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### Authors

Alzantot, Moustafa

Wang, Yingnan

Ren, Zhengshuang

et al.

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## RSTensorFlow: GPU Enabled TensorFlow for Deep Learning on Commodity Android Devices

Moustafa Alzantot, Yingnan Wang, Zhengshuang Ren, and Mani B. Srivastava

University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095

### Abstract

Mobile devices have become an essential part of our daily lives. By virtue of both their increasing computing power and the recent progress made in AI, mobile devices evolved to act as intelligent assistants in many tasks rather than a mere way of making phone calls. However, popular and commonly used tools and frameworks for machine intelligence are still lacking the ability to make proper use of the available heterogeneous computing resources on mobile devices. In this paper, we study the benefits of utilizing the heterogeneous (CPU and GPU) computing resources available on commodity android devices while running deep learning models. We leveraged the heterogeneous computing framework `RenderScript` to accelerate the execution of deep learning models on commodity Android devices. Our system is implemented as an extension to the popular open-source framework `TensorFlow`. By integrating our acceleration framework tightly into `TensorFlow`, machine learning engineers can now easily make benefit of the heterogeneous computing resources on mobile devices without the need of any extra tools. We evaluate our system on different android phones models to study the trade-offs of running different neural network operations on the GPU. We also compare the performance of running different models architectures such as convolutional and recurrent neural networks on CPU only vs using heterogeneous computing resources. Our result shows that although GPUs on the phones are capable of offering substantial performance gain in matrix multiplication on mobile devices. Therefore, models that involve multiplication of large matrices can run much faster (approx. 3 times faster in our experiments) due to GPU support.

### Keywords

Deep learning; Android; `RenderScript`; `TensorFlow`; heterogeneous computing; Convolution; Neural networks; LSTM

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in artificial intelligence and machine learning have made huge leaps in the accuracy of machine perception algorithms in different domains such as object detection [16], speech recognition [13], and natural language understanding [10]. A lot of this progression comes due to the renaissance of deep neural networks (a.k.a. deep learning [12]) methods. Running the deep learning model locally - on device - saves the time and money

spent on sending data to remote servers and reinforces the user privacy. However, running deep learning models involves a massive amount of calculations. Therefore, a lot of applications prefer to send the data from the mobile device to remote servers where the model runs and sends the result back to device despite the obvious benefits of running the models locally on mobile devices. Therefore, an easy to develop with accelerated deep learning framework on mobile devices becomes a necessity.

Although popular deep learning frameworks (e.g. Caffe [15], Torch, Theano [8], and TensorFlow [6]) accelerate the computation of deep learning models by utilizing heterogeneous hard-ware (CPU/GPU) resources and even custom hardware accelerator such as tensor processing units (TPU) used in Google data centers. When running the mobile device versions of these frameworks (e.g. Caffe Mobile [2], Torch Android [5], and TensorFlow for Android [4]), we observe that all of them run entirely on the device CPU. In this paper, we introduce `RSTensorFlow` an extended version of `TensorFlow` that supports heterogeneous computing resources for commodity Android devices. `RSTensorFlow` is implemented by modifying the *kernels* of `TensorFlow` operations to leverage the `RenderScript` heterogeneous computing framework on Android devices. As a result, running models with `RSTensorFlow` will seamlessly utilize the power of available computation resources while running models trained with `TensorFlow` without requiring the use of any other external tools.

In this paper, we make the following contributions:

1. we introduce and implement `RSTensorFlow` a modified version for `TensorFlow` that supports both CPU and GPU on commodity android devices.
2. We benchmark and evaluate the trade-offs of running common deep learning operations (namely matrix multiplication and convolution) on CPU vs GPU on commodity android phones.
3. We benchmark and evaluate the trade-offs of running different model architectures for common tasks (namely, image recognition and gesture recognition) on heterogeneous computing resources.
4. we provide our framework `RSTensorFlow` as an open-source project<sup>1</sup> for the research community.

Although recently research was done on using other computing resources on mobile devices for accelerating the runtime of deep learning models (e.g. DeepX [17], CNN-Droid [19]), these frameworks are either proprietary and not available for the community, or requires specific hardware devices and does not integrate well with the existing popular deep learning frameworks such as `Tensorflow`.

