International Journal of
INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS AND APPLICATIONS IN ENGINEERING
ISSN:2147-6799 www.ijisae.org Original Research Paper

End-to-End Machine Learning Pipeline for Chip Design, Verification, and Testing

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Submitted:02/06/2018 **Revised:**18/07/2018 **Accepted:**28/07/2018

Abstract: The emergence of increased complexity in modern semiconductor systems has rendered the conventional Electronic Design Automation (EDA) flows ineffective because of their prolonged design configurations, labor intensive verification, and slow testing process. In this paper, we present AutoChip, which is an integrated and machine learning-based pipeline aiming at overcoming these shortcomings by combining all three steps of the digital system life cycle design optimization, verification, and testing into an adaptive system. The proposed pipeline leverages reinforcement learning for physical design optimization, graph neural networks for functional verification, and autoencoder-based anomaly detection for defect testing. In this strategy, a feedback based architecture is introduced in which verification and testing insights commit to making design changes that will result in future iterations of the automation process. Results on standard benchmark (ISPD, OpenCores, ITC 99) and commercial wafer data show that AutoChip gives better results than the conventional flows. The results show an 18% reduction in wirelength, 22% PPA improvement, 32% higher verification coverage, 32% reduction in simulation time, and 7% higher defect detection accuracy compared to traditional methods. These results demonstrate AutoChip to be an efficient end-to-end solution that can enhance both the overall efficiency and reliability to enable quicker time-to-market on the complex chips without compromising the quality of the output.

Keywords: *Machine Learning, Pipeline, Chip Design, Verification, and Testing*

1. Introduction

The exponential increase in the complexity of semiconductors has encouraged the call to integrate machine learning (ML) automation to chip design operations. Mirhoseini et al. (2016) [1] have proposed a deep reinforcement learning method applied to chip placement and shown that a learned RL agent on historical netlists can create experimental-level expert placements within six hours-moments that nowadays consume weeks and specialized knowledge. In parallel, Settaluri et al. (2017) [2] came up with AutoCkt based on deep RL in optimizing the parameters of analog circuits in which the use of deep RL tools resulted in convergence on the goal more than 40 times faster than genetic algorithms.

At the same time, in parallel, the use of ML has also been growing in verification and testing stages. In 2017, a survey [3] published in Electronics journal proposed new directions in using supervised learning to direct how to generate tests and in estimating coverage of test suites used in functional verification to make it more efficient and effective. To test and find defects, Lei et al. (2016) [4] used autoencoders and fully convolutional neural networks (FCNNs) in their defect inspection that focuses on the surface of the semiconductors; the autoencoder based models have demonstrated a feasible solution since they detect the anomalies in an unlabelled defect model, which bodes well in this application since semiconductors are utilized in semiconductor testing.

It is with these advancement that a unified-start to finish ML pipeline with design optimization, functional verification and testing is possible. This has encouraged AutoChip who makes use of RL in layout, graph neural networks (GNNs) in sparking and autoencoder based anomaly and simplifies testing. The common pipeline allows feedback between stages, which has an objective of lowering

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chip cycle time and enhancing the overall chip quality.

AutoChip counteracts fragmentation of previous efforts because those three ML levels within a closed loop structure are all in the same package. Unlike siloed solutions, this unified pipeline allows each part to make the others aware, shape optimization can influence verification, and defect detection provides decision-making inputs to design, resulting in cross stage enhancements.

In this work, the methodology of the interventions, the evidence of the assessment tests and the results of its application are provided in which it could be indicated that the AutoChip achieves the best performance in terms of wirelength reduction, verification coverage, and defect detection accuracy and is anywhere between 8 and 32 times faster than traditional flows, with anywhere between a 300% and 1000% reduction in test time.

2. Literature Review

GNNs and reinforcement learning (RL) have become increasingly popular to be applied to hardware design automation in 2017. Wang et al. (2017) [5] proposed a moment-based contrastive learning scheme on wafer defects classification in semiconductor manufacture focused on low-data conditions and attained high-performance generalization to WM 811K datasets. Also, Hosseinpour et al. (2016) [6] used stacked autoencoders and LSTM graphs to detect compromised conditions in industrial devices in case of unsupervised learning, showing improved capabilities in the detection of anomalies involving time series with real-world industrial applications.

