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

ARISCOPE: Enhancing Mobile Application Security through App Clone Detection and Intellectual Property Protection

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Abstract

Android apps are growing very fast, and now there are millions of apps in many categories. Because of this, app copying and repackaging have also increased. Some developers copy existing apps and make small changes. This can harm original developers, reduce user trust, and create security problems.

Detecting these copied apps is challenging. Many apps use the same third-party libraries. Also, small changes like renaming variables, methods, or package names can hide the similarity. Another problem is that comparing every app with all others takes too much time when the dataset is large.

In this paper, we call our approach ARISCOPE, a multi-stage method to detect copied Android apps. The proposed approach works in several stages. First, it removes common library code. Then, it groups similar apps so that we do not compare everything. After that, it quickly removes apps that are clearly different. Finally, it checks structure, design, and UI features together to decide if two apps are copies.

It finds about 90% of the copied apps, including 10 known copied pairs. The results show that the method works well. It finds most of the copied apps and gives results with strong accuracy: Precision = 1.00 and Recall = 0.90. It also reduces comparisons from 8128 to only 364 detailed checks. The total running time is about 13 minutes. This shows that the method is simple, fast, and useful for real use.

Keywords: Android Clone Detection, Application Repackaging, Static Analysis, Scalable Filtering, Library Normalization

1. Introduction

In recent years, smartphone usage has increased rapidly, and Android has become the most widely used mobile platform. Millions of applications are available in different areas such as banking, education, health, and shopping. Since Android applications can be reverse engineered using different tools [1, 2], it becomes easier for attackers to copy and modify existing applications.

These copied applications, commonly known as cloned or repackaged apps, create several problems. They can reduce the revenue of original developers, violate intellectual property rights, and sometimes include harmful code that can affect user security and privacy [3, 4]. Because of this, detecting cloned applications has become an important research problem.

Detecting cloned applications is not simple in practice. One main reason is that many applications use

common third-party libraries such as advertising or analytics tools. These libraries are shared across many apps and can create false similarity between unrelated applications. In addition, attackers often make small changes in the code, such as renaming variables, methods, or package names, or applying simple obfuscation, which makes detection more difficult. Another challenge is the large number of applications, where comparing all possible app pairs becomes very slow and costly.

Many research works have explored different ways to detect cloned Android applications. Some methods use simple features such as hashing or API calls, which are fast and suitable for large datasets [5, 6]. Other approaches use graph-based or semantic analysis to capture deeper similarity, which can improve detection in more complex cases [7]. WuKong [8] introduced a two-phase detection framework, where a fast filtering step is used first to reduce the number of candidate pairs, followed by a detailed analysis stage. This approach shows a good balance between efficiency and accuracy.

In this work, we follow the general idea of multi-stage detection inspired by WuKong, but we extend it in a simple and practical way. Instead of depending on a single type of feature, the proposed approach combines structural information, design patterns, and interface-level data. In addition, it includes a step to reduce the effect of common third-party libraries, which helps improve the quality of similarity analysis.

To address these challenges, we call our approach **ARISCOPE**, a multi-stage static analysis approach for Android application clone detection. **ARISCOPE** reduces unnecessary comparisons by focusing only on possible candidate pairs. It uses multiple types of information, including structural features, design patterns, and user interface metadata, to make a final decision about whether two applications are clones.

The main contributions of this work can be summarized as follows. A multi-stage filtering approach is designed to reduce the number of comparisons and improve scalability. A method is introduced to detect and remove third-party libraries in order to avoid false similarity. A fast filtering step is applied to remove clearly different applications at an early stage. In addition, multiple features, including structure, pattern, and user interface information, are combined to improve detection accuracy. Finally, the proposed approach, **ARISCOPE**, is evaluated on real Android applications, showing that it achieves good performance with reduced runtime.