We evaluate the performance of our system on different Android devices (Nexus 5x, Nexus 6). We notice that matrix multiplication operations gain significant speed when running on GPU, given that matrix size is big. As a result, we notice *up to 3 times* speedup in running

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<sup>1</sup><https://nesl.github.io/RSTensorFlow/>

the inception model on Nexus 5X phone. On the other hand, we notice that convolution operation runs on CPU faster than GPU. Therefore, optimizing convolution operation to run mobile phones GPU remains an interesting research goal.

The rest of this paper is organized as follow: Section 2 provides a summary of the related work, Section 3 provides a brief background about deep learning and the `RenderScript` framework. Section 4 has our system design and implementation details. Section 5 lists our experiments and evaluation results. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper.

## 2. RELATEDWORK

In desktop/server environments, GPU vendors provide accelerated computing libraries for developers such as cuBLAS [21] and cuDNN [9] from Nvidia and AMD Core Math Library (ACML [7]). These libraries provision useful primitive for deep learning engineers to utilize accelerated computing in their frameworks. However, unfortunately there are no equivalent primitives libraries provided by mobile GPU vendors. Although, OpenCL existed for a while as an industry standard for heterogeneous computing that supports mobile devices.

Unfortunately, OpenCL is no longer *officially* supported on most android devices. As a result the current versions of Deep-learning frameworks running on mobile devices: Caffe Mobile [2], Torch Android [5] run only on CPU without acceleration. TensorFlow [6] also supports running on different mobile and embedded platforms: Raspberry pi, iOS and Android. In Android TensorFlow also runs on the device CPU while making use of low-precision quantized matrix multiplication library `GEMMLowp` [3] to provide faster inference time and reduce the memory size of the model. However, it still does not make use of the mobile device GPU.

Recently, different research efforts considered the acceleration of deep learning framework running locally on mobile devices. For example, DeepX [18] accelerates the deep learning inference on mobile devices by using the DSP, GPU and using runtime layer compression to decompose the deep model across available hardware resources. However, in their paper results, DeepX [18] used the GPU only on the Nvidia Tegra K1 Soc and relied on using DSP on the more popular Snapdragon Qualcomm SoC. Also, DeepX is not available for the public developers to use and does not integrate within popular deep learning frameworks. However, possible future work would be to make use of the model compression and decomposition algorithms proposed by DeepX to further improve our implementation.

In comparison to recent work by [20] which also used `RenderScript` framework to accelerate the runtime of convolutional neural networks on mobile devices. Although they report very impressive speed up gain (more than 200x) by using `RenderScript`, this result is magnified due to the fact that they are comparing their `RenderScript`-based convolution against their own java serial implementation of convolution operation. However, we have the same advantage of using `RenderScript` but we compare ourselves against `Eigen` [14] library which is the state of art of optimizing deep learning models runtime on top of ARM NEON SIMD instruction set. We also accelerate other important operations, namely matrix multiplications. Therefore, our `RSTensorFlow` can be used to accelerate other models than convolution neural networks. Finally, our system can be used to run models trained with

TensorFlow out of the box without any model conversion or preparation as needed by [20], and [18].

### 3. BACKGROUND

#### 3.1 Deep Neural Networks

Neural networks are a sub-class of machine learning models that are loosely inspired by how the human brain functions. The computation model for neural networks consists of layers of transformations applied to input data to approximate a target function. Deep learning uses a large number of hidden layers to learn a hierarchical representation of the input data in order to increase the model accuracy. Deep learning methods can be broadly classified into major model types including:

**Feed forward neural networks:** also called multi-layer perceptrons (MLPs), are the fundamental form of neural network. MLPs have no feedback connections, therefore information flow from one layer to the next one. The layer output  $Y$  is computed as the result of applying a transformation of the input  $X$  (multiplying it by weight vector then adding a bias value), then applying a non-linear activation function  $\sigma$  to it. Commonly used activation function include: the `sigmoid` function, `tanh` function, and the rectified linear unit `relu` function. Implementing a feed-forward (fully connected) layer involves a matrix multiplication operation. Since both input  $X$  and output  $Y$  are usually represented as matrices containing several (batch) examples together and the weights matrix  $W$  is also a matrix representing the input weights of different units within the same layer.

**Convolutional neural networks (CNNs):** are specialized versions of MLPs that are currently the state of art model architecture for image recognition tasks. ConvNets are similar to MLPs but ConvNet models start with groups of *convolution* and *pooling* layer pairs.