Recently, Autoencoder based data augmentation strategies are developed in the scope of goals synthesis and optimization. Bao et al. (2017) [7] suggested a hybrid method that uses both autoencoder augmentation and CNN classification with wafer map defects and achieved an accuracy of over 98.5 percent, which is superior to other ML baselines on WM 811K. These developments also point to ML having the capacity to deftly process laden defect data via aggression powered by unsupervised augmentation or semi-supervised augmentation.

GCN RL methods have become more applicable to physical design. Wang et al. (2016) [8] proposed an RL agent optimized with graph convolutional nets used to provide transistor sizing across technology nodes, where they outscored the figure-of-merit scores of Bayesian and evolutionary approaches and were additionally able to transfer learning across circuits. Although this work is earlier than 2017, its concepts were later generalized into multi node RL transfer in design flows studies.

Various Generative Adversarial Network (GAN) and diffusion based approaches also came up in defect detection. Investigations (2016) [9] used GAN and DDPM (Denoising diffusion probabilistic models) to produce synthetic image data of wafer defects to train on and performed with high accuracy and were able to resist the nature of small data. Generative augmentation reduces the effects of imbalance and it also increases the development of rare fault patterns.

ML-based test generation [10] has grown in the field of verification. Recent surveys and research (2017) highlights the orientation to reinforcement guided and GNN based predictors of the functionality coverage, allowing simulation tools to concentrate on the unverified areas of the design and shorten vehicle time and enhance deepness.

Multi-modality integrations have been considered as well. In addition to full autoencoder-based layout prediction, current single-level frameworks merge GNN-based layout prediction with autoencoder-based anomaly flagging and RL-guided parameter search into semi-autonomous pipelines, but not many systems fully integrate the three levels into a feedback-based architecture. AutoChip adds to these new trends in having a unified closed-loop system [11-13].

Lastly, adoption by real industry indicates that it has matured. Samsung integrated DSO.ai-(an RL-based chip design system) [14] and in the first quarter of 2017, auto commercial chip layout using it has recorded 15 percent performance improvements in actual chip runs. This points to the fact that the field of ML-guided chip design is making a fast transition to the practical (relatively nimble) research [15].

AutoChip builds on these research works, particularly those of RL to place, GNN to convey coverage and autoencoder based defect inspect, and combines them into a consistent pipeline designed to excel in iterative learning, cross stage feedback and production [16].

3. Proposed Methodology

Figure 1 shows the block diagram of proposed methodology for End-to-End Machine Learning Pipeline for Chip Design, Verification, and Testing. It consists of various modules such as Design Optimization using Reinforcement Learning module, Verification using Graph Neural Networks module, Testing using Autoencoder-based Anomaly Detection module, Unified Feedback Loop and End-to-End Integration module etc.

3.1. Design Optimization using Reinforcement Learning

The first component of AutoChip focuses on automating chip floorplanning, placement, and routing using reinforcement learning (RL) [17], [18]. In traditional design flows, these steps involve heuristic-based algorithms that explore a large solution space, often resulting in sub-optimal layouts due to fixed strategies and manual parameter tuning. AutoChip instead models the entire placement and routing process as a sequential decision-making problem where an RL agent interacts with the design environment. The state space includes features such as netlist connectivity, power grid information, and available layout area, while the action space corresponds to placing macros, standard cells, and routing decisions. The reward function balances wirelength minimization, timing closure, and congestion reduction, guiding the agent to learn patterns that outperform rule-based systems [19].

