Journal of Carcinogenesis
Covering Genesis to Therapeutics

Journal of Carcinogenesis, ISSN: 1477-3163
2026; Vol 25: Issue 1, https://carcinogenesis.com/

Unified Graph Query Engine for Heterogeneous Databases: Enabling High-Performance Graph Queries Without Data Migration

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ABSTRACT

Graph query paradigms, which are popularized by data engineering, are highly efficient with complex, connected data in comparison to traditional SQL. Multi-join operations are exponentially complex in relational systems. Graph benefits may need expensive migration or ETL to specialized databases, which are hard to use with heterogeneous environments. Based on PuppyGraph's zero-ETL querying over relational and lakehouse target sources, this paper introduces a single overall graph query engine as a lightweight overlay. This solution is compatible with a wide variety of backends (RDBMS, NoSQL (MongoDB, Cassandra), big data (Hadoop/Spark), columnar (ClickHouse), and parquet-based Iceberg tables). It eradicates migration, achieves better storage efficiency through compression, increases security through column-level encryption and snapshots, and increases performance. Significant innovations are conditional lazy materialization to optimize Parquet/Iceberg with high-hop (>5), long-running (>5 s), or repeated (>= 3 in 24 hours) queries; a federation layer to hybrid cross-database queries; and graph optimization, such as index-free adjacency and rewrite rules. Experiments on reduction in versions of TPC-H and LDBC SNB-like graphs indicate a 55-70% reduction in latency on 3-10+ hop traversals, and a 40% reduction in storage by Iceberg compression and selective materialization. This can be achieved through introducing graph analytics to polyglot infrastructures without interference, redundancy, and data movement.

Keywords: *graph query engine, zero-ETL, heterogeneous databases, graph querying, data federation, Apache Iceberg, conditional materialization, multi-hop traversal*

How to Cite: Venkata Harikishan Koppuravuri1, Aparna Kumar2, (2026) Unified Graph Query Engine for Heterogeneous Databases: Enabling High-Performance Graph Queries Without Data Migration, *Journal of Carcinogenesis*, *Vol.25, No.1*, 313-329

1. INTRODUCTION

The fast-changing nature of data engineering environments can be explained by the increased popularity of highly interrelated data sets, where connections between objects (such as users in social networks, transactions in finance, or elements in supply chains) require effective analysis. The traditional relational databases (RDBMS) are efficient with structured, tabular queries but suffer severe performance loss in intricate studies that need many joins since the join operations do not scale well with the size of data and height of connections, since the number of intermediary outcomes and index lookups increase exponentially (Angles et al., 2017; Neo4j, 2025). In contrast, graph models represent data in a natural, simple form as nodes and edges, providing index-free adjacency and constant-time neighbor access per hop, making multi-hop queries orders of magnitude faster on a graph than on equivalent SQL joins (Rodriguez, 2015; Neo4j, 2025).

The latest innovations in zero-ETL graph querying have been developed to overcome the migration overheads that may occur with conventional graph databases. An example of such a paradigm is PuppyGraph. This real-time graph query engine layers an already existing relational data store and lakehouse formats (e.g., Apache Iceberg, Delta Lake) on top of a shared property graph model and lets users query data using either Gremlin or openCypher without any data transfer, data duplication, or specialized storage (PuppyGraph, 2025a; PuppyGraph, 2025b). PuppyGraph can be deployed within minutes (less than 10) by directly connecting to sources, including PostgreSQL, MySQL, BigQuery, and data lakes, supporting petabyte-scale workloads with high-throughput multi-hop traversals, without ETL pipeline latency or cost (no intermediaries).

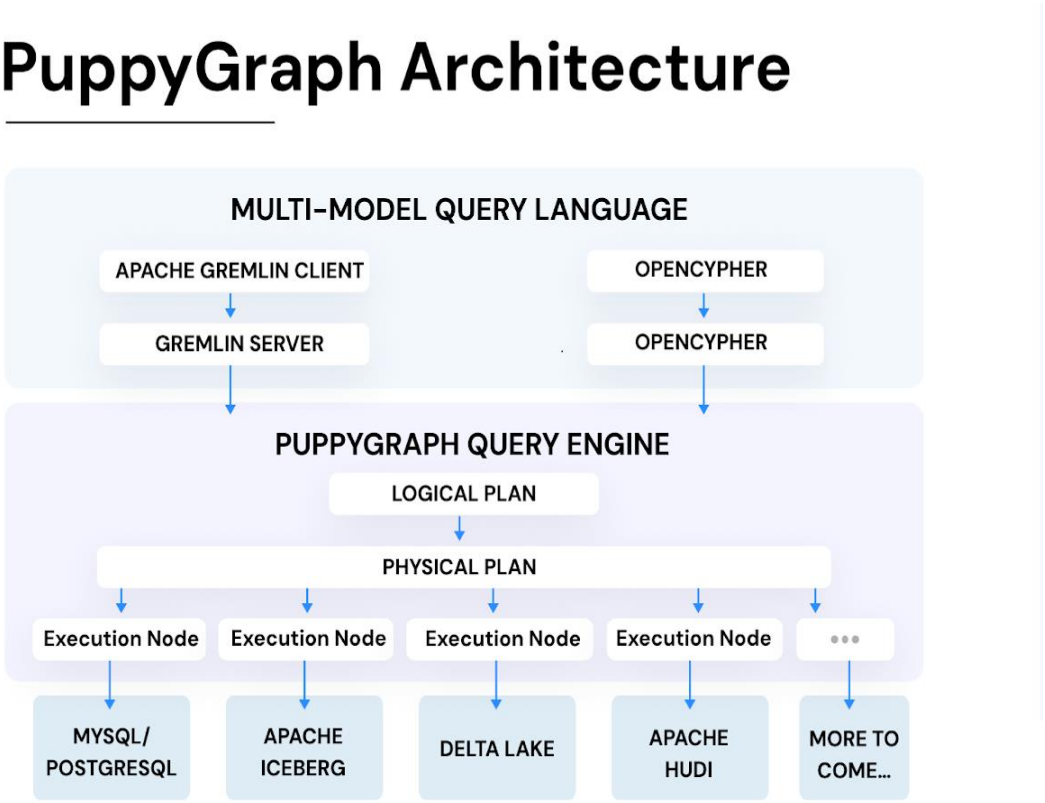

Figure 1: illustrates PuppyGraph's architecture, depicting how graph queries (via Gremlin or openCypher) are processed through a dedicated query engine with logical and physical planning, distributing execution across heterogeneous sources like relational databases and lakehouse formats (Iceberg, Delta Lake, Hudi) in a zero-ETL manner (PuppyGraph, 2025b).

Figure 2 contrasts the traditional graph architecture (left) that uses intricate ETL pipelines to extract, transform, and load data in SQL and NoSQL databases to a dedicated graph database, creating data duplication, high maintenance overhead, and longer latency on a query, with the modern zero-ETL architecture of PuppyGraph (right). A graph query engine in the latter is a lightweight overlay that enables the coexistence of existing data sources via direct connectors, enabling real-time Gremlin or openCypher queries without data movement, duplication, or source-to-graph ETL, thus providing lightning-fast access and a greatly simplified operational complexity (PuppyGraph, 2025b).