**Recurrent neural networks (RNNs):** are neural network models with feedback loops that give them an advantage for modeling patterns in sequential data with variable lengths. They are widely used for different time-series applications such as language translation in natural language processing (NLPs), time-series forecasting, and classifying sensors data.

#### 3.2 TensorFlow

TensorFlow is a widely used framework for machine intelligence. It was originally developed and used by Google internally, until it was released as open-source project in 2015. TensorFlow represents a model computation as a data-flow model in the form of a directed graph. The graph is composed of a set of *nodes* that represent *operations* while *edges* between the nodes are *tensors* holding arbitrary dimensionality arrays of values. TensorFlow relies mainly on the `Eigen` [14] and `cuBLAS` [21] as a library for underlying linear algebra subroutines. On commodity Android devices, `Eigen` [14] is the library being used. While `Eigen` is very well optimized library for running on ARM processors using the ARM advanced SIMD instruction-set (`NEON`), it does not make use of other heterogeneous computing resources such as GPU and DSP.

Recently a cooperation between Google and Qualcomm has led to adding Qualcomm Hexagon 682 DSP support to TensorFlow. Hexagon 682 DSP is an integrated part of the Snapdragon 835 SoC. According to official statement from Qualcomm, running TensorFlow on DSP is 25X times faster and 8X energy efficient than running on CPU. However, phones with Snapdragon 835 are not launched market yet.

### 3.3 RenderScript

Google introduced RenderScript [1] as a framework for running computationally intensive tasks at high performance on Android. RenderScript parallelizes the computation work-loads across CPU cores and GPUs. It is commonly used to accelerate image processing and computer vision algorithms on mobile phones.

Developer express their data parallel tasks in terms of compute `kernels` with RenderScript code using a C99 language in `.rs` files. RenderScript framework executes kernels in parallel across different data points and will distribute the execution across the available heterogeneous CPU cores and GPUs. During the build time, this code is compiled into an intermediate bytecode using LLVM compiler. Android build tools also generate a reflected class with the name `ScriptC_renderscript_filename` for each `.rs` file. This class provides an interface to call the RenderScript functions from Java/C++ code.

During the runtime on device, this bytecode is compiled again (just-in-time) into machine code using another compiler. The machine code is optimized for the device and is cached so the just-in-time compilation happens only during the first time the code runs on device.

## 4. SYSTEM DESIGN

Running inferences using neural network model requires executing the forward pass of the model which involves different operations. We ran an experiment to decide which operations are more computationally expensive than others and hence it is more important to optimize their performance. In our experiment, we use the TensorFlow for Android library [4] to run the forward pass of inception [22] model on Nexus 6 phone. We observe the timing of every operation and of the whole model and compute the percentage of time spent running each operation type. The result shown in Figure 1 demonstrates convolution operations constitute the largest fraction of forward pass time (approx. 75%) while matrix multiplication take the second largest fraction of the the forward pass time (approx. 7%). Therefore, we focus our efforts on these two kinds of operations. The following subsections discuss our approach to modify TensorFlow to run these operations using RenderScript instead of the default Eigen ARM NEON-based implementation.

### 4.1 Matrix Multiplication (`MatMul`)

Matrix multiplication operation (`MatMul`) is an essential ingredient in all kinds of deep learning models as fully connected layers require matrix multiplication between the input matrix and the weight matrix. Fortunately, matrix multiplication is easy to parallelize as every element in the output matrix can be computed independently from other elements. Therefore, it can benefit a lot from data-parallel execution. RenderScript framework has

built-in implementation for multiple matrix BLAS (Basic Linear Algebra Subprograms) operations defined in `ScriptIntrinsicBLAS` class. We modified `TensorFlow` to make use of the `RenderScript` implementation of matrix multiplication instead of the default `MatMul` implementation that uses `Eigen` library.

## 4.2 Convolution Operation ( `Conv2D` )

Convolution operations are the core building block of CNN models such as the inception model [22] which has 22 convolution layers. Convolution layer consists of a number of filters (their values are learned during the training phase). The input and output of each convolution layer are represented as volumes where the depth of volume represents the number of feature maps. For the first input layer, depth will be 3 the RGB color channels. Convolution layer applies the sliding filters across the height and width of input volume transforms it into another volume with the new set of feature maps.

