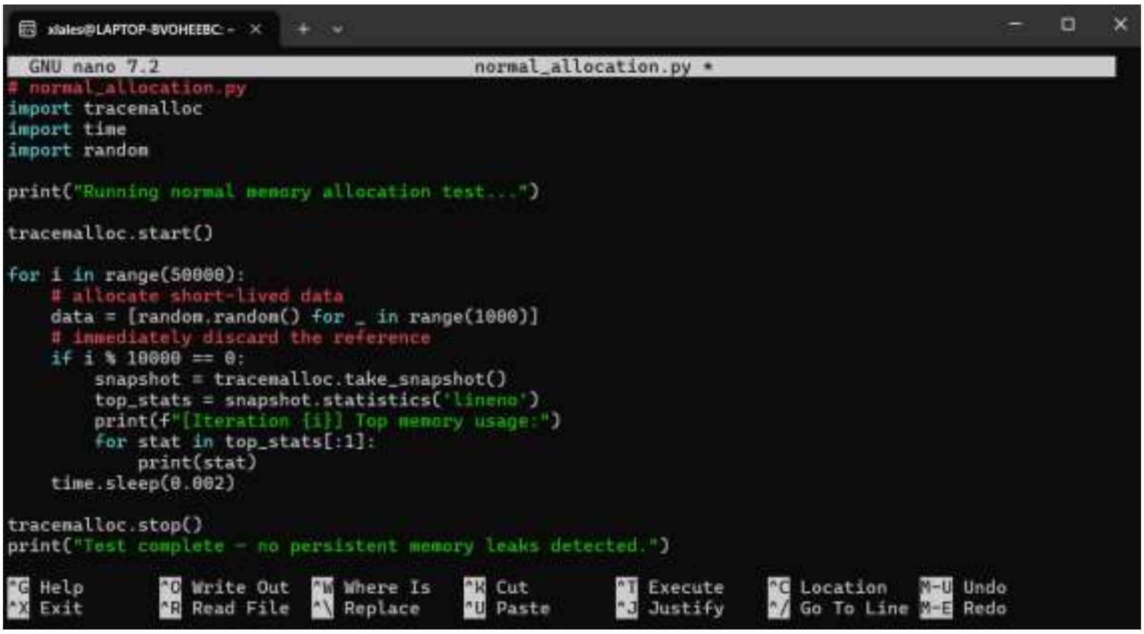
Make a python file name normal_allocation.py and input sample script for memory testing. Include creation of another file for leak simulation namely leak_simulation.py.

Figure 20. Create python file



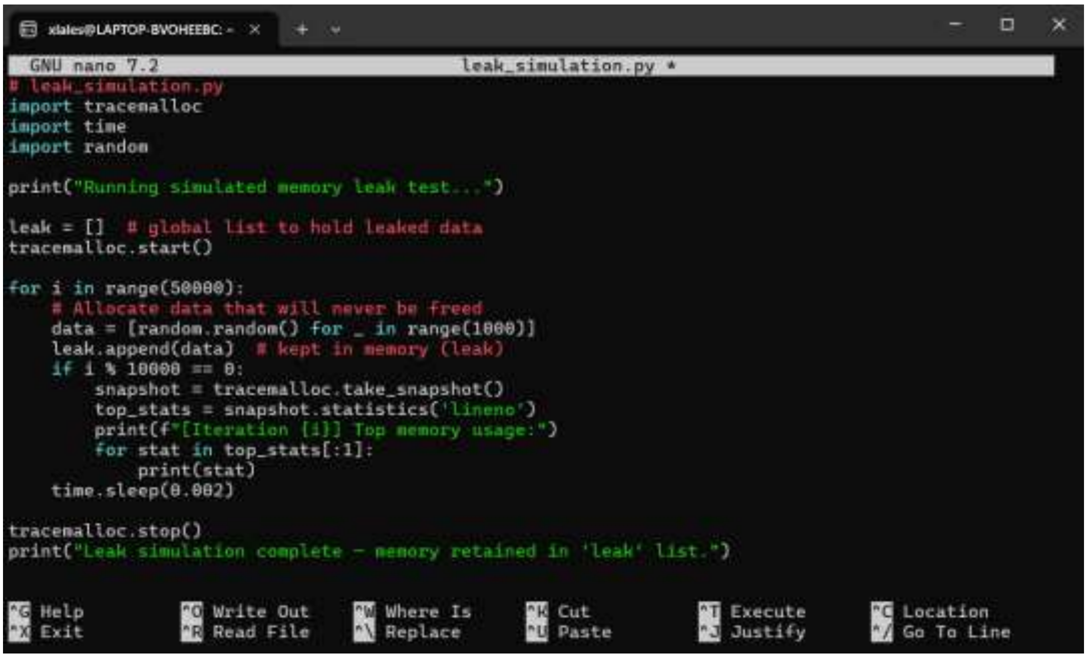
```
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/python-mem$ nano normal_allocation.py
xlales@LAPTOP-BVOHEEBC:~/python-mem$
```

