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Hill Climbing versus genetic algorithm optimization in solving the examination timetabling problem (Conference Paper)[Rahim, S.K.N.A.](#)^{ab}, [Bargiela, A.](#)^{cd}, [Qu, R.](#)^c^a School of Computer Science, University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus, Jalan Broga, 43500, Semenyih, Selangor, Malaysia^b Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA (Perak), 32610, Seri Iskandar, Perak, [View additional affiliations](#)[View references \(21\)](#)

Abstract

In this paper, we compare the incorporation of Hill Climbing (HC) and Genetic Algorithm (GA) optimization in our proposed methodology in solving the examination scheduling problem. It is shown that our greedy HC optimization outperforms the GA in all cases when tested on the benchmark datasets. In our implementation, HC consumes more time to execute compared to GA which manages to improve the quality of the initial schedules in a very fast and efficient time. Despite this, since the amount of time taken by HC in producing improved schedules is considered reasonable and it never fails to produce better results, it is suggested that we incorporate the Hill Climbing optimization rather than GA in our work.

Author keywords

Genetic algorithm (GA); Hill Climbing (HC); Slots permutations

Indexed keywords

Benchmark datasets; Examination timetabling; Genetic-algorithm optimizations; Hill climbing; Hill-climbing optimization; Initial schedule; Scheduling problem; Slots permutations

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Hill Climbing Versus Genetic Algorithm Optimization in Solving the Examination Timetabling Problem

Authors' names and affiliations omitted to ensure a blind peer review

Keywords: Slots Permutations, Hill Climbing (HC), Genetic Algorithm (GA).

Abstract: In this paper, we compare the incorporation of Hill Climbing (HC) and Genetic Algorithm (GA) optimization in our proposed methodology in solving the examination scheduling problem. It is shown that our greedy HC optimization outperforms the GA in all cases when tested on the benchmark datasets. In our implementation, HC consumes more time to execute compared to GA which manages to improve the quality of the initial schedules in a very fast and efficient time. Despite this, since the amount of time taken by HC in producing improved schedules is considered reasonable and it never fails to produce better results, it is suggested that we incorporate the Hill Climbing optimization rather than GA in our work.

1 INTRODUCTION

Timetabling can be defined as a process of creating schedules that will list events and times at which they are planned to occur. In many organizations or institutions, timetabling is an important challenge and considered a very tedious and time consuming task. Normally, the personnel involve in preparing the timetables will do it manually and in most cases using a trial and error approach.

There are various areas of timetabling which includes educational timetabling, sports timetabling, transportation timetabling, nurse scheduling and etc. Among the broad areas of these timetabling problems, educational timetabling is one of the most studied and researched area in the timetabling literature. This is due to the requirement of preparing the timetables periodically (quarterly, annually and etc).

Educational timetabling includes school timetabling (course-teacher timetabling), university course timetabling, university examination timetabling and etc. In this work, our focus is the university examination timetabling problem. For this timetabling problem, in most universities nowadays, the students are given the flexibility to enroll for courses across faculties. This makes this kind of timetabling problem more challenging to solve.

Numerous approaches or methods have been proposed since the year 1960s which have attracted researchers form the Operational Research and Artificial Intelligence area. (Author, 2006). To date, the number of approaches or methods proposed to solve the examination timetabling problems is

increasing. The example of the methods proposed are graph based sequential techniques, constraint based techniques, local search based techniques, population based algorithms, hyper heuristics, hybridisations and etc. (Gueret et. al, 1995), (Taufiq et. al, 2004), (Dowland et al, 2005), (Asmuni et. al, 2009), (Burke et. al, 2010c) and etc.

The strong inter-dependencies between exams due to the many-to-many relationship between students and exams has made the examination timetabling a very challenging computational problem. The general objective of the examination timetabling is to generate schedule which is feasible by making sure all exams are scheduled and that all students can sit for the exams that they enrolled on without any problems. Two types of constraints defined in the timetabling literatures are:

a) Hard Constraints

These constraints must be fulfilled at all times. The basic hard constraint is that the exams with a common student cannot be scheduled in the same period. Another important hard constraint that needs to be obeyed is the room capacity; i.e. there must be enough space in a room to accommodate all students taking a given exam. A timetable which fulfils all the hard constraints is called a feasible timetable.

b) Soft Constraints

Soft Constraints are not very crucial but their satisfaction is advantageous to students and/or the institution. An example of a soft constraint is to space out exams taken by individual students so that they have adequate revision time between their

exams. Normally it is impossible to satisfy all soft constraints therefore there is a need for a performance function measuring the degree of fulfilment of these constraints.