In order to parallelize the convolution operation using `RenderScript`, we developed a render script kernel file to execute the computation of output values in the convolution output volume in parallel.

## 5. EXPERIMENTS

We implemented `RSTensorFlow` by extending the `TensorFlow v1.0.1` implementation. We used Nexus 6 and Nexus 5X mobile phones. Both phones are running Android 7.0 (Nougat, API 24). The two phones have different CPU and GPU models. The detailed hardware specifications of the two phones are shown in Table 1.

### 5.1 Matrix Multiplication Operation Results

We benchmark the running time of the modified matrix multiplication operation and compare it against the running time of the default `Eigen`-based implementation on the two different phones. We perform matrix multiplication between square-matrices of different sizes and measure the time for each multiplication. The timing result are shown in Figure 2.

The results of our matrix multiplication experiments show that on Nexus 5X the `RenderScript` implementation becomes significantly faster as the matrix size increases. When square matrix size = 1024, matrix multiplication using `RenderScript` took 158 milli-seconds which is *6 times* faster than the default implementation using `Eigen` library that took 904 milli-seconds. However, on Nexus 6 phone the `RenderScript` based matrix multiplication was slower than the default `Eigen`-based implementation. The reason is the following. `RenderScript` does not provide the user with control (nor guarantees) about which hardware resource will be used to perform the computation. By monitoring the CPU and GPU frequencies during the experiment, we observed that on Nexus 5X the GPU was used to perform the matrix multiplication which explains the speed-up we obtained, while on Nexus 6 `RenderScript` did not use the GPU and used only two cores of the available 4 CPU cores while `Eigen` fully utilized the four CPU cores. This explains why `RenderScript` matrix-multiplication was faster than `Eigen` on Nexus 5X and slower than

it on Nexus 6. We repeated our experiments multiple times of different phones of the same type and observed similar results.

## 5.2 Convolution Operation Results

We also benchmarked the running time of both our RenderScript-based implementation of the convolution operation and compared it against the running of the default Eigen-based implementation. Our benchmarking results are shown in Figure 3. Unfortunately, we have not noticed speed up in the performance of convolution operation. Even on the Nexus 5X phone where RenderScript utilized the GPU, convolution operation was slower than the default TensorFlow implementation based ARM NEON acceleration. This might be due to the memory overhead associated with using RenderScript that required copying data from/to special buffers (referred to as allocations in RenderScript). Therefore, optimizing the runtime of convolution operation on mobile GPU than the Eigen-based implementation remains an interesting research question.

## 5.3 ConvNet Model Results

We also studied the effects of our RenderScript extension of TensorFlow on the total runtime of the forward pass of the inception [22] convolutional neural network model for image recognition. Inception model consists of 22 convolution and pooling layers and two large fully connected layers at the end of the model computation graph. It recognizes the input image as one of 1000 class labels of the ImageNet [11] dataset.

The results of our benchmarking experiments are shown in Table 5.3. We observe significant speed up when utilizing RenderScript to perform the matrix multiplication (approximately *3 times faster* on Nexus 5X). On the other hand, using our implementation of the convolution operations in RenderScript, tends to bring the whole model execution time slower than the original TensorFlow implementation.

## 5.4 RNN Activity Recognition Results

We also benchmarked the performance of running recurrent neural network sequence classification model using Long-Short Term memory (LSTM) units. We developed an activity recognition RNN model consisting of 512 LSTM units that receive as input a time-series (100 time-steps) of accelerometer and gyroscope sensor measurements to identify the hand gesture as one of the 11 signs which are shown in Figure 5.4. The model can achieve above 90% classification accuracy evaluated using 5 folds cross validation on a dataset of 1290 examples collected by four persons.

Evaluation results shown in Figure 5.4 shows that `RSTensorFlow` slightly improves the classification runtime. Notice, that time-series classification using RNN is a computationally expensive task as the state update for every time step involves several matrix multiplication operations.

The result shows that although the `RSTensorFlow` is slower than the original TensorFlow model when the model runs on a single example, `RSTensorFlow` becomes faster than the



original TensorFlow when we increase the batch size (as a result of increasing the size of the matrix multiplication).