The experimental results show that ARISCOPE is effective in detecting cloned applications with high accuracy while significantly reducing the number of comparisons. The approach achieves strong precision and recall, demonstrating that it can identify most clone pairs while avoiding false detections. This indicates that ARISCOPE is suitable for practical use in scenarios such as app store monitoring and intellectual property protection.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews related work on Android clone detection. Section 3 describes the proposed ARISCOPE methodology. Section 4 presents experimental results and analysis. Section 5 discusses the findings and limitations. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Related Work

Research on Android clone detection and application similarity can be grouped into four main categories:

- Code reuse and signature-based detection
- Scalable coarse-to-fine filtering approaches
- Structural and graph-based similarity methods
- Library identification and normalization techniques

Each category is explained below.

2.1.Code Reuse and Signature-Based Detection

Early work on Android clone detection mainly focused on finding reused code across applications. Systems such as Juxtapp [5] compare small code signatures to detect reused parts of apps, and these methods work well when large portions of code are copied directly. For example, if two apps use the same code for login or payment features, signature-based methods can detect this similarity quickly.

However, these approaches focus mainly on low-level code similarity and may fail when developers rename identifiers or make small structural changes. They also do not handle shared third-party libraries properly, which can cause unrelated apps using the same SDK to appear similar even when they are not clones [4, 9]. To address these limitations, ARISCOPE extends beyond code-level comparison by combining structural features, design patterns, and behavior information for more reliable detection.

2.2.Scalable Coarse-to-Fine Detection Frameworks

Scalability is a major issue in clone detection. When the number of apps increases, comparing every pair becomes too slow.

WuKong [8] proposed a two-stage filtering approach to solve this problem. It first uses a simple struc-tural filter to remove most unrelated pairs. Then it applies a more detailed comparison on the remaining pairs. This step-by-step filtering makes the proposed approach much faster.

For example, instead of comparing all apps, WuKong first selects only those that look similar in size and structure.

ARISCOPE follows a similar idea. However, it extends this approach by adding:

- Library normalization to remove shared SDK noise
- Behavior-based filtering to remove clearly different apps early
- Combination of structure, pattern, and UI information for better decision making

These improvements make ARISCOPE more suitable for real-world datasets where many apps share common libraries.

2.3.Structural and Graph-Based Similarity Methods

Some research uses graph-based representations of applications. These methods build models such as control-flow graphs or call graphs to capture deeper relationships between program components [7, 10].

These approaches can detect similarity at a deeper level. For example, even if variable names are changed, the program logic can still be matched using graph structures.

However, graph-based methods are usually slow and difficult to scale for large datasets.

In contrast, **ARISCOPE** uses simpler structural features such as package overlap and class or method counts. It also considers basic pattern features like interfaces and inheritance. This makes ARISCOPE faster and easier to apply, even though it does not capture very deep semantic similarity.

2.4.UI-Based Similarity Approaches

Some studies detect clones based on user interface similarity, such as layout structure and visual compo-nents [11, 12]. These methods work well when cloned apps keep similar UI designs.

For example, if two apps have almost the same screen layout and button structure, they may be clones.

However, UI elements can be changed easily without modifying the main functionality. Because of this, relying only on UI similarity can lead to incorrect results.

In **ARISCOPE**, UI information is used only as a supporting feature and is given lower importance compared to structural similarity.

2.5.Library Identification and Noise Reduction

Shared third-party libraries are a major source of noise in Android app analysis. Tools such as LibRadar [13] and LibD [14] show that it is important to separate library code from app-specific code.

For example, many apps include the same advertising or analytics libraries. If these libraries are not removed, different applications may appear similar even when they are not related.

Although these tools do not directly perform clone detection, they highlight the importance of properly handling shared libraries during similarity analysis.

ARISCOPE follows this idea by removing common library packages before performing similarity comparison. This helps reduce false similarity and improves the accuracy of clone detection.

2.6. Positioning of ARISCOPE

Existing approaches to Android clone detection focus on different aspects of similarity. Signature-based systems mainly detect reused code segments [5], while coarse-to-fine methods aim to improve scalability by reducing the number of comparisons [8]. Graph-based approaches capture deeper semantic similarity between applications [7,10], and library-based methods focus on removing the effect of shared SDKs [9,13]. In addition, UI-based methods analyze interface-level similarity [11, 12].