Our approach in producing feasible timetables starts by performing datasets retrieval, pre-processing of student-exam data, followed by allocating exams to time-slots and next performing optimization process to improve the quality of the schedules. Greater explanations will be given in the next section.

1.1 Overview of the Proposed Method

The steps of our proposed work in creating feasible and quality examination schedules are datasets retrieval, pre-processing, scheduling and lastly timetable optimization as illustrated in Figure1.

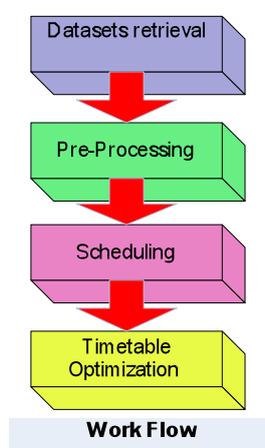


Figure 1: The Work Flow in This Research

Datasets retrieval can be defined as a task to populate the four sets in the timetabling problem as defined by (Burke et. al, 2004). The 4 sets are the times (T), resources (R), meetings (M) and constraints (C). The task involves the process of retrieving the datasets that are freely made available to the public over the internet. In this research, we have retrieved benchmark datasets that are widely tested by many researchers from the University of Nottingham and University of Toronto. These benchmark datasets contain information or files pertaining to students, exams, enrollments and other data and constraints.

In the next step, which is the pre-processing stage, a more meaningful information and higher level data will be generated. This stage will be

underpinned by the methodology of Granular Computing of generating semantically meaningful information granules and their experimental validation (Author, 2008). The aggregated data will supply us with the important information that is needed in order to create timetables that are feasible which satisfy the basic constraints. One example of the information obtained from the pre-processing is the identification of the clashing exams. By identifying this information, later during the scheduling, we will be able to schedule timetables that will fulfill the hard constraint; for instance there should not be one student having two exams simultaneously. In other conventional approaches, this is not the case. Without the pre-processing stage, the clashing information is implicit in data, thus a lot of permutations requiring a lot of time need to be done in order to create a feasible timetable. This problem can be avoided in our approach. Hence our approach deals only with feasible solutions. The pre-processing is explained in detail in (Author, 2009).

Scheduling will be done next by using the derived information from the previous process. The scheduling is done by allocating exams with the highest conflicts first to the available timeslots and followed by exams with lower conflicts. Splitting and merging of timeslots were done for exams in a slot that can be reassigned to other slots consisting non-conflicting exams. The allocation process has been elaborated in detail in (Author, 2012). The timetable generated at this stage is based on the pre-processed data therefore it will always fulfill the hard constraints.

The arrangements of the exams in the schedule generated earlier might not fulfill many of the soft constraints. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of the exam schedules generated, we have employed an optimization process. The optimization consists of three procedures: i) Minimization of Total Slot Conflicts, ii) Permutations of exams slots and iii) Reassignments of exams between slots. (Author, 2012). Please note that all the optimization procedures mentioned here are done in sequence but they are independent of each other.

In this paper, we will not be discussing about these procedures in detail (it can be found in (Author, 2012)), but will be looking at the possibility of improving the quality of the schedules by substituting the second step of optimization: the *permutations of exams slots* which is a local search procedure with a more effective procedure.

Realizing that our existing method (permutations of exams slots), is a local search procedure, we

would like to incorporate a global search procedure in order to see whether it could generate better quality schedules. For this purpose, we have implemented Genetic Algorithm (GA) to substitute the permutations of exams slots in the optimization process.

Genetic algorithm has been chosen as an alternative approach to our implementation because it has been proven a good way of producing good examination timetables (Burke et. al, 1994a), (Burke et. al, 1994b), (Gyori et. al, 2001), (Ulker et. al, 2007). Besides, it has been mentioned that the hybridisations of GA with some local search have led to some success in this area. (Author, 2008).