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we introduced RSTensorFlow an accelerated deep learning framework on commodity android devices using the heterogeneous computing framework RenderScript. Although, we noticed that GPU was not used by RenderScript on all phone models. When GPU is used, RSTensorFlow improves matrix multiplication operations a lot and therefore we observed significant speedup in running different models on Nexus 5X phones. Optimizing other deep learning operations and profiling the energy costs of running on CPU vs GPU are potential future research directions.

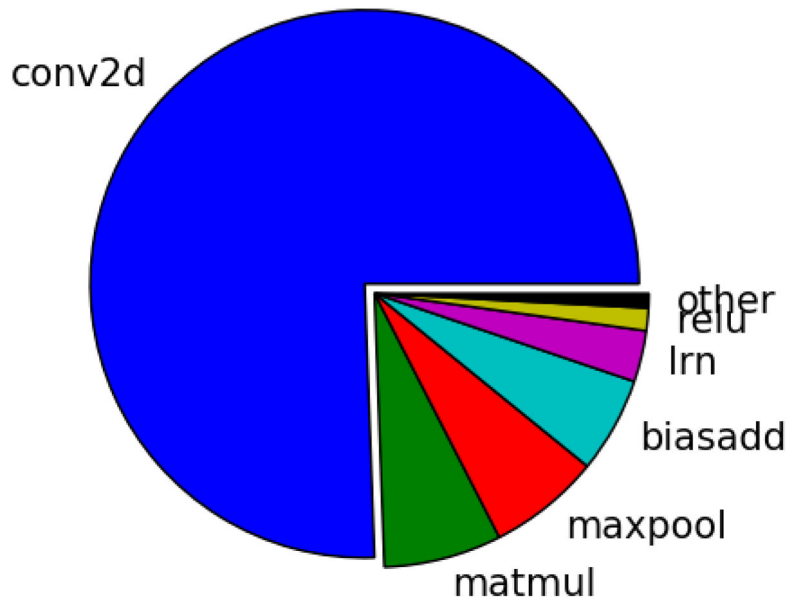
## Acknowledgments

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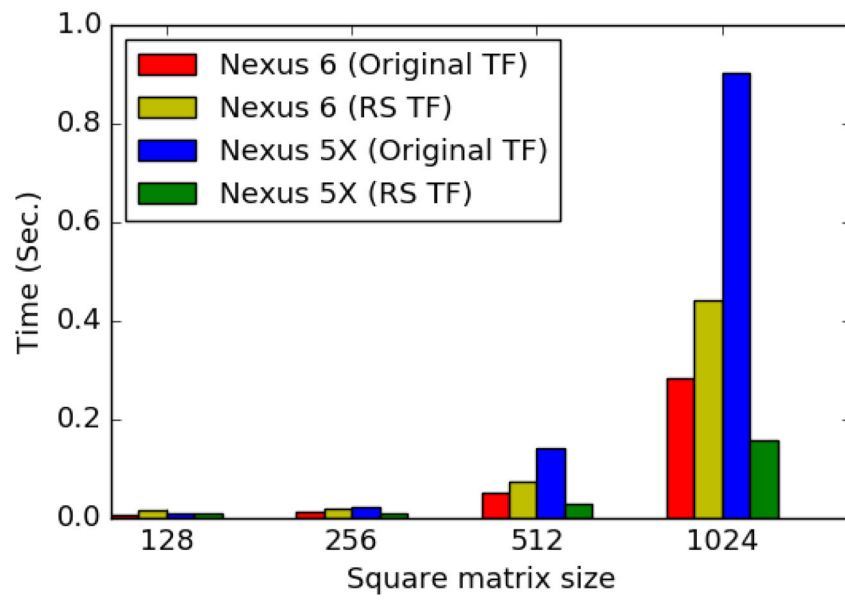
**Figure 1.**  
The time share of each type of operations during the forward pass of Inception model