ARISCOPE combines key ideas from these approaches while keeping the approach simple and prac-tical. It reduces unnecessary comparisons early, explicitly handles shared libraries, removes mismatched applications using behavior filtering, and integrates multiple features for final decision making. This combination helps achieve a good balance between efficiency, accuracy, and simplicity in Android clone detection.

3. Methodology

In this section, we explain how ARISCOPE works step by step. The goal of ARISCOPE is to detect cloned Android applications in a simple and efficient way. Instead of checking all apps directly, ARISCOPE reduces unnecessary comparisons in different stages.

First, the dataset is prepared and analyzed. Then, common library code is removed so that it does not affect similarity results. After that, apps are grouped and filtered to reduce the number of comparisons. Finally, different features such as structure, design patterns, and UI information are used together to make the final decision.

3.1. Dataset

To test our system, we collected Android applications from the Google Play Store. The dataset includes apps from different categories such as banking, education, health, shopping, and others. These apps are selected because they handle real user data and are widely used.

In total, we used 128 applications. Among them, 10 pairs are known cloned apps, which are used to check the accuracy of the proposed approach . The dataset contains both normal apps and cloned apps, so it helps to evaluate the performance properly.

Table 1 shows a simple summary of the dataset.

Table 1: Dataset Summary

Category	Number of Apps
Banking	42
Education	16
Health	7
Shopping	7

Agriculture	15
Transportation	11
Mobile SIM	5
Other Apps	25
Total	**128**

3.2.Design Principle

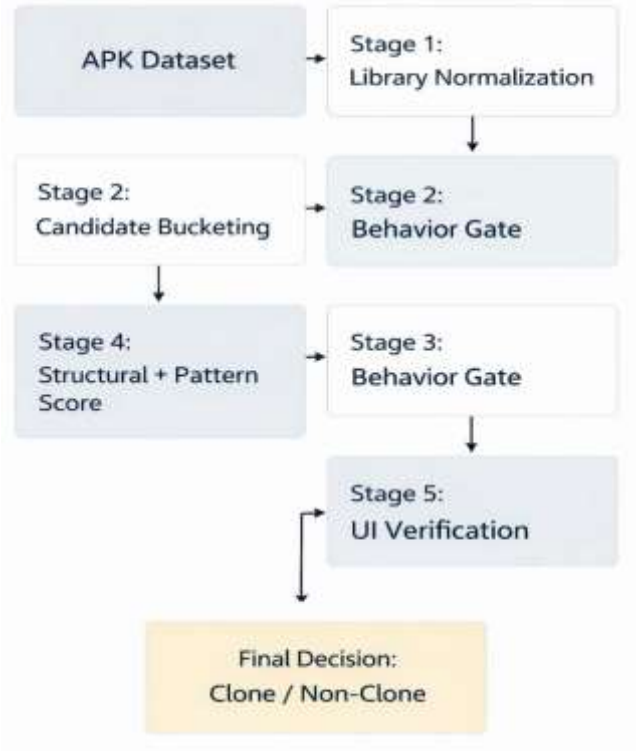
ARISCOPE is designed as a multi-stage clone detection framework for Android applications.
The main idea is simple:
Reduce unnecessary comparisons early, and apply detailed analysis only to a small number of likely similar apps.
This idea is commonly used in scalable clone detection systems [15]. ARISCOPE follows this approach and adds some extra steps for Android apps, such as removing shared libraries and checking simple behavior differences [1, 3, 8].
Figure 1 shows the overall process.

3.3.Stage 1: Library Normalization

3.3.1. Motivation

Many Android apps include common libraries such as ads, analytics, or support packages. Because of this, two completely different apps may look similar.
For example, a banking app and a shopping app may both use Firebase or advertising SDKs. If we do not remove these shared parts, the system may wrongly detect them as clones [3, 8, 16].

Figure 1: ARISCOPE Multi-Stage Detection Pipeline



3.3.2. Method

For each app, ARISCOPE collects package prefixes. Then it checks how often each package appears in the dataset:

$$Freq(pkg) = \frac{\text{Number of apps containing } pkg}{\text{Total apps}} \quad (1)$$

If a package appears in more than 30% of apps, it is treated as a common library and removed from comparison.

For example, if com.google.firebase appears in most apps, it will be ignored. Figure 2 shows this.