Below we present the diagram to illustrate a summary of the work done in our research (Author, 2012) which shows the sequence of every process involve and the part that will be substituted by GA. Please note that the whole set of optimizations is done twice, therefore first and second order optimization can be seen in the diagram.

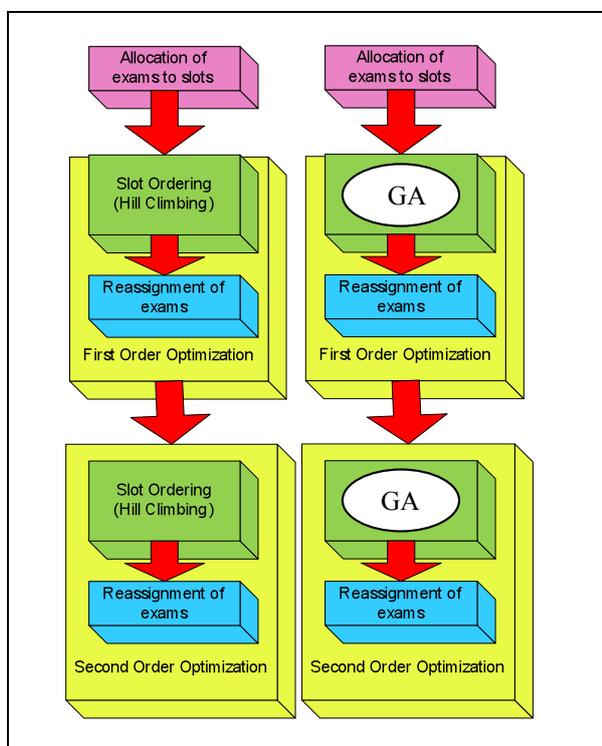


Figure 2: Scheduling and Optimization Steps Before and After GA Substitution.

2 OPTIMIZATION METHODS

Normally, the cost of the initial timetables generated by the allocation method mentioned earlier is a bit

high. This is because the ordering of exams to slots might not satisfy many of soft constraints. An example is the gap between conflicting exams is not spaced out equally. The cost of the schedules is measured by objective function proposed by Carter (Carter et. al, 1996) as below:

$$\frac{1}{T} \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=i+1}^N s_{ij} W_{|p_j - p_i|} \quad (1)$$

where N is the number of exams, s_{ij} is the number of students enrolled in both exam i and j, p_j is the time slot where exam j is scheduled, p_i is the time slot where exam i is scheduled and T is the total number of students. According to this cost function, a student taking two exams that are $|p_j - p_i|$ slots apart, where $|p_j - p_i| = \{1, 2, 3, 4, 5\}$, leads to a cost of 16, 8, 4, 2, and 1, respectively.

The lower the cost obtained, the better is the quality of the schedule, since the gap between two consecutive exams allows students to have additional revision time.

2.1 Hill Climbing Optimization

In this optimization process, the permutations of exam slots in the spread matrix (Author, 2009), (Author, 2012) are done. This process involves shuffling of slots or columns and so as block shifting and swapping. The procedure started by reading a spread matrix which is a matrix indicating how many students taking an exam from slot 'i' and 'j'.

The permutations in the spread matrix involved swapping of slots and repetitions of block shifts. Each slot will be swapped with another slot. This is done by doing provisional swapping and the Carter cost will be evaluated first. If the cost is reduced, the swap will be remembered and the exam proximity matrix will be updated according to this swap. Due to this, we call this kind of optimization as a greedy Hill Climbing (HC). The term greedy here refers to the fact that we always take the best value whenever we found one. A number of repetitions of block shift and swapping are done in order to ensure the search space is explored in different directions so that global optimum of the solutions can be found.

2.2 Genetic Algorithm Optimization

Genetic algorithm is a search heuristic that mimics the process of natural evolution. It simulates the inheritance of living beings and it is a widely used method to solve optimization and search problems.

Genetic algorithm is a procedure used to find approximate solutions to search problems by mimicking the evolutionary biological process. It operates on a population of solutions represented by some encoding. Each member or unit of the population consists of a number of genes, representing a unit of information. This procedure begins by creating an initial population (normally randomly generated). Next the solution members are evaluated by computing their fitness (or quality). The selection procedure then reproduce more copies of individuals with higher fitness values. The selection procedure influences the search direction towards promising areas. Genetic operators such as crossover (mating two parents) and mutation (slight random changes) are used to create new populations. The important parameters include the population size, crossover rate and mutation rate.