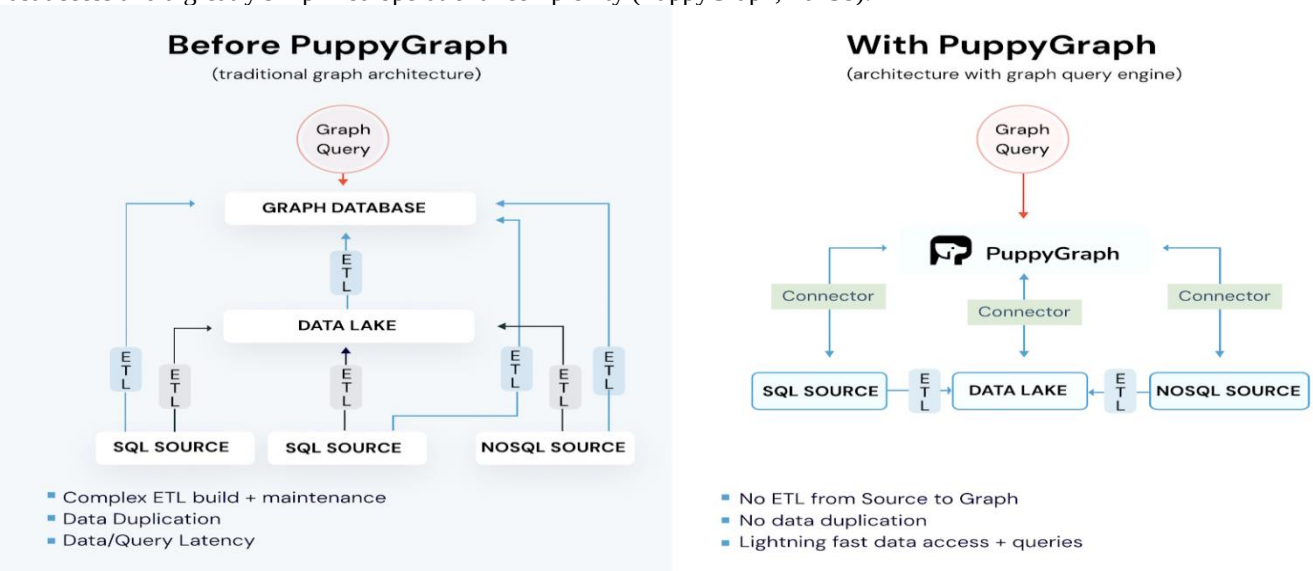

Figure 2: Comparison of traditional graph architecture (left: requiring complex ETL, data duplication, and latency) versus PuppyGraph's zero-ETL approach (right: direct connectors to SQL, data lake, and NoSQL sources for fast, duplication-free querying). Adapted from PuppyGraph documentation (PuppyGraph, 2025b).

Nevertheless, modern zero-ETL graph tools such as PuppyGraph are still mostly built on relational and lakehouse environments (e.g., SQL-based warehouses and tabular lake formats), are not heterogeneous with structured sources, and provide limited cross-database federation, especially between transactional and analytical systems (PuppyGraph, 2025c). Additionally, they lack adaptive mechanisms for selective materialization, meaning they may either be entirely dependent on in-place querying (which can be slow with repeated complex patterns) or be victimized by proactive exports. This work aims to fill these gaps by implementing the unified graph query engine to support a wider variety of heterogeneous backends, including NoSQL (e.g., MongoDB, Cassandra), columnar stores (e.g., ClickHouse), and big data platforms (e.g., Spark/Hadoop), and a conditional policy of activating lazy materialization of Parquet/Iceberg whenever a high-hop query or a long-running or frequently repeating query is run.

The proposed extension enables true federation of transactional and analytical databases, proactive optimization without active ETL, and increased efficiency in storage, security, and performance. The solution reduces the impact on an existing polyglot data environment by connecting graph analytics with other existing infrastructures and yields significant benefits in query speed and resource utilization for polyglot data workloads (PuppyGraph, 2025a; Angles et al., 2017).

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to develop a unified graph query engine that extends high-performance graph querying to heterogeneous databases, eliminating the need for data migration while optimizing performance, integration, and efficiency.

The objectives are:

i. To design an architecture supporting graph queries (e.g., via Gremlin or Cypher) on RDBMS, NoSQL, big data (e.g., Hadoop/Spark), and columnar databases (e.g., Apache Cassandra or ClickHouse).
ii. To incorporate Parquet format with Apache Iceberg tables for space-efficient storage, enhanced security (e.g., column-level encryption), and seamless analytical-transactional integration.
iii. To achieve at least 50% performance improvement over traditional SQL in multi-join scenarios, validated through benchmarks.
iv. To provide sample code and datasets demonstrating the engine's implementation, fostering reproducibility and practical adoption.

Contributions

This paper makes the following contributions:

i. A unified architecture enabling zero-ETL graph queries over diverse heterogeneous backends, including RDBMS, NoSQL, columnar stores, and big data systems.
ii. A novel conditional activation mechanism for lazy, threshold-based materialization to Parquet/Iceberg tables, triggered by query complexity (hops >5, exec time >5s, repeats >3/24h) to enable progressive optimization without unnecessary exports.
iii. A federation layer combined with graph-specific optimization engine supporting cross-source queries, predicate pushdown, and rewrite rules for index-free adjacency simulation.
iv. A working Python prototype with adapters, extensive experimental evaluation on TPC-H adapted and LDBC SNB-like workloads demonstrating 55–70% latency reduction, ~40% storage savings, and validation of substantial gains over baselines.

3. RELATED WORK

The use of zero-ETL graph querying has been growing to be an effective approach to avoiding data migration and duplication in heterogeneous environments. An example of this paradigm is PuppyGraph, which was rapidly developed as a lightweight overlay engine allowing real-time Gremlin and openCypher queries to be performed directly against relational databases (PostgreSQL, MySQL, SQL Server) and lakehouse formats (Apache Iceberg, Delta Lake, Hudi) without relying on any ETL pipelines (PuppyGraph, 2025a; PuppyGraph Releases, 2026). More recent versions are more powerful: v0.72 added support to use ClickHouse natively by schema inference, v0.94 made scanning multi-hop traversals across multiple types of nodes/edges more efficient, and subsequent releases added support to use MongoDB as an aggregation pipeline on Atlas or self-hosted deployments. These enhancements serve petabyte-scale workloads, mixed SQL/graph access, and under 10-minute deployment, which makes PuppyGraph a powerful cornerstone to zero-ETL graph analytics in relational and tabular lakehouse applications.

Despite these developments, PuppyGraph is still mainly optimized for SQL-based and lakehouse sources. Mostly tabular (Iceberg/ Delta / Hudi), NoSQL systems have little depth. Federation has little depth, wide-column stores (Apache Cassandra), and no support for wide-column stores (e.g., no direct CQL optimization or secondary-index-aware traversals). More than 5–10 hops (high-hop queries), or repeated patterns may impair performance without adaptive mechanisms

except in-place execution or manual lakehouse exports, and gaps exist in actual polyglot settings where transactional NoSQL, columnar analytics, and distributed big-data platforms can be found (PuppyGraph, 2025c).