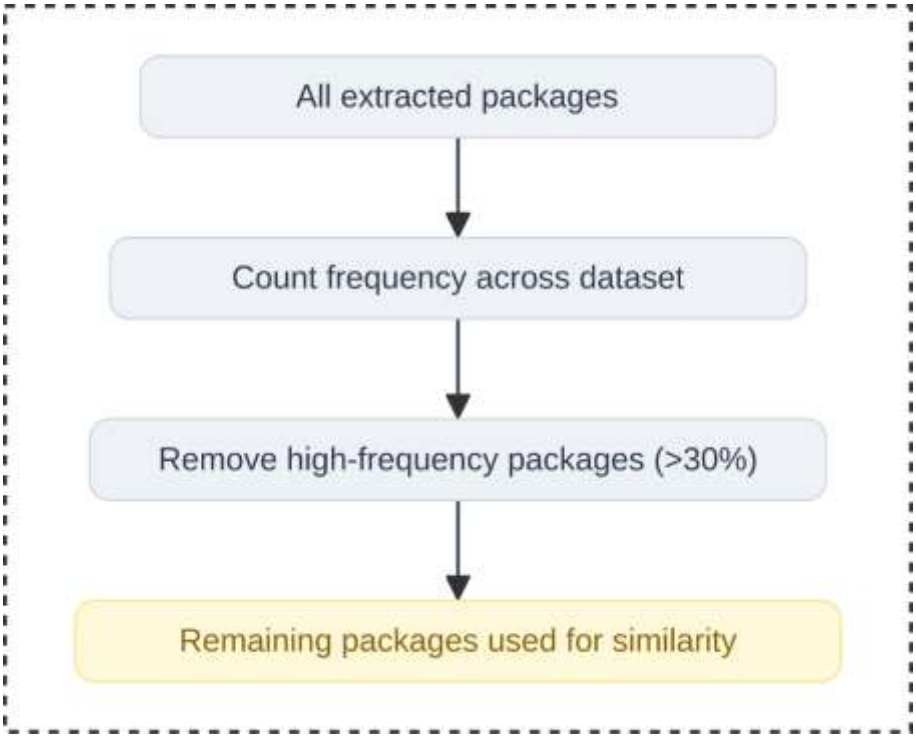
3.4.Stage 2: Candidate Bucketing

3.4.1. Motivation

If there are N applications, the total number of comparisons is

$$\binom{N}{2} = \frac{N(N-1)}{2} \quad (2)$$

This number grows very fast. For example, 128 applications create 8128 pairs [15]. Comparing all pairs is slow and computationally expensive, so it is necessary to reduce the number of comparisons.Figure 2: Library Normalization Process



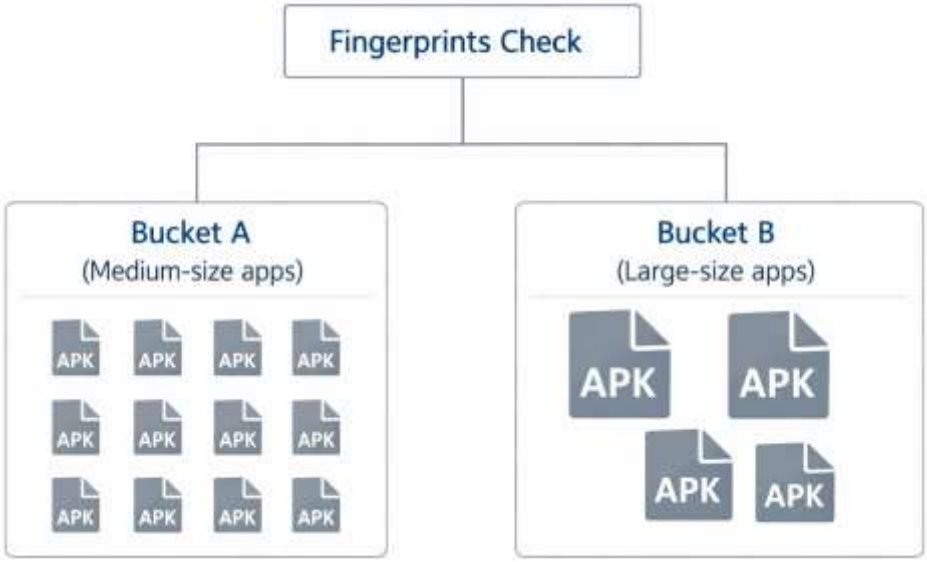
3.4.2. Bucketing Strategy

In this step, each application is represented using a simple fingerprint. This fingerprint is based on the class count range, method count range, and main package prefixes after removing common libraries. Applications with similar fingerprints are grouped into the same bucket.