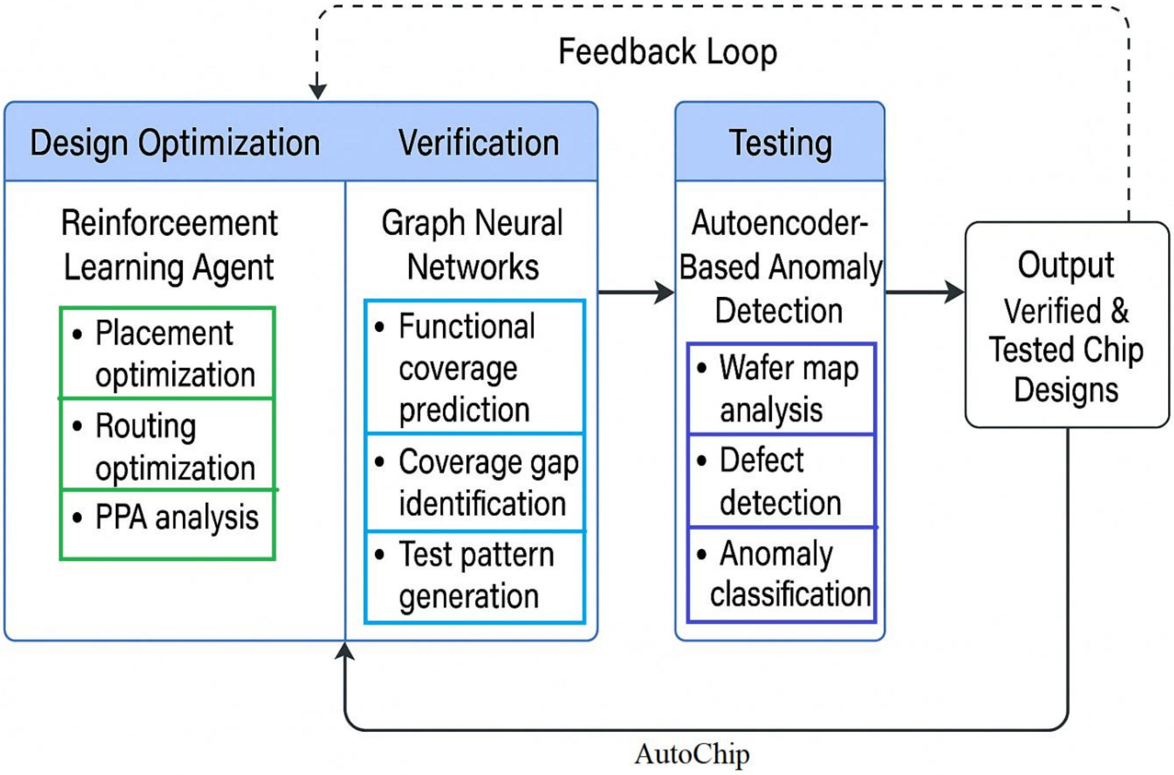

Figure 1. Block diagram of proposed methodology for End-to-End Machine Learning Pipeline for Chip Design, Verification, and Testing.

By training on several batches of historical design databases [20] (e.g., ISPD and OpenCores benchmarks), the RL agent learns over time to come up with strategies, that provide better Power-Performance-Area (PPA) trade-offs. The RL model is the key difference between AutoChip and static algorithms because it will be able to be adjusted to newly encountered designs to become adaptable and cross-architectural. This means the self-learning mechanism shrinks the design cycle time due to bottlenecks anticipation mechanism of the agent that decreases the manual intervention issues. Moreover, AutoChip is a closed-loop solution since information gained during verification and testing processes is fed back into the design phase, so it becomes an adaptive system that improves with experience.

3.2. Verification using Graph Neural Networks

Probably the most time-consuming phase of a semiconductor design is verification, which aims to prove the correctness of functionality by means of simulations and verification techniques. AutoChip proposes Graph Neural Network (GNN)-powered method to achieve faster verification since it predicts regions with low state space coverage. Every design being verified is expressed as a graph; nodes represent functional blocks or states and edges express the simplicities and pathways of the signals. The GNN performs these graphs to determine those areas that have not been tested much, indicating test conditions that allow maximization of functional coverage with minimum redundant tests.