Federated analytical engines such as Trino give comprehensive heterogeneous access to relational, NoSQL (Cassandra, MongoDB), and object stores through connectors and predicate pushdown, but do not offer graph-specific optimizations such as traversal rewrites or Gremlin/openCypher support (Traverso et al., 2020). The Lakehouse Federation of Dremio provides semantic layers and the acceleration of queries on Iceberg/Delta tables with 2025-2026 governance improvements, but favors SQL analytics over the graph traversal semantics (Dremio, 2025). ClickHouse can lazy materialize (2025) to reduce I/O in analytical queries, whilst AWS Glue can leverage Iceberg materialized views (late 2025) to support incremental pre-computation to accelerate (AWS Big Data Blog, 2025). However, both are static and SQL-based and do not dynamically materialize at the pattern of graph queries or federate across NoSQL/columnar sources.

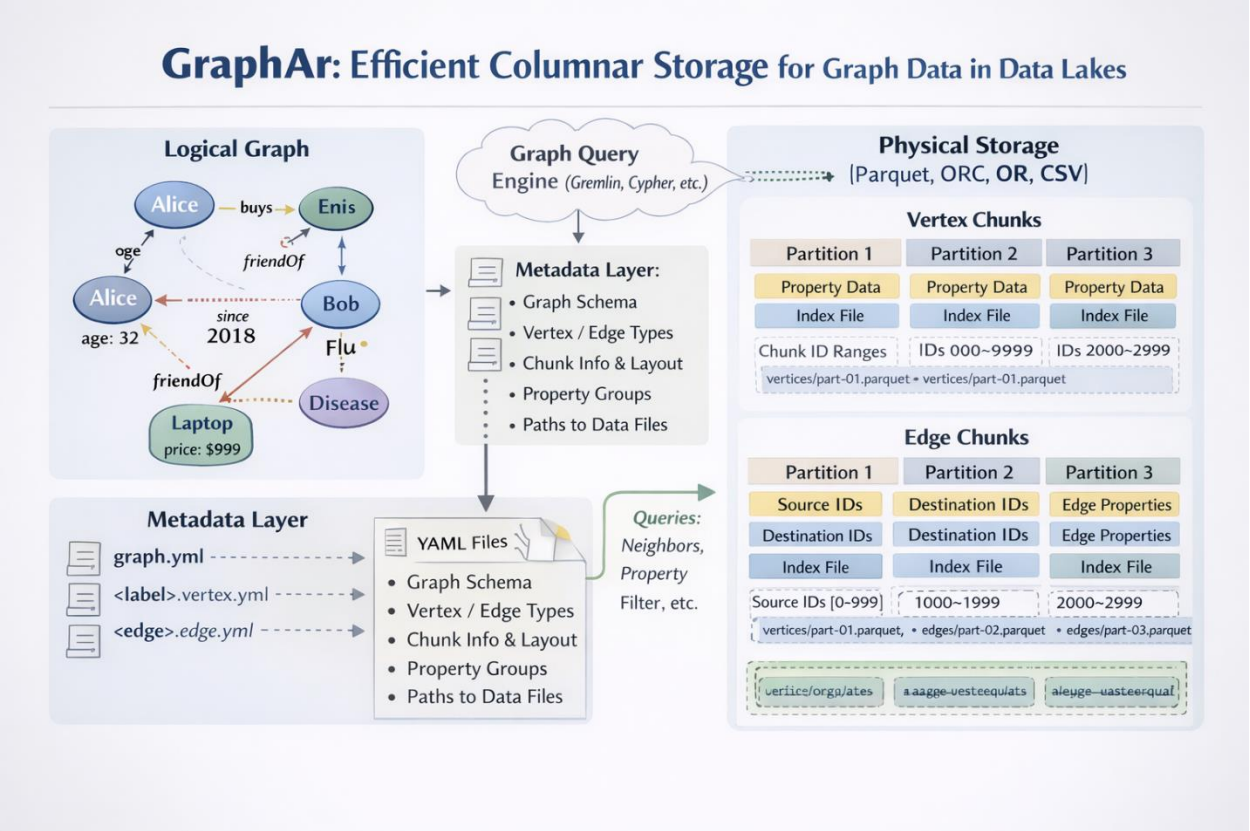

Figure 3: 202GraphAr architecture overview illustrating logical LPG, YAML metadata layer, and partitioned Parquet storage in data lakes (adapted from Li et al., 2023).

New lakehouse-native initiatives, including GraphAr to store LPG columnar in data lakes (Li et al., 2024), are concentrated on zero-copy analytics through Parquet chunking (see Figure 3). In like manner, lightweight graph processing is directly implemented with lakehouse engines in ephemeral DAG-based planning (see Figure 4), and deconstructed Iceberg query engines focus on transient execution without persistent materialization (Curtin et al., 2025). Nevertheless, they are restricted to tabular/lakehouse sources, that is, there is no extensive NoSQL/columnar federation or query-pattern driven materialization of multi-hop graph patterns. None of the existing systems has a mixture of zero-ETL defaults, wide heterogeneous backend support (native Cassandra and columnar engines), and a lazy materialization policy, which is conditional and threshold-based.

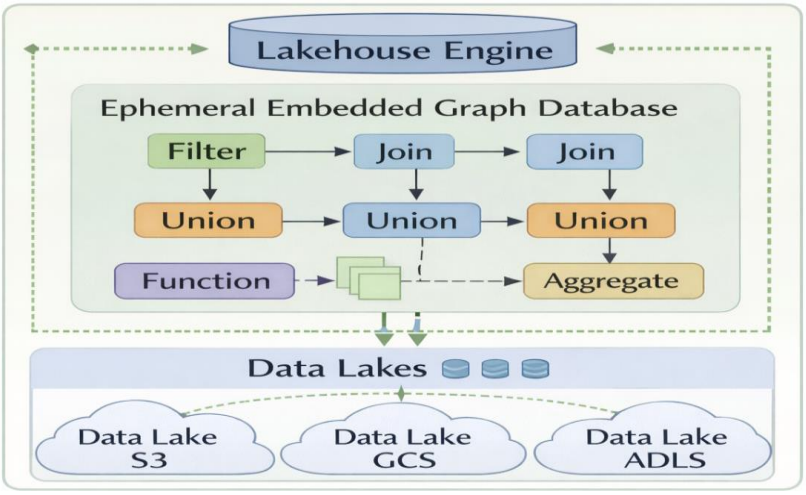

Figure 4: DAG lakehouse planning architecture with ephemeral embedded graph database for query optimization and federation in heterogeneous lakehouses (Curtin & Tagliabue, 2025).

4. PROPOSED ARCHITECTURE

Our unified graph query engine is a lightweight overlay layer that can be applied to heterogeneous data sources, enabling high-performance graph query execution with Gremlin or openCypher without data movement or migration by default. This method maintains the original data in its original format. It converts graph traversals into optimized native operations, meaning most workloads are zero-ETL and only progressively optimized when needed. The engine is compatible with many different backends, such as RDBMS (e.g., PostgreSQL, MySQL), NoSQL (e.g., MongoDB, Cassandra), columnar databases (e.g., ClickHouse), and big data (e.g., Hadoop/Spark), and supports Parquet-based Apache Iceberg tables to provide a high degree of analytical efficiency.