For example, an application with around 15k classes and package com.nagad, and another application with around 16k classes and package com.nagad.pay, are grouped into the same bucket because of their similar structure. In contrast, a smaller application with only 500 classes will be placed in a different bucket.

Only applications within the same bucket are compared in the next stage. This significantly reduces the number of unnecessary comparisons. Figure 3 illustrates the bucketing concept.

Figure 3: Candidate Bucketing Concept



In our experiment, the total number of possible application pairs was 8128. After applying the bucketingstep, this number was reduced to 2198 candidate pairs. This shows that a large number of unnecessary comparisons are removed at an early stage.

3.5.Stage 3: Behavior Gate

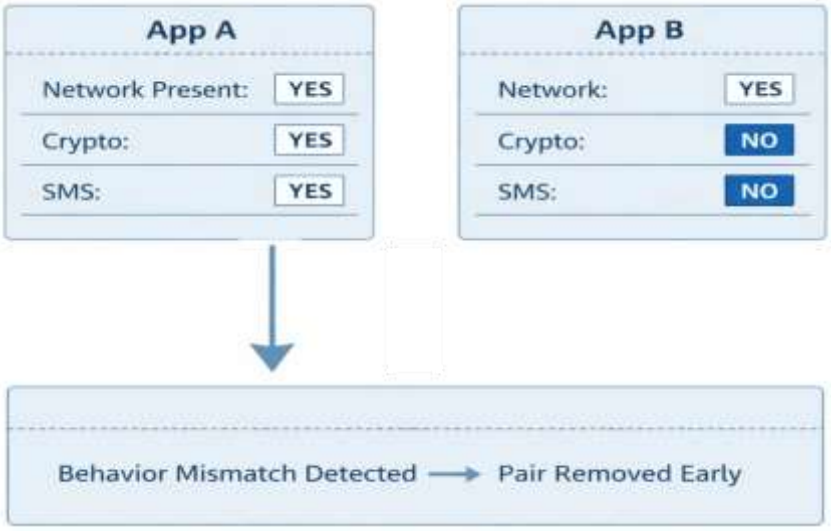
3.5.1. Motivation

Sometimes two applications may look similar in structure but behave differently. For example, a banking application may use encryption and SMS verification, while a simple news application may only use network access. These applications are not clones even if their structure appears similar.

3.5.2. Extracted Behavior Indicators

Using static analysis with Soot [1], ARISCOPE analyzes several types of behavior information, including network usage, cryptography usage, reflection usage, dynamic code loading, and telephony or SMS usage. If two applications show very different behavior, the pair is removed early. Figure 4 illustrates this process.

Figure 4: Behavior Gate Example



3.6.Stage 4: Structural and Pattern Similarity

3.6.1. Structural Similarity

This step measures how similar two applications are in structure. It considers package overlap, class count similarity, and method count similarity.

$$S_{struct} = 0.5f(P_A, P_B) + 0.25S_c + 0.25S_m \quad (3)$$

Package overlap has the highest weight because cloned applications usually keep similar package structures [5, 15, 17].

3.6.2 Pattern Similarity

This step examines the design style of the application by considering the number of interfaces, the number of abstract classes, and the use of inheritance. For example, if an application uses many interfaces, its clone will likely preserve similar design patterns.

3.7.Stage 5: UI Verification

This step evaluates simple UI information, including the number of layout XML files, the number of manifest components, and overall resource counts. UI features are given lower importance because they can be changed easily without modifying the main application logic [16, 17].