Figure 21. Code for non-leaking allocations in python



```
# normal_allocation.py
import tracemalloc
import time
import random

print("Running normal memory allocation test...")

tracemalloc.start()

for i in range(50000):
    # allocate short-lived data
    data = [random.random() for _ in range(1000)]
    # immediately discard the reference
    if i % 10000 == 0:
        snapshot = tracemalloc.take_snapshot()
        top_stats = snapshot.statistics('lineno')
        print(f"[Iteration {i}] Top memory usage:")
        for stat in top_stats[:1]:
            print(stat)
    time.sleep(0.002)

tracemalloc.stop()
print("Test complete - no persistent memory leaks detected.")
```

Figure 22. Code for leaking allocations in python

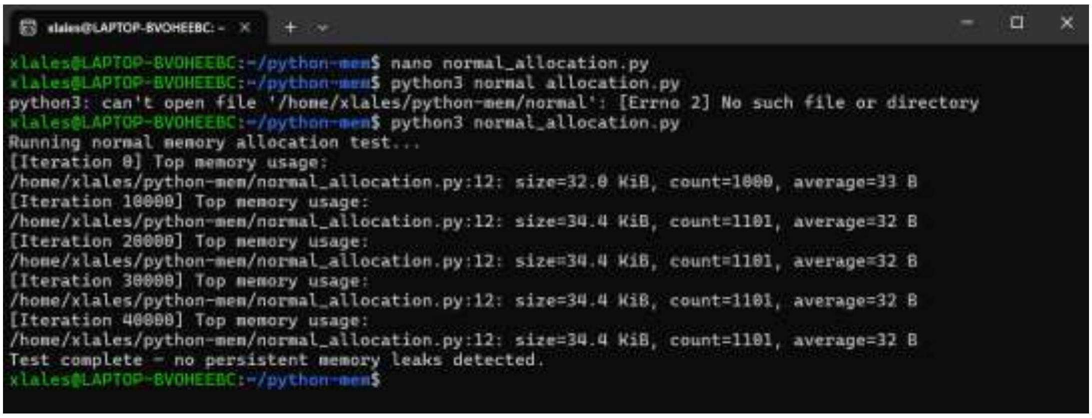


```
# leak_simulation.py
import tracemalloc
import time
import random

print("Running simulated memory leak test...")

leak = []  # global list to hold leaked data
tracemalloc.start()

for i in range(50000):
    # Allocate data that will never be freed
    data = [random.random() for _ in range(1000)]
    leak.append(data)  # kept in memory (leak)
    if i % 10000 == 0:
        snapshot = tracemalloc.take_snapshot()
        top_stats = snapshot.statistics('lineno')
        print(f"[Iteration {i}] Top memory usage:")
        for stat in top_stats[:1]:
            print(stat)
    time.sleep(0.002)

tracemalloc.stop()
print("Leak simulation complete - memory retained in 'leak' list.")
```

2.3.5 Outputs in both leaking and non-leaking allocations of tracemalloc for python

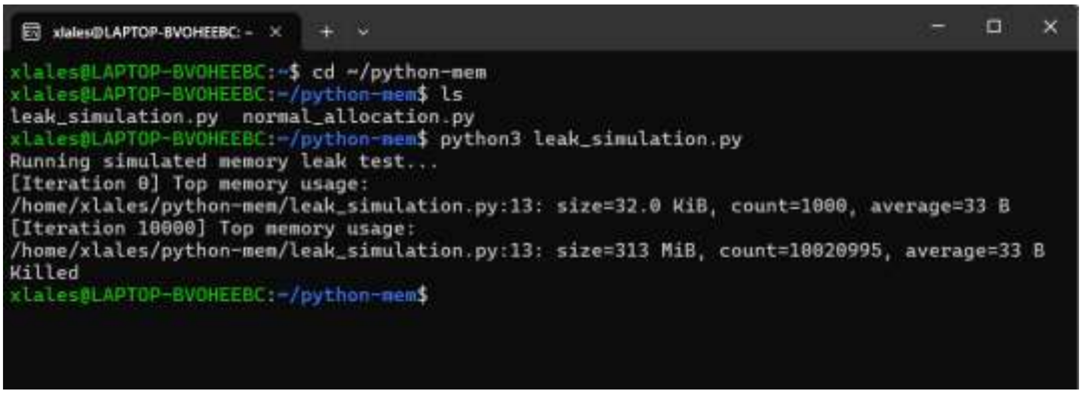
Each Tracemalloc snapshot shows memory usage details during program execution. For example, an output like [Iteration 10000] Top memory usage: leak_simulation.py:11: size=2.4 MiB, count=40000, average=64 B means line 11 allocates 2.4 MiB across 40,000 objects averaging 64 bytes each. The size indicates total memory allocated, count the number of objects, and average their mean size. A continuously increasing size value signals a potential memory leak, while fluctuating values indicate normal garbage collection with a saw-tooth allocation pattern.

Figure 23. Output for non-leaking allocations



Memory usage increased from 32 KiB to 313 MiB, showing that the program continuously retained objects, causing a memory leak. The "Killed" message indicates that the Linux kernel terminated the process after it exceeded the WSL memory limit, confirming sustained memory consumption without release.