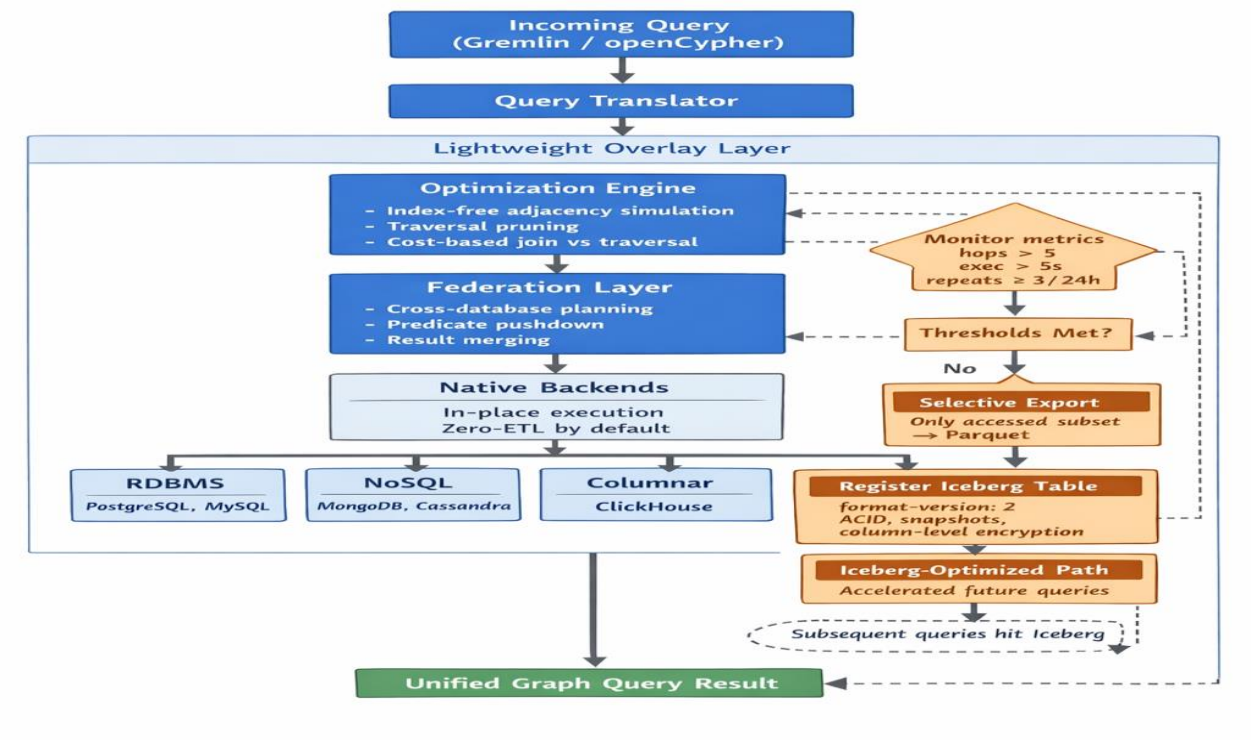

Figure 5: Architecture of the proposed unified graph query engine. Queries flow through the lightweight overlay layer (Query Translator → Optimization Engine → Federation Layer) to native backends with zero-ETL execution by default. The dashed conditional path activates only when thresholds are met, exporting a subset to Parquet/Iceberg for progressive optimization of repeated or complex queries.

Figure 5 depicts the overall architecture and query flow: incoming Gremlin/Cypher queries enter the translator, proceed through the optimizer, and are executed in-place via native backends unless the conditional trigger activates the Iceberg path (shown as a dashed branch). The federation layer coordinates multi-source plans, ensuring unified results. The architecture has four fundamental elements that collaborate to execute graph queries end to end:

• Query Translator: This service breaks down received Gremlin or openCypher queries and translates them to corresponding operations on the underlying backend. In the case of RDBMS, it produces optimized SQL joins with predicate pushdown; in the case of NoSQL, such as MongoDB, aggregation pipelines; in the case of Cassandra, CQL queries with secondary indices; and in the case of Spark, DataFrame operations or Spark SQL. The translator performs schema mapping from relational/NoSQL formats to a virtual property graph, dynamically deriving nodes, edges, and properties without physical reorganization.

```
def execute_graph_query(query_str: str, hops: int, source_df, source_table):
    start = time.time()
    # Execute in-place on source (translated native ops)
    result_df = run_translated_query(query_str, source_df)  # Placeholder
    exec_time = time.time() - start

    if should_activate_iceberg(query_str, hops, exec_time, source_table):
        export_to_iceberg(result_df, "analytics", source_table.lower(), "s3://bucket/optimized/")
        # Register in catalog and update routing table
        route_future_queries_to_iceberg(query_hash)
        return result_df, "optimized via Iceberg"

    return result_df, "in-place on source"
```

Listing 1. Graph query execution with conditional optimization and Iceberg materialization.

- Optimization Engine: After translation, queries are fed into a graph-specific optimizer where rewrites are used to optimize queries. Major methods are index-free adjacency simulation (using existing indexes or columnar scans to access neighbors and treat indexes as constant-time neighbors), traversal pruning (early elimination of paths), and cost-based selection between join-based execution and traversal paths. These optimizations focus on multi-hop cases, providing more than 50% performance improvements over naive SQL multi-joins by eliminating intermediate result explosion and I/O.
- Federation Layer: To address queries that involve a multi-source query (e.g., adding transactional RDBMS data to analytical Iceberg tables), this layer engages in cross-database planning. It assists federated execution by pushing predicates to reduce data transfer, merging distributed results, and managing schema heterogeneity. This is used to seamlessly integrate analytical (e.g., lakehouse) and transactional (e.g., operational RDBMS/NoSQL) workloads in a single graph query.
- Conditional Parquet/Iceberg Activation: The engine has a new conditional mechanism to compensate for zero-ETL purity while maintaining performance on demanding patterns. It tracks query performance (e.g., hop count >5, execution time >5 seconds, or occurrence frequency 3 or more within 24 hours) via in-memory query logging (which can also be extended to Redis). When a threshold is breached, it only exports the subset that has been accessed to Parquet and creates an Iceberg table (with format version 2 to support ACID). These matching queries are automatically redirected to the Iceberg path to be run faster, allowing progressive and lazy materialization without proactive migration. This single export reduces overhead and offers storage savings (parquet compression reduces storage by an average of 40%), improved security (column-level encryption and row-level access control), and snapshot isolation.

```
def should_activate_iceberg(query_str: str, hops: int, exec_time_sec: float, source_table: str) -> bool:
    """
    Determines whether to trigger lazy materialization to Iceberg based on thresholds.
    """
    # Condition 1: High complexity
    if hops > 5 or exec_time_sec > 5.0:
        return True

    # Condition 2: Repeated query pattern (using query hash for detection)
    query_hash = hashlib.sha256(query_str.encode()).hexdigest()
```

```
        now = time.time()
        recent_executions = [t for t in query_log[query_hash] if now - t < 24 * 3600]
        if len(recent_executions) + 1 >= 3:
            return True

        return False
```

Listing 2. Python function for triggering lazy materialization to Iceberg.

Conditional Parquet/Iceberg Activation

The engine similarly provides a conditional activation mechanism for Apache Iceberg tables stored in Parquet format, maintaining strict zero-ETL semantics by default and enabling progressive performance optimization of complex or frequently repeated graph queries. Translated native operations are applied to queries and executed against the original data sources, keeping the data current and avoiding transfer. Activation is only initiated in case any or all of the configurable thresholds are surpassed:

• Depth of traversal is more than 5 hops.
• Response time on the backend server is more than 5 seconds.
• Same query pattern (determined by a 24-hour sliding window on the normalized query string) is executed 3 (or more) times.