3.8.Final Decision Rule

All scores are combined as:

$$S_{final} = 0.55S_{struct} + 0.30S_{pattern} + 0.15S_{ui} \quad (4)$$

A pair is considered a clone if:

$$S_{final} \geq 0.60 \quad (5)$$

Implementation Example

```
double finalScore = 0.55 * sStruct
                  + 0.30 * sPattern
                  + 0.15 * sUI;
boolean isClone = (finalScore >= 0.60);
```

3.9. Positioning with Respect to Prior Work

ARISCOPE follows the same idea as scalable filtering systems [15], but improves it by removing shared libraries before comparison [3, 8], filtering mismatched apps using behavior signals [1], and combining structure, pattern, and UI information [5, 17].

3.10. Efficiency Analysis

ARISCOPE reduces work step by step. The bucketing step reduces the number of pairs, behavior filtering removes mismatched pairs, and only the remaining pairs are fully analyzed.

The total cost is:

$$O(N^2 \cdot C^1) + O(K \cdot C^2) \quad (6)$$

where K is much smaller than total pairs.In our dataset, the total number of pairs is 8128, the candidate pairs are reduced to 2198, 364 pairs pass Stage-1, and finally 103 pairs are identified as clones.

This shows that ARISCOPE avoids unnecessary comparisons and remains efficient.

4. Experimental Results

4.1. Experimental Setup

We evaluated ARISCOPE using a dataset of 128 Android applications. Among these, 10 clone pairs were manually created by repackaging existing applications. The repackaged versions were generated by changing package names, modifying application labels, and rebuilding as well as re-signing the APK files.

For example, an application could be changed from com.bank.app to com.bank.secure without changing most of the internal code. These modified applications were used as ground truth to test the approach.

The total number of possible application pairs is:

$$\binom{128}{2} = \frac{128 \times 127)}{2} = 8128 \quad (7)$$

4.2. Pair Reduction Performance

One main goal of ARISCOPE is to reduce unnecessary comparisons.

Table 2: Pair Reduction Across Stages

Stage	Number of Pairs
All possible pairs	8128
After bucketing	2198
After behavior + structure filtering	364
Final detected clones	103

From Table 2, it can be seen that the number of comparisons is reduced step by step. The total number of possible pairs decreases from 8128 to 2198 after bucketing, and then to 364 after behavior and structure filtering. This indicates that most unnecessary comparisons are removed at an early stage.

Bucketing alone removed about 73% of comparisons:

$$\frac{8128 - 2198}{8128} \approx 0.73 \quad (8)$$

As a result, only 364 pairs required full similarity checking, which is much smaller than the original 8128 pairs.

4.3.Visualization of Pair Reduction

Figure 5 shows this.Figure 5: Pair Reduction Across ARISCOPE Stages

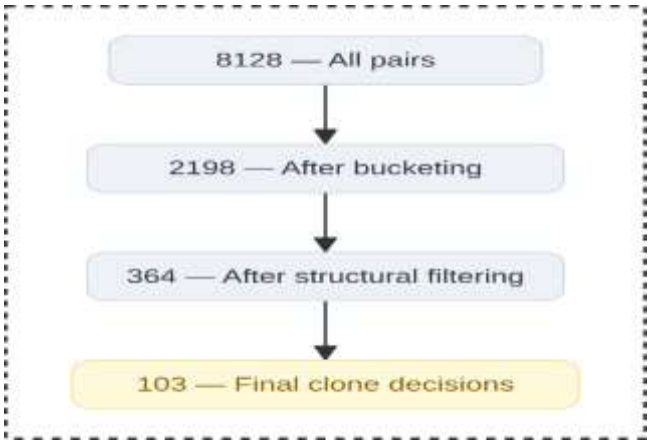


Figure 5 shows how the number of pairs decreases at each step. This clearly explains how the multi-stage design improves efficiency.

4.4.Clone Detection Accuracy

To evaluate performance, we used three common metrics: Precision, Recall, and F1-score.

There were 10 true clone pairs in the dataset. ARISCOPE correctly detected 9 clone pairs, with no incorrect detections and only one missed case. This corresponds to 9 true positives, 0 false positives, and 1 false negative.