Figure 24. Output for leaking allocations



3. Discussion

The comparative findings highlight how language-level memory models influence performance under similar workloads. As noted by Baroudi et al. (2020), static allocation improves predictability at the cost of flexibility, while dynamic allocation enhances scalability. In this study, the use of WSL Ubuntu proved efficient for running cross-language profiling tools, supporting its viability for academic performance testing environments.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Memory Profiling Tools under WSL–Ubuntu

Criteria	Valgrind (C)	VisualVM (Java)	Tracemalloc (Python)
Primary Purpose	Detects memory leaks, invalid reads/writes, and analyzes heap allocations for low-level programs.	Monitors JVM heap usage, garbage collection (GC), thread performance, and retained objects.	Traces and reports memory allocations and leaks at the Python line and file level.
Environment (WSL Ubuntu)	Executed using terminal commands with valgrind and massif tools; outputs text-based reports and heap summaries.	Runs Java applications in Ubuntu terminal, visualized using VisualVM GUI via X server or JMX.	Runs directly in terminal; outputs snapshots and memory statistics through printed logs.
Performance Behavior	Moderate to high runtime overhead due to instruction-level analysis; slower execution but most precise results.	Moderate performance impact in profiling mode; smooth operation with real-time heap visualization.	Low runtime overhead; lightweight profiling suitable for repeated runs and quick comparisons.
Memory Allocation Analysis	Tracks exact heap allocations, deallocations, and leaks in bytes; provides clear summary of “definitely lost” and “still reachable” memory.	Displays heap growth, GC cycles, and per-class object counts; visualizes saw-tooth heap patterns for clean memory runs.	Reports memory size, object count, and average object size; detects leak growth trends and GC-related fluctuations.
Leak Detection Output	Reports leaks explicitly with file line numbers and memory sizes in bytes.	Indicates leaks indirectly through sustained heap growth or retained references visible in the Dominator Tree.	Shows line-specific leak growth where memory size increases continuously across iterations.
Visualization of Results	Textual reports via terminal and optional Massif heap graphs.	Graphical heap charts, GC activity graphs, and heap dump explorers.	Terminal-based snapshots with numerical memory metrics; can export text summaries.
Strengths	Extremely accurate in detecting even small leaks and invalid memory accesses; ideal for C/C++ system programs.	Provides detailed visual insights on GC, heap usage, and thread performance; ideal for Java runtime optimization.	Lightweight and easy to use; integrates seamlessly with Python scripts; effective for code-level leak tracing.

Weaknesses	Slower due to deep analysis; lacks GUI visualization without external tools.	Requires GUI environment or X server in WSL; limited to JVM-based languages.	Cannot inspect native C extensions; limited to Python's interpreter memory view.
Observed Performance (in this study)	Fast access and minimal memory overhead under static allocation; clear detection of memory leaks when free() was omitted.	Heap usage increased with intentional leaks; saw-tooth pattern observed for non-leaking demo; terminated with OutOfMemoryError when heap exhausted.	Memory increased from 32 KiB to 313 MiB under leak simulation; program terminated ("Killed") after exceeding WSL memory limit.
Memory Management Type	Manual allocation/deallocation via malloc() and free().	Automatic garbage collection using JVM's GC mechanisms.	Automatic memory management using Python's garbage collector.
Best Use Case	Low-level debugging, embedded systems, performance-critical C/C++ projects.	Enterprise Java applications requiring runtime performance tuning.	Python data-processing or machine-learning scripts requiring lightweight leak detection.

4. Conclusion

This study successfully demonstrated and compared the behavior of static and dynamic memory allocation across three major programming languages—C, Java, and Python—executed within the Windows Subsystem for Linux (WSL) environment using Ubuntu. Through the application of Valgrind, VisualVM, and Tracemalloc, the research revealed distinct memory management characteristics inherent to each language paradigm.

Results showed that C, utilizing Valgrind, provided the most precise control and accuracy in detecting memory leaks and invalid accesses, though at the expense of slower runtime performance due to its low-level instrumentation. Java, when profiled through VisualVM, exhibited predictable garbage-collection cycles that efficiently managed heap resources under non-leaking conditions, yet its automatic memory management introduced moderate overhead during heavy allocation tasks. Python, analyzed using Tracemalloc, displayed lightweight and transparent allocation tracking but demonstrated a steady increase in memory usage under simulated leak conditions until the process was terminated by the system, confirming persistent object retention.

Overall, static allocation methods—commonly observed in C—proved to be more efficient in execution time and memory footprint, while dynamic allocation approaches, as seen in Java and Python, offered flexibility and scalability at the cost of increased overhead. The integration of WSL Ubuntu as a testing environment provided a practical and reliable hybrid platform for cross-language performance evaluation, ensuring native Linux compatibility within Windows systems.

The findings emphasize that the choice between static and dynamic memory allocation depends on the specific requirements of the application: performance-critical systems benefit from static management, whereas flexible, high-level applications favor dynamic allocation with automated garbage collection. This study contributes to the deeper understanding of how programming language design and memory management strategies influence overall system efficiency, serving as a guide for educators, developers, and researchers conducting performance profiling in hybrid computing environments.

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