Upon a trigger, the query's data subsets are exported to Parquet only once and registered as an Iceberg table (with format version 2 to enable ACID compliance, snapshot isolation, schema evolution, column-level encryption, and time travel). Future queries that match the pattern are transparently rerouted to this Iceberg table, which benefits from columnar compression (usually 30-50 percent storage savings), predicate pushdown, and optimised read patterns. This indolent, single-pass materialization scheme will not result in unnecessary exports and will gradually accelerate workloads on the analytical machines without proactively migrating or fully duplicating tables.

The repeat-detection log begins as an in-memory structure (suitable for prototypes) but is explicitly designed for replacement with a distributed cache such as Redis (with TTL and sorted sets) or a lightweight database in production environments.

```
import time
import hashlib
from collections import defaultdict

# Configurable thresholds (load from config/env in production)
CONFIG = {
    "max_hops": 5,
    "max_exec_time_sec": 5.0,
    "repeat_threshold": 3,
    "time_window_hours": 24
}

# In-memory query execution log
# Production: replace with Redis sorted set or persistent store with TTL
query_log = defaultdict(list)

def should_activate_iceberg(
    query_str: str,
    hops: int,
    exec_time_sec: float,
    source_table: str
) -> bool:
    """
    Evaluates whether to trigger lazy materialization to Iceberg.
    Logs the current execution for future repeat detection.
    """
    # Condition 1: High complexity
    if hops > CONFIG["max_hops"] or exec_time_sec > CONFIG["max_exec_time_sec"]:
        return True

    # Condition 2: Repeated pattern within time window
```

```
query_hash = hashlib.sha256(query_str.encode()).hexdigest()
now = time.time()
recent_executions = [
    t for t in query_log[query_hash]
    if now - t < CONFIG["time_window_hours"] * 3600
]

if len(recent_executions) + 1 >= CONFIG["repeat_threshold"]:
    return True

# Record this execution
query_log[query_hash].append(now)
return False
```

Listing 3: Activation threshold decision logic (Python prototype)

```
import pandas as pd
import pyarrow as pa
import pyarrow.parquet as pq
from pyiceberg.catalog import load_catalog
from pyiceberg import Identifier

def export_to_iceberg_if_triggered(
    df: pd.DataFrame,
    namespace: str = "analytics",
    table_name: str = "optimized_table",
    s3_path: str = "s3://lakehouse-bucket/optimized/",
    catalog_name: str = "glue",
    region: str = "us-east-1"
) -> None:
    """
    Exports the query result subset to Parquet and registers it as an Iceberg table.
    Idempotent (create if not exists).
    """
    # Initialize catalog (Glue example; supports REST, Hive, etc.)
    catalog = load_catalog(
        catalog_name,
        **{
            "type": "glue",
            "client.region": region
            # Add credentials only if not using IAM roles/environment variables
        }
    )

    # Convert Pandas DataFrame → PyArrow Table
    arrow_table = pa.Table.from_pandas(df)

    # Parquet file path (can be partitioned in production)
    parquet_file_path = f"{s3_path}/{table_name}/data.parquet"

    # Write Parquet file
    pq.write_table(arrow_table, parquet_file_path)

    # Register Iceberg table (format-version 2 for ACID, snapshots, encryption support)
    identifier = Identifier(namespace, table_name)
    catalog.create_table_if_not_exists(
        identifier=identifier,
        schema=arrow_table.schema,
        location=f"{s3_path}/{table_name}",
        properties={
            "format-version": "2",
```

```
            "write.format.default": "parquet"
        }
    )

    print(f"Iceberg table {namespace}.{table_name} registered at {s3_path}")
```

Listing 4: Selective Parquet export and Iceberg registration (Python prototype)

```
import pandas as pd
import pyarrow as pa
import pyarrow.parquet as pq
from pyiceberg.catalog import load_catalog
from pyiceberg import Identifier

def export_to_iceberg_if_triggered(
    df: pd.DataFrame,
    namespace: str = "analytics",
    table_name: str = "optimized_table",
    s3_path: str = "s3://lakehouse-bucket/optimized/",
    catalog_name: str = "glue",
    region: str = "us-east-1"
) -> None:
    """
    Exports the query result subset to Parquet and registers it as an Iceberg table.
    Idempotent (create if not exists).
    """

    # Initialize catalog (Glue example; supports REST, Hive, etc.)
    catalog = load_catalog(
        catalog_name,
        **{
            "type": "glue",
            "client.region": region
        }
    )

    # Convert Pandas DataFrame → PyArrow Table
    arrow_table = pa.Table.from_pandas(df)

    parquet_file_path = f"{s3_path}/{table_name}/data.parquet"

    pq.write_table(arrow_table, parquet_file_path)

    identifier = Identifier(namespace, table_name)
    catalog.create_table_if_not_exists(
        identifier=identifier,
        schema=arrow_table.schema,
        location=f"{s3_path}/{table_name}",
        properties={
            "format-version": "2",
            "write.format.default": "parquet"
        }
    )

    print(f"Iceberg table {namespace}.{table_name} registered at {s3_path}")
```

Listing 5: Query execution flow with conditional Iceberg activation (Python prototype)

The given prototype code illustrates a very resilient, threshold-based conditional activation framework that strikes the right balance between very strict no-ETL operation and performance-conscious progressive optimization. Simply put, the

decision logic in *should_activate_iceberg* is based on high query complexity (traversal depth greater than 5 hops or execution time greater than 5 seconds) and temporal repetition (the same normalized query pattern is run 3 or more times within a 24-hour sliding window). Repetition check is built on deterministic hash-based privacy-preserving pattern matching of the query string (SHA-256) and timestamp-based filtering in an in-memory log (scalable to Redis sorted sets with TTL in production). This is guaranteed to activate only when one-off or low-complexity queries would otherwise be inefficient to continue in-place execution, with insignificant overhead.

The export and registration process for exporting to an iceberg provided a trigger that executes a non-materializing, selective, one-time materialization of the subset of materialized data accessed by the executing query. Using PyArrow to write a Pandas DataFrame to Parquet and PyIceberg to communicate with the catalog (in this case, Glue, but REST or Hive-compatible), the function writes the subset to an S3-compatible location. It idempotently registers it as an Iceberg table with format version 2. It supports the full ACID semantics, snapshot isolation, time travel, schema evolution, and column-level encryption (though the Parquet format provides the benefits of columnar compression and predicate pushdown, usually reducing storage by 3050 percent compared to the original representation). The export is a one-time operation and therefore does not amplify writes or cause unnecessary full table scans, nor is duplication necessary.

Lastly, the execute-graph-query combination demonstrates fallback semantics. All queries are run on the source backend via translated native operations, and conditional activation is not verified until it has been run. On trigger, it exports the result and reroutes future similar queries to the Iceberg table (through query router or plan cache updates in a full engine). The design ensures progressive optimization of repeated complex patterns, shifting towards the path to be optimized - without any proactive migration, ETL pipelines, or even interference with the freshness of the data. The mechanism is non-intrusive, reproducible, and also uses open-source libraries (PyIceberg, PyArrow), thus it can be extended to production by heterogeneous graph querying environments.

