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Dynamic Objective Selection Incorporating RLBEEP for Efficient Data Transmission in Wireless Networks: Hybrid Reward Shaping for Accelerated Learning

Anand Kumar Dwivedi[1],Dr.Virendra Tiwari[2*] , Shankar Bera[3]
[1]*Research Scholar, Department of Computer Science AKS University Satna India*
[2]*Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science AKS University Satna India*
[3]*Research Scholar, Department of Computer Science AKS University Satna India*

ABSTRACT
Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) are increasingly reliant on Reinforcement Learning (RL) for adaptive and efficient routing under dynamic network conditions. The Dynamic Objective Selection Reinforcement Learning (DOS-RL) protocol offers a flexible framework by switching among multiple routing objectives such as Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR), delay, and energy. However, its learning process often suffers from slow convergence in the early training episodes, which delays the achievement of optimal routing policies. This paper proposes an enhanced DOS-RL framework by incorporating a hybrid reward shaping mechanism that combines the potential-based shaping from DOS-RL with the energy-aware reward design from the Reinforcement Learning-Based Energy-Efficient Protocol (RLBEEP). The hybrid reward shaping function guides the agent toward the routing goal while promoting balanced energy consumption across nodes, enabling faster policy convergence and improved early-stage performance. Simulations in a Python-based environment, replicating the computational parameters demonstrate that the proposed method significantly accelerates convergence and achieves better trade-offs between learning speed and energy efficiency compared to the baseline DOS-RL protocol.

Keywords: — Wireless Sensor Networks (WSN), Reinforcement Learning (RL), Dynamic Objective Selection, Reward Shaping, Energy Efficiency, Routing Protocols, Convergence Speed.

I. INTRODUCTION

Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) consist of spatially distributed nodes that collaborate to sense, process, and transmit data to a sink node. Energy efficiency, reliability, and adaptability are critical performance factors in WSN routing due to limited power resources and dynamic network conditions. Traditional routing protocols often rely on fixed metrics, which limits their adaptability. Reinforcement Learning (RL) offers a promising solution by enabling nodes to learn optimal routing policies through interaction with the environment.

The Dynamic Objective Selection Reinforcement Learning (DOS-RL) protocol [1] addresses adaptability by dynamically switching between multiple objectives, including Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR), end-to-end delay, and residual energy. This approach allows the routing protocol to prioritize different network performance metrics based on the current state. However, in its original form, DOS-RL exhibits slow convergence during the initial learning phase. This results in suboptimal performance in early episodes, which can be critical in short-lived or highly dynamic WSN deployments.

Separately, the Reinforcement Learning-Based Energy-Efficient Protocol (RLBEEP) [2] focuses on maximizing network lifetime through energy-aware routing and sleep scheduling mechanisms. While it does not directly target faster convergence, its reward design implicitly encourages balanced energy usage, which can reduce unnecessary retransmissions and enhance overall efficiency.

This research focuses on Investigate the effectiveness of shaping rewards in improving the learning process and accelerating routing policies in the DOS-RL routing protocol.

To achieve this, we propose a **Hybrid Reward Shaping** method that combines DOS-RL's potential-based shaping with RLBEEP's energy-aware term. This combination aims to accelerate convergence without sacrificing energy efficiency. The proposed approach is validated through Python-based simulations using parameters from the original studies.

II. Related Work

A. DOS-RL Protocol

The DOS-RL protocol [1] leverages Q-learning to optimize routing decisions based on dynamically selected objectives. The network state includes metrics such as remaining energy, hop count, and link quality. The unique aspect of DOS-RL is its **dynamic objective selection** mechanism, which allows the routing goal to change during operation. This adaptability improves performance under varying network conditions. DOS-RL also implements **potential-based reward shaping**, where the reward is augmented by a potential function reflecting the proximity to the sink node or improvement in the chosen objective. While this method accelerates learning compared to plain Q-learning, it can still exhibit slow convergence in the initial training phase because the shaping is purely distance- or metric-based and does not account for energy balancing.