In our Genetic Algorithm implementation, we defined the original parent as P0, which is a data structure with the initial ordering of slots (1 N) where N is the number of slots. GA creates a new parent by moving position of the rows in blocks to the new position, then appends it to array P. A member of $\langle npar \rangle$ parents will be generated. Generation of the new parents is just by shifting the rows which in the end is the new representation of the original parent with a magnitude maximum distance of $npar - 1$. Therefore, if it is just a window shift, there will be identical parents.

We then generated the new offspring. The number of offspring to be generated is equals to $npar \times npar - 1$. Each of the parents will be crossed over with all other parents at a certain point R. The result will be added to "o" which is the overall population. The best parent will be automatically selected to become one of the next generation parent. Then the next best parent with the lowest cost will be selected. The parent will be included in the next population and the process continues for certain number of generations.

3 COMPUTATIONAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The experiment in this work was performed on all 13 datasets in the Toronto benchmark repository [<ftp://ftp.mie.utoronto.ca/pub/carter/testprob>] and also on the Nottingham dataset [<http://www.cs.nott.ac.uk/~rxq/files/Nott.zip>]. For the sake of comparability with other studies in the literature, these problems are considered here as an

uncapacitated scheduling problem. Uncapacitated means the total room capacity in each time slot is not considered.

The characteristics of all the datasets are listed in Table 1. For the Toronto datasets, based on the survey made by (Author, 2006), 8 out of 13 problem instances exist in 2 versions. We will use version I of the datasets which are extensively tested by other researchers.

Table 1: The characteristics of the Benchmark Datasets (a)Name of Dataset; (b) No of Exams; (c) No of Students; (d) No of Enrollments; (e) Required No of Slots; (f) Conflict Density

| (a) | (b) | (c) | (d) | (e) | (f) |
|---------------|------|-------|-----------------------|-----|------|
| nott (a/b) | 800 | 7896 | 33997 | 23 | 0.03 |
| car-s-91 (I) | 682 | 16925 | 56877 | 35 | 0.13 |
| car-s-91 (II) | 682 | 16925 | 56242 / 56877 | 35 | 0.13 |
| car-f-92 (I) | 543 | 18419 | 55522 | 32 | 0.14 |
| car-f-92 (II) | 543 | 18419 | 55189 / 55522 | 32 | 0.14 |
| ear-f-83(I) | 190 | 1125 | 8109 | 24 | 0.27 |
| ear-f-83(II) | 189 | 1108 | 8014 | 24 | 0.27 |
| hec-s-92(I) | 81 | 2823 | 10632 | 18 | 0.42 |
| hec-s-92(II) | 80 | 2823 | 10625 | 18 | 0.42 |
| kfu-s-93 | 461 | 5349 | 25113 | 20 | 0.06 |
| lse-f-91 | 381 | 2726 | 10918 | 18 | 0.06 |
| pur-s-93 (I) | 2419 | 30029 | 120681 | 42 | 0.03 |
| pur-s-93 (II) | 2419 | 30029 | 120686 / 120681 | 42 | 0.03 |
| rye-f-92 | 486 | 11483 | 45051 | 23 | 0.07 |
| sta-f-83(I) | 139 | 611 | 5751 | 13 | 0.14 |
| sta-f-83(II) | 138 | 549 | 5689 | 35 | 0.14 |
| tre-s-92 | 261 | 4360 | 14901 | 23 | 0.18 |
| uta-s-92(I) | 622 | 21266 | 58979 | 35 | 0.13 |
| uta-s-92(II) | 638 | 21329 | 59144 | 35 | 0.13 |
| ute-s-92 | 184 | 2749 | 11793 | 10 | 0.08 |
| yor-f-83 (I) | 181 | 941 | 6034 | 21 | 0.29 |
| yor-f-83 (II) | 180 | 919 | 6012 | 21 | 0.29 |

We have shown the results obtained by using Hill Climbing and Genetic Algorithm optimization on the initial feasible schedule generated by our allocation method before performing other optimization process (Author, 2012) in Table 2 to Table 15. For the Hill Climbing, we recorded the worse and the best cost during the process

(permutations of slots), and for the Genetic Algorithm, we presented the cost produced after Generation 1 (Gen1) and Generation 15 (Gen15).