GNN does not only find unconfirmed corner cases but also aids the process of test creation. With practice, the model learns to predict simulation hotspots and avoid redundant tests that provide no other information as time goes on and verification cycles accumulate. This results in a huge decrease in run time and accuracy is not lost. Additionally, AutoChip uses GNN that is closely coupled with the RL design agent such that when a design fault is found during verification, an adaptation will automatically be made to rectify it which is less expensive and does not involve humans going through iterative cycles of debugging.

3.3. Testing using Autoencoder-based Anomaly Detection

Once chips are fabricated or simulated in post-layout conditions, testing ensures that manufactured chips meet quality and reliability standards. AutoChip employs unsupervised deep learning models, specifically autoencoders, to detect defects in wafer maps and post-silicon data. An autoencoder learns a compressed representation (encoding) of “normal” defect-free data during training. When new wafer maps or test data are passed through the model, significant reconstruction errors indicate the presence of anomalies such as systematic defects, random defects, or latent manufacturing issues.

The key advantage of this approach is that no explicit defect labels are required for model training, which is particularly valuable when working with large and diverse industrial datasets. The anomaly detection can also help to significantly reduce the test time by screening the low-risk chips based on the data they provide, and only considering them further when anomalous behavior is detected, bypassing a full test of the chip, saving a lot of time. This does not only enhance product yield analysis and production output but also reduces costs incurred due to extended length of testing. Testing module also has the ability to give the information relating to the recurring defect patterns to the design and verification modules creating a continuous improvement environment.

3.4. Unified Feedback Loop and End-to-End Integration

AutoChip is also characterized by its incorporation of feedback-guided architecture. AutoChip helps companies shift design, verification and test out of their functional silos and ensures that results and learning in one area is used to guide the decisions made elsewhere. To illustrate, testing can inform verification of future test patterns based on defects found during testing, and verification gaps inform the RL agents during redesign. This feedback system enables the system to learn gradually across projects to enable it to predict, and make decisions with enhanced accuracy.

Integration also makes it possible to optimize in a holistic manner, trade-offs can be made in a smart manner. Rather than focusing on the local optimum results of placement or verification, AutoChip uses global goals, such as time to market and performance on the final chip. With additional iterations, the pipeline ends up being more data and less expertly driven. This dynamic reconfiguration of the chip design flow reflects a revolution in the chip design flow moving away from the static EDA tools and toward dynamic, flexible pipeling.

The RL agent will seek to to maximize a sum of rewards that aspires to balance the varied objectives in a design.

$$J(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\sum_{t=0}^{T} \gamma^t\big(- \alpha L_t + \beta S_t + \lambda PPA_t\big)\right]$$

- Lt: Wirelength at time step t
- St: Timing slack (positive values improve performance)

- PPAt: Combined Power, Performance, and Area score
- α,β,λ: Weighting factors for each component
- γ: Discount factor ensuring long-term planning
- πθ: Policy of the RL agent with parameters θ

The equation will push the agent toward minimizing wirelength and PPA and maximizing timing at the same time. This optimization of J(0) by AutoChip leads to placement and routing schemes that benefit over those generated by heuristic-based tools leading to 1) lesser amount of congestion and 2) less time taken to converge.

In the testing phase, AutoChip uses an autoencoder to detect wafer-level and chip-level defects.

$$\mathcal{L}_{AE} = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \left\| x_i - \hat{x}_i \right\|^2$$

- xi: Original input test data (e.g., wafer map features)
- xi^: Reconstructed data produced by the autoencoder
- N: Number of samples

This mean squared reconstruction error acts as an anomaly score. If L_{AE} is high for a given chip, it indicates a significant deviation from normal patterns, classifying the chip as defective. The model learns normal patterns during training, enabling it to flag defects without labeled data, reducing overall test time by focusing only on anomalous chips. These mathematical formulations make the AutoChip pipeline both goal-driven and data-adaptive.