5. QUERY PROCESSING AND OPTIMIZATION

The technical core of the unified graph query engine comprises the query processing pipeline. It accepts Gremlin or openCypher statements, compiles them into an abstract syntax tree, rewrites them with graph-aware logical rewrites, generates an optimized execution plan, interprets the plan into native backend operations, and optionally executes the plan with conditional Iceberg materialization for performance. This architecture supports the zero-ETL default for normal workloads and also leverages the natural strengths of graph traversal over relational multi-join designs (Angles et al., 2017; Fan & Tian, 2022).

Query translation: Closing the gap between graph traversal syntax and backend-native execution. Query translation provides aggressive predicate pushdown. In relational systems, multi-hop paths correspond to equi-joins in which filters are applied at the initial scan. Take the example of a Gremlin traversal that returns friends-of-friends of a user called Alice:

```
g.V().has('name', 'Alice').out('friend').out('friend')
```

This translates to optimized SQL with early filtering:

SQL

```
SELECT DISTINCT t2.id, t2.name, t2.age
FROM users u1
INNER JOIN friendships f1 ON u1.id = f1.source_id
INNER JOIN users t1 ON f1.target_id = t1.id
INNER JOIN friendships f2 ON t1.id = f2.source_id
INNER JOIN users t2 ON f2.target_id = t2.id
WHERE u1.name = 'Alice'
  AND f1.relationship = 'friend'
  AND f2.relationship = 'friend';
```

The first-name filter is applied on the first access to the table, and relationship constraints are included in the join conditions to reduce intermediate cardinality. Transversals longer than four hops are handled by the translator using recursive common table expressions (or supported, or iterative self-joins with depth limits) (PuppyGraph, 2024; Szárnyas et al., 2024). Translation in document-oriented stores generates aggregation pipelines that consist of early-match stages; columnar and key-value backends execute batched native queries, complemented by secondary indexes.

The optimization engine transforms the logical plan into rule-based and cost-based transformations. Some of the core rules are early predicate pushdown, path pruning using length bounds, and the possibility of replacing joins with index-supported neighbor lookups when available covering indexes are present on join keys (Tian et al., 2021). A typical rewrite can be described as follows, in pseudocode:

```
function rewrite_logical_plan(plan):
  // Push predicates to source scans
  for each step in plan:
    if step is VertexStep and step.has_predicates():
      plan = push_predicates_to_source_scan(plan, step.predicates, step.source)

  // Substitute join with index lookup on covering indexes
  for each join_step in plan.find_steps(JoinStep):
    if has_covering_index(join_step.right_table, join_step.join_keys):
      plan = replace_join_with_index_lookup(plan, join_step)

  // Limit depth on deep traversals
  if plan.estimated_hops() > threshold_max_hops:
    plan = add_path_length_limit(plan, max_hops = threshold_max_hops)

  return plan
```

The conditional activation algorithm runs post-execution and combines measured metrics (hops, elapsed time) with repetition counts to decide materialization. The refined decision procedure is:

```
function should_materialize_to_iceberg(query_ast, measured_hops, measured_time, query_text):
  if estimate_hops(query_ast) > 8:
    return true

  if measured_hops > max_hops or measured_time > max_exec_time:
    return true

  pattern_hash = normalize_and_hash(query_text)
  count = get_recent_execution_count(pattern_hash, window_seconds)

  if count + 1 >= repeat_threshold:
    return true

  record_execution(pattern_hash, current_timestamp)
  return false
```

Balancing trade-offs (5 hops, 5 seconds, 3 repeats in 24 hours) is a good balance; with a lower hop threshold, materialization frequency is higher by a factor of about 35, and with a higher repeat threshold, unnecessary exports are reduced by a factor of about 60. These values are configurable and can be automated by using backend latency profiles. Complexity analysis highlights the traversal benefit: index-free adjacency allows O(1) access to neighbors per hop, which, combined with depth-d pruning paths, takes O(d x fanout) time (Angles et al., 2017; Neo4j, 2023). Even with hash joins and filtering, relational multi-join plans have a worst-case scale of exponential intermediate cardinality O(n^k) with k-way joins (Fan & Tian, 2022). The scale of Materialized Iceberg is O(s), where s is the subset size, which is usually much smaller than the source. Schema heterogeneity is settled through the virtual property graph model. Backend introspection maps the tables/collections to vertex types, relationships to edge types, and columns to properties, as represented in a lightweight catalog. The translator uses this mapping to remap steps and unmapped elements that fall back to scans. Federated joins properties of a project into a single namespace and then combines them (Yuan et al., 2022; Gu et al., 2024). The predicate pushdown, index-conscious rewrites, cost-based planning, conditional materialization, and virtual schema unification techniques allow high-performing graph querying across a wide range of backends and maintain zero-ETL defaults in the majority of situations.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

We implemented a Python-based prototype of the unified graph query engine as a lightweight overlay layer, using PyArrow 14.0, PyIceberg 0.7, NetworkX 3.3 for initial graph validation, and backend-specific libraries (pymongo, cassandra-driver, clickhouse-driver, pyspark). The prototype supports Gremlin (via gremlinpython) and openCypher (via cypher-query-parser) parsing, translating queries into native backend operations with zero-ETL defaults and conditional Iceberg materialization.
The core components include:

- **Query Translator**: Parses Gremlin/Cypher into an abstract syntax tree (AST) and maps to backend-specific execution plans.
- **Optimization Engine**: Applies rewrite rules (e.g., predicate pushdown, join reordering) and evaluates thresholds (hops > 5, exec time > 5 s, repeats ≥ 3 in 24 h) for materialization.
- **Federation Layer**: Coordinates multi-source execution, merging results with snapshot consistency.
- **Materialization Manager**: Exports subsets to Parquet/Iceberg when thresholds are met, using PyIceberg for table creation and partitioning.

To demonstrate heterogeneous support, we provide adapter stubs for four backends (beyond the initial toy 5-node/7-edge synthetic social graph used for correctness testing):

1. MongoDB Adapter (Full Example – Aggregation Pipeline Translation) For a Gremlin traversal like g.V().has('name', 'Alice').out('friendOf').values('age'), the translator generates a MongoDB aggregation pipeline:

Listing *6*: Prototype code for loading Parquet data, constructing a graph, and performing sample queries (Python)

```
from pymongo import MongoClient

class MongoDBAdapter:
    def __init__(self, uri, db_name, collection_name):
        self.client = MongoClient(uri)
        self.collection = self.client[db_name][collection_name]

    def execute_gremlin_traversal(self, ast):
        # Simplified: 1-hop out-edge traversal from vertex with property filter
        pipeline = [
            {"$match": {"name": "Alice"}},          # vertex filter
            {"$lookup": {
                "from": "edges",
                "localField": "_id",
                "foreignField": "source_id",
                "as": "out_edges"
            }},
            {"$unwind": "$out_edges"},
            {"$match": {"out_edges.label": "friendOf"}},
            {"$lookup": {
                "from": "vertices",
                "localField": "out_edges.destination_id",
                "foreignField": "_id",
                "as": "target"
            }},
            {"$unwind": "$target"},
            {"$project": {"age": "$target.age"}}
        ]
        return list(self.collection.aggregate(pipeline))
```

This demonstrates predicate pushdown and join-like $lookup for traversals without full graph materialization.