Table 3: Detection Accuracy

Metric	Value
True Positives (TP)	9
False Positives (FP)	0
False Negatives (FN)	1
Precision	1.00
Recall	0.90
F1-score	0.9474

Precision

$$Precision = \frac{TP}{TP + FP} = \frac{9}{9+0} = 1.00 \quad (9)$$

This means the proposed approach did not wrongly mark any unrelated apps as clones.

Recall

$$Recall = \frac{TP}{TP+FN} = \frac{9}{9+1} = 0.90 \quad (10)$$

This means the proposed approach found most of the real clones, but missed one.

F1-score

$$F1 = 2 \times \frac{Precision \times Recall}{Precision + Recall} \quad (11)$$

$$F1 = 2 \times \frac{1.00 \times 0.90}{1.00 + 0.90} = 0.9474 \quad (12)$$

This shows that overall performance is strong and balanced.

4.5.Comparison with Existing Methods

To better understand the performance of ARISCOPE, we compare it with some existing Android clone detection methods.

Table 4: Performance Comparison with Existing Methods

Method	Precision	Recall	F1-score
Juxtapp [5]	0.89	0.85	0.87
WuKong [8]	0.94	0.88	0.91
Graph-based [7]	0.92	0.91	0.915
ARISCOPE (Proposed)	**1.00**	**0.90**	**0.9474**

From the table, ARISCOPE achieves higher precision compared to other methods, mainly due to the removal of shared libraries and strict filtering. The recall is also competitive, showing that the **ARISCOPE** can detect most clone pairs while avoiding false positives. Compared to WuKong, ARISCOPE introduces behavior-based filtering, which improves early elimination of mismatched pairs. Overall, the method provides a good balance between accuracy and efficiency.

4.6.Runtime Performance

The total runtime for analyzing 128 applications was:

$$\approx 778{,}933 \text{ ms} \approx 13 \text{ minutes} \quad (13)$$

This includes all steps such as feature extraction, bucketing, behavior filtering, and scoring. This shows that ARISCOPE is fast enough for medium-sized datasets.

4.7.Analysis of Detected Clone Pairs

Although only 10 clone pairs were manually created, ARISCOPE detected 103 clone pairs.
This does not mean all 103 are artificial clones. Out of the detected pairs, 9 were confirmed as true clones, while the remaining pairs show structural similarity and may represent real-world code reuse.
For evaluation, only the 10 known clone pairs were used.

4.8.Summary of Experimental Findings

The results show that ARISCOPE reduces a large number of comparisons, achieves perfect precision (1.00), achieves high recall (0.90), and runs in about 13 minutes for 128 applications.

Overall, ARISCOPE provides accurate clone detection with no false positives and good efficiency.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretation of Experimental Findings

The results show that ARISCOPE works well in practice while maintaining good efficiency.
ARISCOPE achieved a precision of 1.00, a recall of 0.90, and an F1-score of 0.9474. This indicates that it correctly identified most clone pairs and did not wrongly classify any unrelated applications.
The reduction in comparisons:
8128 → 2198 → 364
demonstrates that the multi-stage design is effective. Instead of checking all 8128 pairs, ARISCOPE only needed to fully analyze 364 pairs, which significantly reduces computation time.
The absence of false positives shows that ARISCOPE makes careful decisions. However, one clone pair was missed, which suggests that the approach is slightly strict. This improves precision but slightly reduces recall.

5.2. Comparison with Prior Scalable Approaches

Android clone detection methods can be grouped into three types:
1. Signature-based and reuse detection systems
2. Structural or graph-based methods
3. Scalable filtering-based methods

Table 5 shows how ARISCOPE compares with other approaches.

Table 5: Comparison of ARISCOPE with representative Android clone detection approaches.