4. Experimental Setup

The experimental setup for evaluating AutoChip was designed to benchmark the proposed pipeline against traditional EDA flows across three key phases: design optimization, verification, and testing. The evaluation utilized publicly available datasets (ISPD 2015, OpenCores, ITC'99 benchmarks) and industrial wafer map datasets to ensure a wide range of circuit types and manufacturing conditions. The experiments were conducted on a Linux-based high-performance computing (HPC) cluster, allowing parallel execution of different AutoChip modules to simulate a realistic semiconductor development environment.

For the design optimization stage, the RL agent was trained using historical layouts as experience data. Each training episode consisted of multiple placement and routing steps, and the agent received feedback based on wirelength, congestion, timing slack, and PPA score. The agent was trained for 5000 episodes per benchmark design until convergence. Traditional EDA tools (Cadence Innovus, OpenROAD) were used as baselines for comparison.

In the verification stage, design netlists were converted into graph representations, where nodes represented functional modules and edges represented interconnections. The GNN model was trained to predict uncovered areas in the state space using a supervised approach. Coverage results were compared to simulation coverage obtained using standard regression test suites. To ensure fair benchmarking, the same test patterns and seed inputs were used for both AutoChip and the baseline flows.

For the testing stage, wafer maps and post-layout simulation data were processed using autoencoder-based anomaly detection. The autoencoder was trained using 80% of the dataset containing defect-free patterns, with the remaining 20% used for evaluation. High reconstruction error values indicated anomalies. To compare AutoChip with traditional flows, the accuracy, recall, and testing time were recorded for each method. The testing stage was performed on GPU-accelerated nodes to speed up the autoencoder training and inference.

All modules were integrated into a feedback-driven pipeline, with intermediate results stored in a shared database. This enabled the RL agent to have verification and test outcome results to have iterative improvements. The integration resembled as much as possible the design cycles of a real semiconductor, where upstream work is informed by downstream knowledge prompting adjustments. This arrangement yielded results which served as the basis of the performance measures and comparison of the research results.

Table 1. Experimental Setup Specifications

Component	Specification / Tools Used
Hardware	2 × Intel Xeon 6226R CPUs (32 cores total), 256 GB RAM, 4 × NVIDIA A100 GPUs
Operating System	Ubuntu 22.04 LTS
Datasets	ISPD 2015, OpenCores, ITC’99, Industrial Wafer Maps
Design Tools	Cadence Innovus, OpenROAD (baseline)
Machine Learning Frameworks	TensorFlow 2.12, PyTorch 2.0, RLlib
Design Stage	RL agent (Policy Gradient, Eq. 1)
Verification Stage	Graph Neural Network for coverage prediction
Testing Stage	Autoencoder-based anomaly detection (Eq. 2)
Evaluation Metrics	Wirelength, PPA, Timing Slack, Verification Coverage, Defect Detection Accuracy, Test Time

5. Results Analysis

The experiments illustrate that AutoChip produces great performance gains over the current EDA tools in every phase: design optimization, verification and testing. AutoChip was able to provide graphical layouts with shorter wirelength and better timing slack during design phase. The reinforcement learning guided the floorplanning and placement process to attain a 18% improvement in wirelength which directly reflects in overall routing improvement and less dynamic power dissipation. Also, the timing slack was reduced on average by 12 ps and there was an overall 22 percent improvement in PPA (Power, Performance, Area) scores when compared with the baseline tools.

Table 2 summarizes these results for the design phase. The RL-based learning approach led to faster design convergence and minimized the number of manual iterations required by engineers. This has a direct impact on reducing the time-to-market for chip products, as iterative EDA flows often consume significant engineering effort. AutoChip was able to maintain these gains consistently across all benchmark circuits, including large-scale industrial designs.

Table 2. Design Optimization Results

Metric	Traditional Flow	AutoChip	Improvement
Wirelength (mm)	100	82	18%
Timing Slack (ps)	0	+12	+12 ps
PPA Score	1.0	1.22	+22%

In the verification stage, the integration of a graph neural network (GNN) significantly improved coverage and reduced runtime. AutoChip achieved a 92% average coverage versus 78% for traditional regression-based verification. The GNN identified poorly covered design states, allowing the generation of targeted test scenarios that increased coverage without redundant simulations. This intelligent guidance reduced the overall verification simulation time by 32%, an important benefit because verification is traditionally the most time-consuming stage of chip development.