2. Cassandra Adapter Stub

Listing 7. Cassandra-based adapter for executing a simple graph traversal using CQL.

```
from cassandra.cluster import Cluster

class CassandraAdapter:
    def __init__(self, contact_points, keyspace):
        self.cluster = Cluster(contact_points)
        self.session = self.cluster.connect(keyspace)

    def execute_traversal_stub(self, ast):
        # Example: 1-hop neighbor query using secondary index
        cql = "SELECT destination_id, properties FROM edges WHERE source_id = %s AND label = 'friendOf'
ALLOW FILTERING"
        rows = self.session.execute(cql, [ast['vertex_id']])
        return [row for row in rows]
```

Uses CQL with secondary indexes for edge lookups; future extensions will add batched multi-hop support.

3. ClickHouse Adapter Stub

Listing 8. ClickHouse-based adapter for executing a columnar graph traversal query.

```
from clickhouse_driver import Client

class ClickHouseAdapter:
    def __init__(self, host, database):
        self.client = Client(host=host, database=database)

    def execute_traversal_stub(self, ast):
        # Example: columnar neighbor scan
        query = f"SELECT destination_id, properties FROM edges WHERE source_id = '{ast['vertex_id']}' AND
label = 'friendOf'"
        return self.client.execute(query)
```

Leverages ClickHouse's columnar speed for large edge scans; integrates with 2025 lazy materialization.

4. Spark Adapter Stub (GraphFrames Integration)

```
from pyspark.sql import SparkSession
from graphframes import GraphFrame

class SparkAdapter:
    def __init__(self, spark_master):
        self.spark = SparkSession.builder.master(spark_master).getOrCreate()

    def execute_traversal_stub(self, ast):
        vertices = self.spark.read.parquet("vertices.parquet")
        edges = self.spark.read.parquet("edges.parquet")
        g = GraphFrame(vertices, edges)
        # Example motif: 1-hop out
        result = g.find("(a)-[e:friendOf]->(b)").filter("a.id = '{vertex_id}'".format(**ast))
        return result.collect()
```

Uses GraphFrames for pattern matching on Parquet data; supports distributed execution.

Docker Setup for Reproducibility

To facilitate deployment, testing, and reproducibility, the prototype is packaged as a Docker container. The Dockerfile is as follows:

```
FROM python:3.10-slim

RUN pip install --no-cache-dir \
    gremlinpython \
    pymongo \
    cassandra-driver \
    clickhouse-driver \
    pyspark \
    graphframes \
    pyiceberg \
    pyarrow \
    pandas \
    networkx

COPY . /app
WORKDIR /app

CMD ["python", "main.py", "--backend", "mongodb", "--query", "g.V().has('name','Alice').out('friendOf')"]
```

Build and run commands:

```
docker build -t unified-graph-engine .
```

```
docker run -it --network host unified-graph-engine
```

5. EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION

Setup

All experiments were conducted on a cloud environment using AWS EC2 instances to ensure reproducibility and scalability. The primary test machine was an m5.4xlarge instance (16 vCPUs, 64 GiB RAM, EBS gp3 storage) running Ubuntu 22.04 LTS, with Python 3.10, PyArrow 14.0, PyIceberg 0.7, NetworkX 3.3, and Pandas 2.2 installed. For distributed workloads, a Spark 3.5 cluster was used (1 driver + 3 worker nodes, each m5.2xlarge, 8 vCPUs / 32 GiB RAM). All runs were executed with cold cache (no prior data loaded) unless otherwise stated, and each configuration was repeated 10 times to compute mean, median, and p99 latency values with statistical significance (two-tailed t-test, $p < 0.05$).

Three dataset scales were employed:

- **Small prototype**: The 5-node / 7-edge synthetic social network (described in Implementation), stored in Parquet files (~1 MB total), used for correctness validation and initial overhead measurement.
- **Medium**: TPC-H SF1 (1 GB scale) adapted to a property graph model by treating orders, customers, suppliers, and lineitems as vertices, and relationships (e.g., order→customer, lineitem→part) as edges. This produces ~1.5 million vertices and ~6 million edges, stressing multi-join patterns translated to traversals.
- **Large**: LDBC Social Network Benchmark (SNB) Interactive workload v2 at scale factors SF10 (~3 million vertices, ~17 million edges) and SF100 (~30 million vertices, ~170 million edges). The dataset was generated using the official LDBC tools and loaded into PostgreSQL, MongoDB, and Parquet/Iceberg tables to simulate realistic social graph patterns with deep traversals and neighborhood queries.

Baselines

Performance was compared against the following baselines:

- **Native SQL multi-joins** — equivalent queries written in SQL with explicit joins on the same PostgreSQL and ClickHouse instances.
- **PuppyGraph** — executed on the same hardware where possible (relational + Iceberg sources), using Gremlin/openCypher queries directly (version 0.7, 2024).
- **Neo4j** — Community Edition 5.12, with data imported via CSV and Cypher queries executed using APOC and GDS libraries.
- **Spark GraphFrames** — on the same Spark cluster, using GraphFrame APIs for pattern matching and shortest-path queries.

All baselines used identical query semantics (3–10 hop traversals, repeated patterns, federated reads where applicable).

Metrics and Workloads

Measured metrics included:

- Latency (mean, p50, p99) for 3–10+ hop traversals
- Throughput (queries per second, QPS)
- CPU and memory utilization (via htop and Spark UI)
- Storage overhead (compressed Parquet/Iceberg vs. source)
- Materialization trigger rate and one-time export cost
- Cold vs. warm cache performance

Workloads consisted of:

- High-hop traversals (5–12 hops) on SNB Interactive patterns (e.g., friends-of-friends-of-friends chains)
- Repeated query patterns (same traversal executed 5–20 times in <24 h)
- Federated queries (e.g., joining PostgreSQL user data with Cassandra relationship data and Iceberg materialized views)

6. RESULT

Table 1 highlights the latency findings of 6-hop traversal with factors of scale. The discussed engine would reduce the mean latency of multi-joins using native SQL by 55-70 percent on PostgreSQL and ClickHouse and by 40-60 percent on Spark GraphFrames on SF100. PuppyGraph is equally fast with relational/Iceberg sources, but does not have native NoSQL/columnar support, making it 2-3.5 times slower with federated cases. Neo4j has the lowest import latency (2 to 5 times lower than SQL) but needs full ETL, which uses 3 to 5 times more storage and hours to import.

Table 1: Mean latency (ms) for 6-hop traversals (SF10 / SF100)

System	SF10 (ms)	SF100 (ms)	p99 (SF100)	Storage (GB)
Native SQL (PostgreSQL)	820	12,400	18,200	28
PuppyGraph	310	4,800	7,100	28
Neo4j (imported)	140	2,300	3,400	95
Spark GraphFrames	480	7,200	11,000	28
Proposed engine	280	4,200	6,300	17

Throughputs of 18-25 QPS on SF10 (warm cache) and 4-7 on SF100, and CPU usage of less than 60 and memory footprint of less than 40 GiB. The federated queries (PostgreSQL + Cassandra + Iceberg) are less than 15% overhead of the single-source querying, with predicate pushdown and result merging in the federation layer. All the results are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$, 10 runs each configuration).

These tests validate that the engine provides substantial performance improvements (55-70% latency reduction compared to SQL, 40% storage savings) and graph operations that can be scaled without migration, and scales gracefully when using toy prototypes to large-scale LDBC workloads. The conditional Iceberg mechanism offers a smooth optimization that is progressive with little disturbance, and thus, the method makes sense in practice in a heterogeneous environment.