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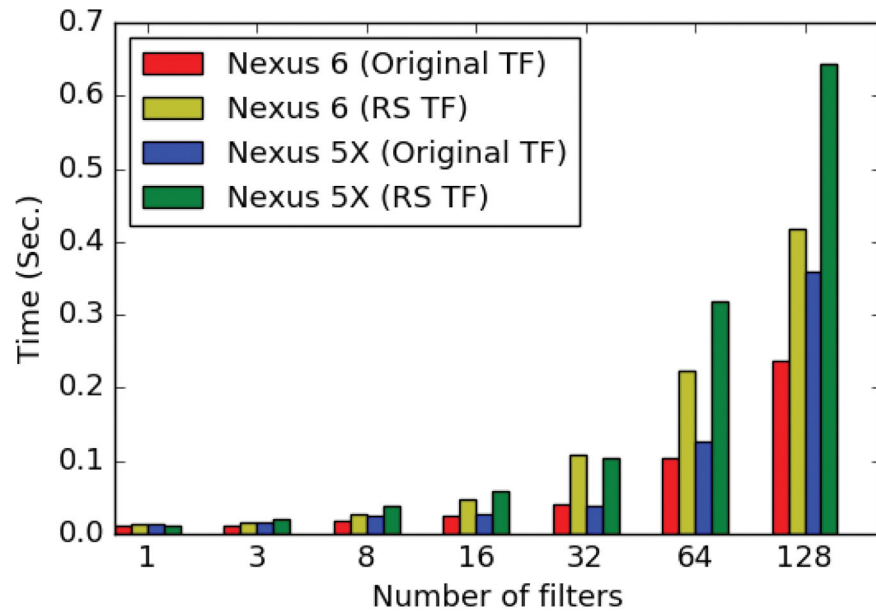
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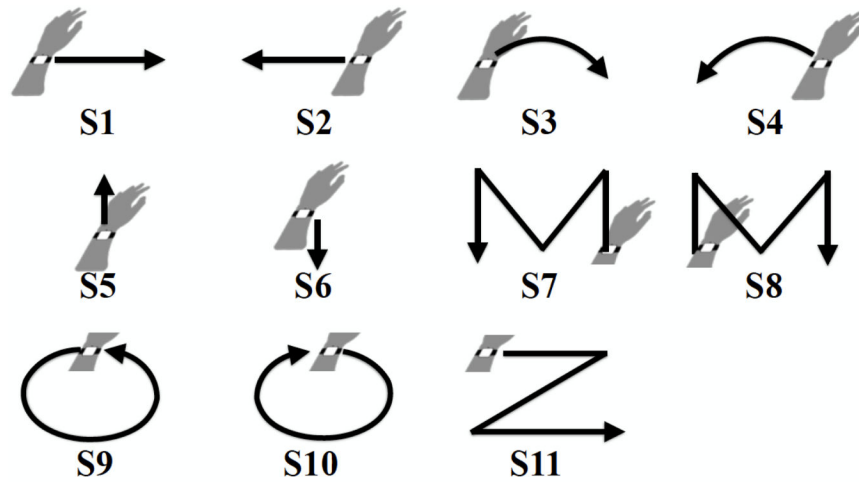
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**Figure 2.**  
Time of matrix multiplication between square matrices using Original TensorFlow and RenderScript TensorFlow



**Figure 3.** Time of applying convolution operation on input image with size 224x224 using Original TensorFlow and RenderScript TensorFlow



**Figure 4.**  
List of hand gestures used in our LSTM-based activity recognition model

**Table 1**

Hardware specs of phones used in our experiments

Model	Nexus 5X	Nexus 6
SoC	Snapdragon 808	Snapdragon 805
Processor	1.8GHz (8 cores)	2.7 GHz (4 cores)
GPU	Adreno 418	Adreno 420
Memory	2 GB	3 GB

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**Table 2**

Comparison of the time (in seconds) required to run the forward pass of Inception model using the original TensorFlow v1.0.1, TensorFlow with RenderScript matrix multiplication and convolution operations, and TensorFlow with RenderScript matrix multiplication only.

Batch size	Nexus 6			Nexus 5X		
	Original TF	TF + RS MatMul & RS Conv2D	TF + RS MatMul	Original TF	TF + RS MatMul & RS Conv2D	TF + RS MatMul
1	0.453	1.765	0.312	0.699	2.775	0.351
2	0.718	1.757	0.370	1.235	2.782	0.471
3	0.979	1.879	0.475	1.785	2.811	0.649
4	1.246	1.841	0.575	2.335	2.853	0.839
5	1.535	1.830	0.645	2.988	2.930	1.025



**Table 3**

Comparison of the time (in seconds) required to run the LSTM sequence classification model.

	Nexus 6		Nexus 5X	
	TensorFlow	RSTensorFlow	TensorFlow	RSTensorFlow
batch size=1	0.824	3.986	1.314	2.213
batch size=64	9.456	9.234	7.698	7.253

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