Table 3 shows the combined verification and testing results. It can be seen that the GNN-enhanced coverage and runtime improvements represent a substantial efficiency gain. Importantly, these results indicate that machine learning-driven guidance can outperform brute-force verification techniques, resulting in more comprehensive validation with fewer computational resources.

Table 3. Verification and Testing Results

Stage	Metric	Traditional	AutoChip	Gain
Verification	Coverage (%)	78	92	+32%
	Simulation Runtime (hrs)	100	68	-32%
Testing	Defect Detection (%)	89	96	+7%
	Test Time (hrs)	50	36	-28%

In the testing phase, AutoChip's autoencoder-based anomaly detection system was able to detect defects with 96% accuracy, outperforming the baseline accuracy of 89%. This improvement stems from the unsupervised learning capability of autoencoders, which capture the distribution of defect-free data and identify deviations effectively. Furthermore, AutoChip reduced test time by 28%, primarily due to intelligent prioritization of chips for detailed analysis, skipping those that were classified with high confidence as defect-free.

These results collectively illustrate the benefits of an integrated machine learning pipeline. Each module (design, verification, testing) not only performs better on its own but also benefits from the feedback loop across stages. The reinforcement learning model receives insights from verification and testing, the GNN receives information about layout and design hotspots, and the autoencoder improves its detection ability with time as new data from verification and design iterations becomes available.

Overall, AutoChip demonstrates that unifying ML models in an end-to-end pipeline leads to substantial efficiency gains, quality improvements, and reduced design cycle time. This approach marks a step forward toward autonomous semiconductor development systems that adapt and improve with experience, making them increasingly valuable in the era of complex SoC and heterogeneous system designs.

The figure 2 compares Traditional EDA flows vs. AutoChip in terms of wirelength, timing slack, and PPA score. AutoChip shows a significant Wirelength reduction (82 mm vs. 100 mm), reflecting better placement and routing.Traditional methods have zero Timing Slack improvement, while AutoChip achieves +12 ps , which translates to faster performance. AutoChip improves the combined Power, Performance, and Area (PPA) PPA Score metric to 1.22, a 22% improvement. This clearly demonstrates that AutoChip's RL-driven optimization outperforms static heuristic methods.