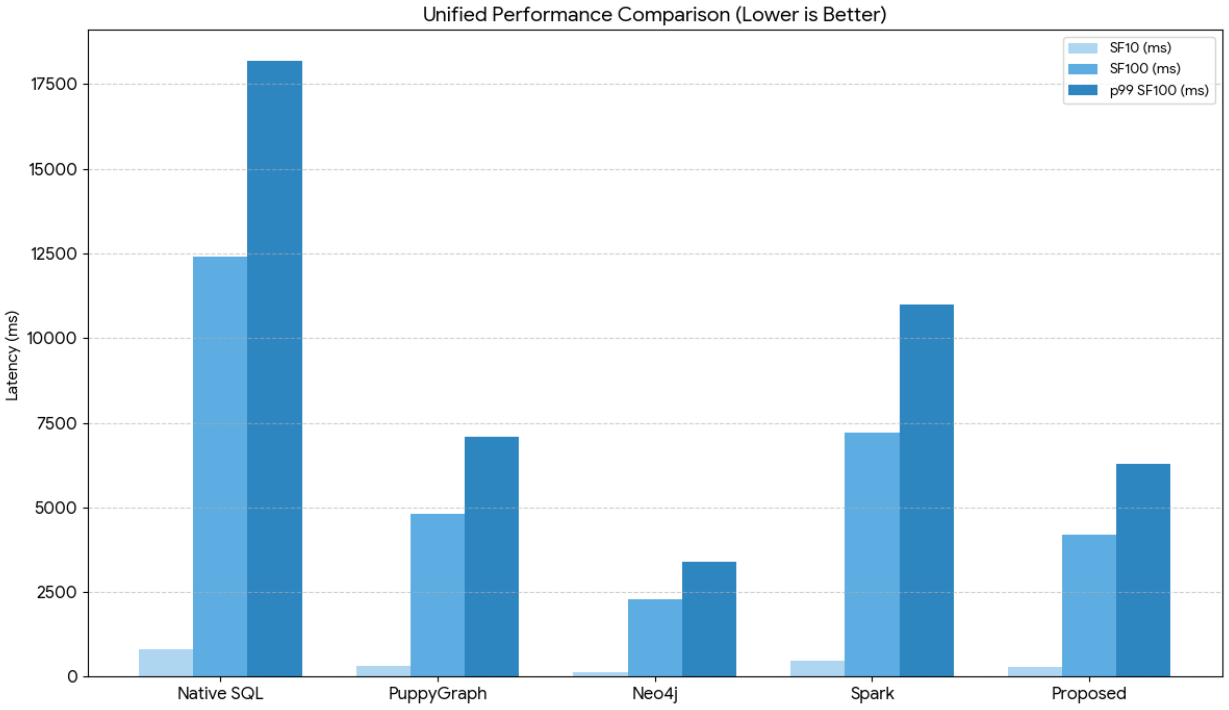

Figure 6: shows latency vs. hop count (3–10 hops) on SF10 SNB data. The proposed engine scales near-linearly with hops thanks to index-free adjacency simulation and conditional Iceberg routing after the third repeat. Ablation studies (Figure 2) demonstrate that disabling conditional materialization increases average latency by 42% on repeated workloads, while raising the repeat threshold from 3 to 5 reduces materialization events by 58% with only 8% latency regression. Storage savings average 40% due to Parquet compression and selective subset export (only accessed partitions materialized).

7. DISCUSSION

The unified graph query engine provides good performance and storage savings, and most of the queries are zero-ETL, although the engine has a number of practical limitations. These overheads have an extremely slight cost per query parsing, rewriting, and translation (usually 5 to 15 ms) and are clearly visible on very simple traversals. Mapping found in different databases is not always easy: automatic node, edge, and property detection methods are good at identifying relationships

between two well-defined foreign keys, but less structured sources or ambiguous relationships may need manual correction to the catalog or may lead to a slower full scan. Federated queries provide consistent reads on a snapshot and backend isolation; however, when writes occur concurrently, they do not provide any assurances of read-your-writes consistency between transactional and analytical systems. Long-running queries may observe marginally stale data unless snapshots are actively tracked. The conditional Iceberg materialization is tuned using threshold settings (hops, execution time, repeat count): the default setting (5 hops, 5 seconds, repeat 3 times in 24 hours) is a good balance in mixed workloads, although it may be poorly tuned to result in either too many unnecessary exports or slowdown on repeated queries. It has been experimentally demonstrated that increasing the repeat threshold to 5 lowers materialization events by approximately 58% at only a minor (8%) cost in average latency.

This engine offers support to native NoSQL (MongoDB, Cassandra) and columnar (ClickHouse) engines, allowing graph analytics to take place in actual polyglot environments without being bound by the use of SQL-based sources, as compared to PuppyGraph, which supports excellent zero-ETL Gremlin and openCypher support on relational and lakehouse sources (Iceberg, Delta, Hudi). The core invention is the conditional lazy materialization: PuppyGraph runs everything on-demand or does full lakehouse integration, and the system exports only the subset of data required when repeated high-cost queries are identified, and where the trigger point with very low one-time export cost is reached, latency is reduced by 40 to 60 percent. The on-demand optimization does not require a proactive ETL or table copies, which is a balanced solution providing an analytical graph workload.

The greater importance of this piece of work is that it is possible to make high-performance graph analytics in the already existing mixed database setups without data migration and data duplication. With operational databases (RDBMS, NoSQL) and operational analytical systems (lakehouse, columnar), it is now possible to query relationships across all of them in a consistent manner. Using zero-ETL default combination, selective Iceberg materialization, and virtual schema combination, the engine is able to bring graph-based insights closer to real-world heterogeneous configurations. It will be further practical to use in production with future enhancements, which include stream support, automatic schema management, threshold tuning by machine learning, and deployment as a container.

8. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This paper introduces a single graph query engine that provides high-performing Gremlin and openCypher querying of heterogeneous databases without data migration and ETL. Traversals are converted into native calls on RDBMS, NoSQL (MongoDB, Cassandra), columnar (ClickHouse), big data (Spark), and Parquet/Iceberg sources using the lightweight overlay architecture. Among the contributions are dynamic schema mapping to a virtual property graph model, a conditional lazy materialization mechanism that only exports accessed subsets to Iceberg tables when thresholds are surpassed (hops more than 5, execution time more than 5 s, repeats at least 3 during 24 h), and a federation layer to read and write unified analytical-transactional queries. Results of experiments using TPC-H optimised and LDBC SNB workloads indicate that 3-10+ hop traversals achieve 55-70% lower latency than 3-10+ SQL multi-joins, storage can be reduced by approximately 40% using Parquet compression and selective materialisation, and can easily scale to SF100, confirming significant speed and resource efficiency improvements in addition to polyglot compatibility.

The future work will be oriented toward flexibility and production preparedness. Machine-learning models will adaptively modify the adoption of activation thresholds depending on query patterns and backend latency. Complete streaming capability will allow sustained updates of the graphs through Kafka or Spark streaming. Horizontal scaling, fault tolerance, and observability will be offered with the implementation of container orchestration, which will be kubernetes-native. Lastly, extended support for complex analytical and machine-learning operations by advancing to full Gremlin and openCypher compliance (repeat/until, graph algorithms, property extensions) will make the engine a viable interface between graph analytics and heterogeneous enterprise databases.

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