The best cost produced for each type of optimization is accepted and the ordering of slots were rearranged accordingly before doing further optimization : reassignment of exams between slots (Author, 2012) and later repeating the whole set of the optimization process until there is no improvement in the schedule cost (Author, 2012). The accepted cost together with the CPU time taken for each process can be seen in these tables.

Table 2: Results obtained by optimization for nott

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| nott | 31.95 | 10.94 | 10.94 | 187.27 |
| 38.99 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 28.03 | 14.74 | 14.74 | 3.39 |

Table 3: Results obtained by optimization for car-f-92(I)

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| car-f-92 (I) | 8.89 | 5.36 | 5.36 | 268.97 |
| 9.43 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 8.07 | 6.68 | 6.68 | 5.11 |

Table 4: Results obtained by optimization for car-s-91(I)

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| car-s-91 (I) | 10.43 | 6.26 | 6.26 | 351.39 |
| 11.77 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 9.37 | 8.10 | 8.10 | 5.99 |

Table 5: Results obtained by optimization for ear-f-83(I)

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| ear-f-83 (I) | 62.57 | 40.45 | 40.45 | 136.77 |
| 72.69 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 53.51 | 48.99 | 48.99 | 1.78 |

Table 6: Results obtained by optimization for hec-s-92(I)

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|----------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| hec-s-92 (I) | 22.55 | 12.52 | 12.52 | 27.52 |
| 22.83 | Genetic | | | |

| | Algorithm | | | |
|--|-----------|--------|-------|------|
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 19.39 | 14.14 | 14.14 | 2.30 |

Table 7: Results obtained by optimization for kfu-s-93

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| kfu-s-93 | 29.89 | 16.06 | 16.06 | 40.36 |
| 37.79 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 26.81 | 20.06 | 20.06 | 2.48 |

Table 8: Results obtained by optimization for lse-f-91

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| lse-f-91 | 22.42 | 14.63 | 14.63 | 26.59 |
| 23.77 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 19.40 | 17.20 | 17.20 | 2.25 |

Table 9: Results obtained by optimization pur-s-93(I)

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|----------------------|--|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |

| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|-----------|------|--------|
| pur-s-93 (I) | 14.27 | 6.69 | 6.69 | 321.05 |
| 14.91 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 11.94 | 8.47 | 8.47 | 7.97 |

Table 10: Results obtained by optimization for rye-f-92

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| rye-f-92 | 28.55 | 12.68 | 12.68 | 73.17 |
| 31.50 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 19.04 | 16.46 | 16.46 | 3.25 |

Table 11: Results obtained by optimization sta-f-83(I)

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| sta-f-83 | 193.47 | 158.43 | 158.43 | 10.28 |
| 201.95 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 172.80 | 163.12 | 163.12 | 0.52 |

Table 12: Results obtained by optimization for tre-s-92

| Dataset / Initial | Cost | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|-------------------|------|---------------|--------------------|
|-------------------|------|---------------|--------------------|

| Cost | | | | |
|----------|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| tre-s-92 | 13.25 | 9.84 | 9.84 | 66.34 |
| 14.81 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 12.76 | 11.70 | 11.70 | 3.17 |

Table 13: Results obtained by optimization utas-s-92(I)

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| uta-s-92 (I) | 6.59 | 4.23 | 4.23 | 455.94 |
| 7.30 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 6.19 | 5.22 | 5.22 | 6.54 |

Table 14: Results obtained by optimization for ute-s-92

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| ute-s-92 | 43.25 | 31.79 | 31.79 | 2.91 |
| 56.97 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 35.77 | 32.96 | 32.96 | 1.30 |

Table 15: Results obtained by optimization for yor-f-83(I)

| Dataset / Initial Cost | Cost | | Accepted Cost | CPU Time (seconds) |
|------------------------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Hill Climbing | | | |
| | Worse cost | Best cost | | |
| yor-f-83 (I) | 56.31 | 43.36 | 43.36 | 46.99 |
| 59.04 | Genetic Algorithm | | | |
| | Gen 1 | Gen 15 | | |
| | 50.77 | 47.50 | 47.50 | 0.75 |

Based on the results presented in Table 2 to Table 15, it can be seen clearly that our proposed greedy Hill Climbing (HC) method has outperformed GA in all cases during the optimization when tested on the benchmark datasets. All the results produced by GA for all the datasets after generation 15 (Gen 15) were not able to outperform results produced by HC.