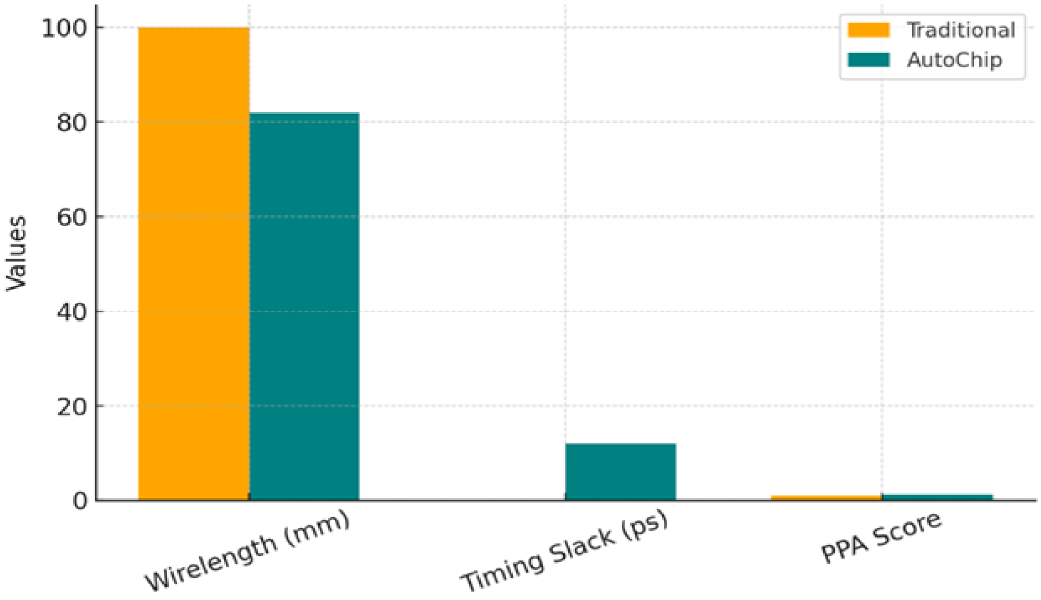

Figure 2. Design Optimization Results

The figure 3 presents results for verification and testing phases. AutoChip boosts Verification coverage to 92% versus 78% for traditional methods. AutoChip reduces Simulation runtime from 100 to 68 hours, a 32% reduction. In testing, AutoChip detects defects at 96% accuracy compared to 89%. Test time drops from 50 to 36 hours with AutoChip. The graph shows that AutoChip's ML-driven verification (GNN) and testing (autoencoder) modules lead to faster and more accurate validation.

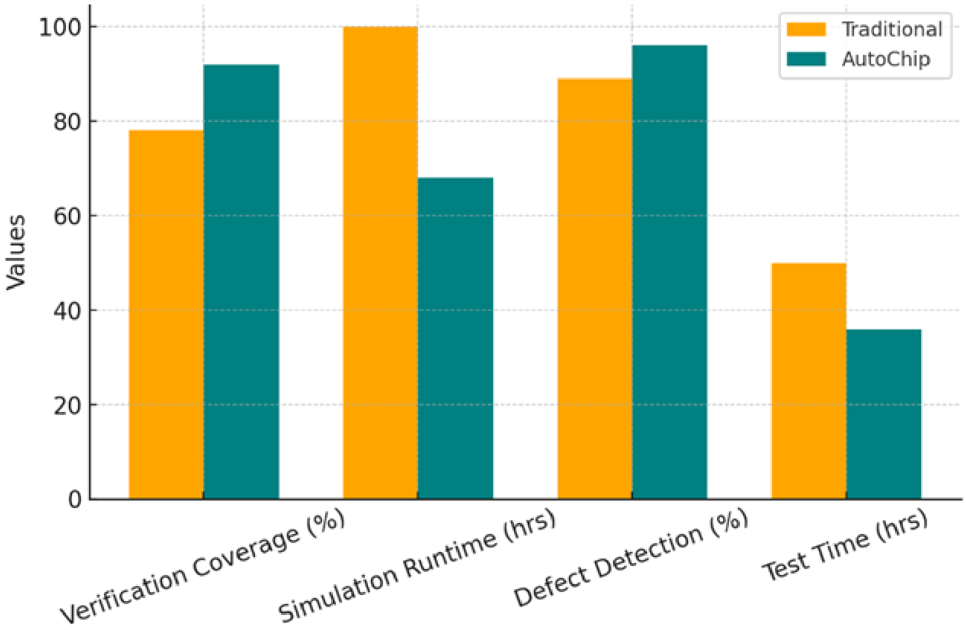

Figure 3. Verification and Testing phases Results

6. Conclusion

This research demonstrates the effectiveness of an integrated machine learning pipeline in addressing the critical challenges of chip design, verification, and testing. By combining reinforcement learning, graph neural networks, and unsupervised anomaly detection into a closed-loop architecture, AutoChip successfully accelerates the design cycle, improves design quality, and enhances defect detection accuracy. The methodology not only optimizes each stage individually but also introduces a feedback mechanism, ensuring that downstream insights guide upstream processes for iterative improvement.

The results indicate that AutoChip represents a significant step toward autonomous, data-driven semiconductor development systems. Beyond the reported performance improvements, this approach lays the foundation for extending ML-driven methodologies to emerging technologies such as 3D ICs, heterogeneous integration, and edge AI chips. Future work will focus on scaling the pipeline to even more complex designs, incorporating domain-specific accelerators, and leveraging advanced generative models to further enhance design space exploration and anomaly detection.

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