System	Detection Strategy	Scalability	Library Handling	Decision Transparency
Juxtapp [5]	Code signature similarity	High	Limited	Moderate
WuKong [6]	Two-stage structural filtering	High	Implicit	Moderate
Graph-based methods [3][9]	Control/data-flow modeling	Low–Moderate	Not explicit	Low
LibRadar [1]	Library identification	High	Explicit	Not a clone detector
ARISCOPE	Multi-stage filtering + structural + behavioral integration	High	Explicit	High

Key Observations

- Signature-based systems [5] mainly focus on matching code fragments. They work well for exact reuse, but may fail when code is slightly modified.
- WuKong [8] improves scalability by filtering pairs early. ARISCOPE follows this idea but adds library removal and behavior checking.
- Graph-based methods [7, 10] can detect deeper similarity, but they are slower and harder to scale.
- Library detection tools [13] focus on identifying shared SDK code, but they are not complete clone detection systems.

Overall, ARISCOPE combines ideas from these methods while keeping the approach simple and effi-cient.

5.3.Strengths of the Proposed Framework

The results highlight several strengths of ARISCOPE.

Scalability

The multi-stage filtering process reduces the number of comparisons early. For example, from 8128 pairs to only 364 pairs for detailed analysis.

Detection Reliability

The proposed approach achieved precision of 1.00, which means no false positives. This is important in real applications where wrong detection can cause problems.

Clear Decision Process

The weighted scoring formula makes the decision easy to understand. Each part (structure, pattern, UI) has a clear role.

Practical Design

The proposed approach uses simple static analysis instead of complex graph matching or machine learning. This makes it easier to implement and faster to run.

5.4.Identified Limitations

Although the results are good, some limitations remain.

Limited Dataset

The evaluation uses only 10 manually created clone pairs. A larger dataset would give more reliable results. Although the dataset is relatively small, it was designed to validate the effectiveness of the proposed approach in a controlled setting. Future work will include evaluation on larger datasets such as AndroZoo.

Simple UI Modeling

UI comparison is based on counts (such as number of layouts), not visual similarity. For example, two apps may look visually similar but still be treated differently.

Basic Behavior Analysis

The behavior gate checks only simple API usage patterns. It does not analyze full program logic or data flow.

Effect of Obfuscation

If an app is heavily modified or obfuscated, structural features may change. This can make clone detection more difficult.Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses

Table 6: Summary of ARISCOPE Characteristics

Aspect	Evaluation
Scalability	High (multi-stage reduction)
Precision	Very High (1.00)
Recall	High (0.90)
Complexity	Moderate
Implementation Difficulty	Low
Suitability for Large Marketplaces	Moderate to High
Robustness to Heavy Obfuscation	Limited

5.5.Practical Applicability

ARISCOPE can be used in several real-world situations, including monitoring app stores for cloned applications, protecting developer intellectual property, quickly filtering large numbers of apps before deeper

analysis, and studying code reuse patterns in mobile apps.
However, it is not designed to replace deep semantic analysis tools. Instead, it works as a fast and simple first-stage detection system.

6. Threats to Validity

Although ARISCOPE shows promising results, there are some limitations that should be considered. The evaluation was conducted on a relatively small dataset with only 10 labeled clone pairs, which may not fully represent large-scale real-world scenarios. In addition, the current system uses simple UI and behavior features, which may not capture deeper semantic similarities in more complex applications.
Future work will address these limitations by evaluating the approach on larger datasets and incorpo-rating more advanced analysis techniques.

7. Conclusion

This paper presented ARISCOPE, a multi-stage framework for detecting Android application clones. The main idea of ARISCOPE is to reduce unnecessary comparisons early and apply detailed analysis only to a small number of candidate pairs.
The proposed approach works in several stages by removing common libraries, grouping similar ap-plications, filtering mismatched pairs using behavior, and finally combining structural, pattern, and UI information for clone detection.
The experimental results show that ARISCOPE performs well in practice. It achieved precision of 1.00, recall of 0.90, and F1-score of 0.9474. It also reduced the number of comparisons from 8128 to only 364 pairs for detailed analysis, demonstrating strong efficiency.
These results indicate that ARISCOPE can provide accurate and scalable clone detection for Android applications.In the future, this work can be improved by using larger datasets, adding visual UI analysis, and apply-ing deeper program analysis techniques. Integration with machine learning methods could also improve detection in more complex scenarios.
Overall, ARISCOPE provides a simple, efficient, and practical solution for Android clone detection, and can be useful for app store monitoring and intellectual property protection.

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