It is worth highlighting here that the cost obtained by GA for all datasets at generation 1 (Gen 1) are quite encouraging, where they are much lower than the worse cost obtained by HC. However, all of them failed to outperform the cost obtained by HC after generation 15 (Gen 15).

Using the data gathered from the experiments on all the datasets, we have plotted graphs for the cost (1) versus the Total Slot Conflicts as in Figure 3 and Figure 4. Figure 3 and 4 show the graphs for the cost(1) versus the Total Slot Conflicts plotted for all benchmark datasets tested. Diagram (a1), (b1), (c1), (d1), (n1) are the graphs (line-graphs) when HC optimization used where as diagram (a2), (b2), (c2), (d2),..... (n2) are the graphs (dotted-graphs) plotted when GA optimization used. The diagrams in these figures are arranged according to the sequence of datasets from Table 2 to table 15.

Based on the graphs presented, the horizontal line constructed from the second data point to third data point in diagram (a1) to (n1) is due to reduction of cost via permutations of exams slots (greedy HC) which did not involve any augmentation of total slots conflicts (Author, 2012). The dotted line from the first data point to the second data point in each diagram (a2) to (n2) is constructed based on the GA optimization discussed earlier in this paper.

The dotted lines in this stage showed that a significant reduction in terms of the initial cost has

been achieved by performing the GA optimization. These lines also showed that our GA implementation managed to substitute the HC implementation and was incorporated successfully in the whole set of our optimization process. (Author, 2012).

One of the obvious thing that can be seen in the graphs is that the line constructed by GA optimization is not always horizontal. This is because, the crossover and mutation of exam slots in the GA optimization process had changed the assignments of some exams to slots to ensure the feasibility of the schedules, thus changing the existing number of total slots conflicts. This is not the case duirng HC optimization where by the total exam-slot conflict does not change because the individual exams to slots remain as before permutations. (Author, 2012).

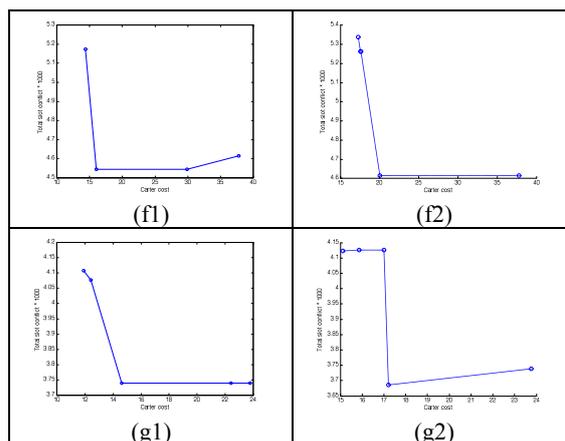
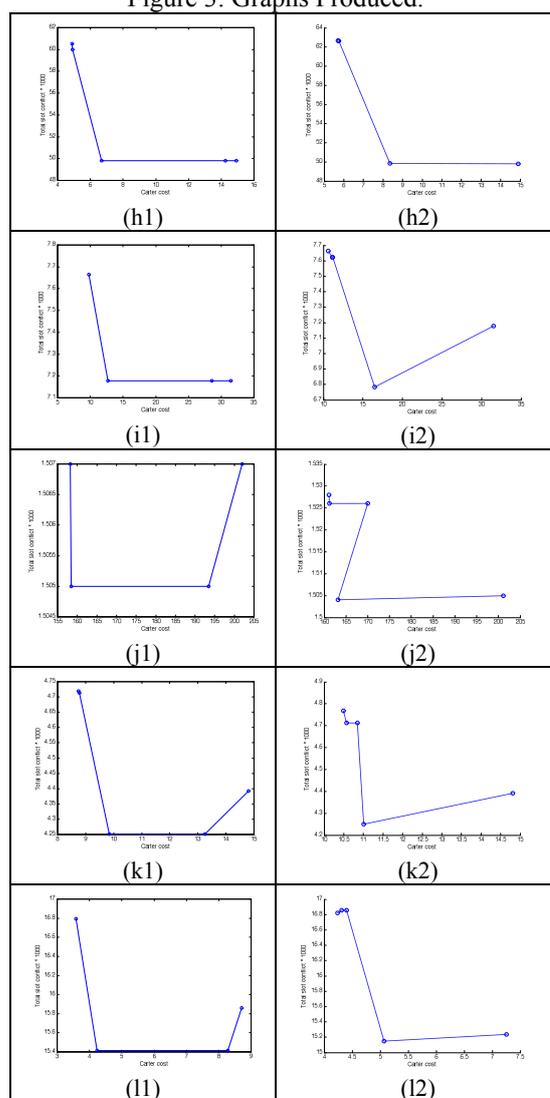
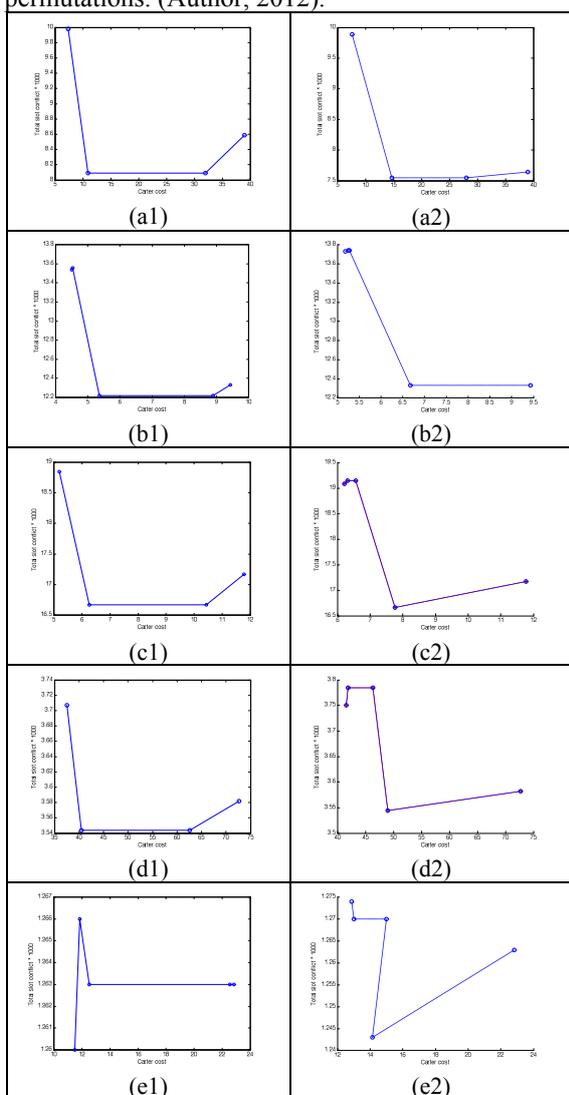


Figure 3: Graphs Produced.



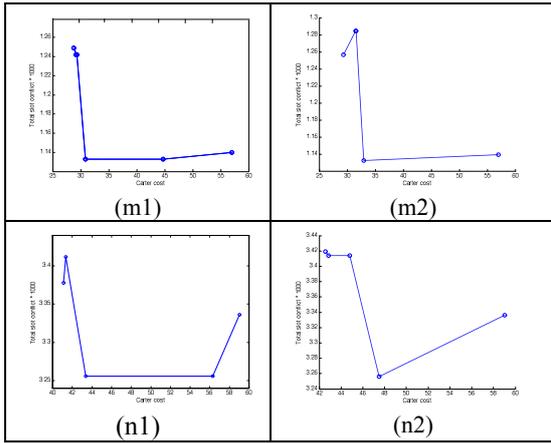


Figure 4: Graphs Produced

An interesting point to note is the computational time taken to execute both methods. Even though GA did not surpass HC in all cases, however the time taken to execute the process was incredibly fast compared to our HC implementation. We have managed to implement a simple, straightforward and quite effective GA which consumed very little amount of time to improve the initial feasible schedule, although majority researchers claimed that the GA took a very huge time in order to solve the scheduling problem (for example claimed by (Abramson, 1992)).

This advantage (minimal time requirement) could offer even more advantage, because based on the results presented earlier we can predict that addition to the number of iterations or generations (with the aim to generate better offsprings) to the GA execution will add only little more computational time that would definitely be very acceptable.

However, unfortunately this is not the case. The increase in the number of generations has not given any benefit to the reduction of the cost of the exam schedule generated. We have experimented 15 generations, but it seems like the highest number of generations that manage to reduce the cost is generation 12 (car-f-92(I)). Recall that we have mentioned previously, a second round of optimization was done in order to test whether it could reduce the cost further. Therefore, after performing reassignment of exams on the schedules obtained by the GA optimization (Author, 2012), we have repeated the GA optimization one more time. As can be seen in Table 16, the highest number of generations that could reduce the schedule cost is generation 11 (rye-f-92) even though 15 generations was tested.

The second round has improved the cost(1) for most of the datasets (exceptional for notts, carf92, kfus93, purs93, and utes9) and this is illustrated in diagram (a2) until (n2) by the third data point to the fourth data point.

The final results obtained by HC and GA methods which later were further improved by reassignments of exams (Author, 2012) were compared and can be found in Table 17. It can be seen clearly that HC outperforms GA in all cases, though the execution time recorded was a bit high in comparison to GA, but the amount of time taken was still reasonable which is only a few hundreds seconds CPU time.

Table 16: Number of Generations That Could Improve the Schedule Cost During GA Optimization

| Dataset | First Order Optimization: Cost Improved Until Iteration | Second Order Optimization: Cost Improved Until Iteration |
|---------|---|--|
| notts | 7 | 0 |
| carf92 | 12 | 0 |
| cars91 | 9 | 2 |
| earf83 | 7 | 6 |
| hecs92 | 6 | 7 |
| kfus93 | 10 | 0 |
| lsef91 | 8 | 4 |
| purs93 | 11 | 0 |
| ryef92 | 8 | 11 |
| staf83 | 6 | 4 |
| tres92 | 8 | 5 |
| utas92 | 10 | 4 |
| utes92 | 3 | 0 |
| yorf83 | 6 | 3 |

Table 17: Final Cost Produced Using HC versus GA Optimization

| Dataset | Final Cost Produced after All Optimizations Processes For HC (Author, 2012) | Final Cost Produced after All Optimizations Processes For GA |
|---------|---|--|
| notts | 7.34 | 7.62 |
| carf92 | 4.49 | 5.18 |

| | | |
|--------|--------|--------|
| cars91 | 5.19 | 6.03 |
| earf83 | 37.57 | 45.08 |
| hecs92 | 11.47 | 12.90 |
| kfus93 | 14.36 | 17.27 |
| lsef91 | 11.90 | 15.11 |
| purs93 | 4.88 | 5.57 |
| ryef92 | 9.8 | 10.63 |
| staf83 | 158.25 | 161.13 |
| tres92 | 8.74 | 9.86 |
| utas92 | 3.58 | 4.01 |
| utes92 | 27.37 | 29.35 |
| yorf83 | 41.10 | 43.52 |

4 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it is shown that GA has been proven to be a good method to reduce the cost of the initial feasible timetable. With a robust implementation, it managed to explore the search space efficiently and produce good quality timetable with an incredibly fast execution time.

However, the good cost obtained through the experiment with GA did not manage to outperform the results obtained by utilizing our proposed greedy HC. Although the computational time taken by GA execution is very much lower than HC, but an additional reasonable amount of time taken to obtain good quality schedules is considered very worth while. Since HC managed to improve the initial feasible schedule without fail for all datasets and always surpass the GA results, therefore it is suggested that the proposed HC is incorporated and used in our whole set of optimization process.

Through the findings of this research, it makes it more understandable to us the claim made by (Ross et.al, 1998) that sometimes GA is not a very good approach in solving problems.

In the future work, we will try to implement other types of search procedures to be incorporated with our proposed method for example the Late Acceptance Hill Climbing method which has been proven to be very effective in producing encouraging results to the examination scheduling problem. (Bykov et. al, 2008), (Bykov et. al, 2009).

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