B. RLBEEP Protocol

The RLBEEP protocol [2] aims to extend the lifetime of WSNs by incorporating energy-aware decision-making into the RL reward function. It penalizes the overuse of low-energy nodes and encourages routing through nodes with balanced residual energy. In addition, RLBEEP uses a sleep scheduling mechanism to reduce idle energy consumption. Although RLBEEP does not dynamically switch objectives, its **energy-aware shaping** can influence routing decisions early in the learning process, which may indirectly accelerate convergence in energy-critical scenarios.

C. Reward Shaping in RL-Based Routing

Reward shaping is a well-established technique in RL to accelerate convergence by providing intermediate feedback signals in addition to terminal rewards. Potential-based shaping [3] ensures theoretical convergence guarantees while guiding the agent toward the goal. Energy-aware shaping incorporates additional constraints to promote balanced energy usage. Combining these two approaches can offer both faster learning and energy efficiency, which aligns directly with the goals of Objective 2 in this research.

III. System Model & Problem Formulation

A. Network Model

We consider a Wireless Sensor Network (WSN) consisting of NN static nodes randomly deployed over a two-dimensional area of size L×LL \times L. Each node has a limited initial energy budget E0E_0 and communicates using a fixed transmission range RtR_t. Nodes can function as both data sources and relays. The network follows a multi-hop communication paradigm, where data packets are forwarded toward a sink node located at a predefined position within the network area.

The network traffic follows a **Constant Bit Rate (CBR)** pattern, and each packet has a fixed size SpS_p. The wireless communication model follows the **first-order radio model**, where transmission and reception energy consumption are given by:

$$E_{tx}(k, d) = E_{elec}.k + E_{amp}.k.d^{n}$$

$$E_{rx}(k) = E_{elec}.k$$

where:

- k = packet size in bits
- d = distance between transmitter and receiver
- n = path loss exponent (typically 2–4)
- E_{elec}= energy consumption per bit for the transmitter/receiver electronics
- E_{amp}= energy consumption per bit for the transmitter amplifier

B. RL Model

1) State Space (SS)

The state of a node includes:

- Residual energy level ErE_r
- Hop count to sink HsH_s
- Link quality indicator (LQI) or packet success rate PsP_s
- Queue length QlQ_l

2) Action Space (AA)

Possible actions are the selection of one of the neighboring nodes as the next hop.

3) Reward Function (RR)

In the baseline DOS-RL, the reward is:

$$R(s, a) = w_{PDR}.\Delta PDR + w_{Delay}.\Delta Delay + w_{Energy}.\Delta Energy$$

$$R(s,a) = w_{PDR} \cdot \Delta PDR + w_{Delay} \cdot \Delta Delay + w_{Energy} \cdot \Delta Energy$$

where w are weights for the active objective.

4) Problem Statement

While DOS-RL uses potential-based shaping to accelerate convergence, its learning process is still slow in early episodes because:

- Energy balancing is not considered during shaping.
- Early routing decisions may lead to overuse of certain nodes.

Our goal is to design a **hybrid reward shaping** method that accelerates convergence while maintaining balanced energy usage.

IV. Proposed Method: Hybrid Reward Shaping

A. Overview

The proposed method combines **potential-based shaping** from DOS-RL with **energy-aware shaping** from RLBEEP into a single reward formulation. This hybrid approach provides additional guidance to the RL agent by incorporating both goal-oriented and resource-preserving signals.

B. Potential-Based Shaping (From DOS-RL)

Potential-based shaping modifies the reward using a potential function Φ(s)\Phi(s):

$$F_{potential}(s,s`)=\gamma\Phi(s`)-\Phi(s)$$

where:

- γ\gamma = discount factor
- Φ(s)\Phi(s) = potential value of state ss (e.g., negative hop count to sink)

This encourages actions that reduce the hop count or improve the current objective metric.

C. Energy-Aware Shaping (From RLBEEP)

Energy-aware shaping modifies the reward based on the residual energy of the next hop:

Fenergy(s,s′)=Er(s′)−EavgEmax−EminF_{energy}(s,s') = \frac{E_r(s') - E_{avg}}{E_{max} - E_{min}}

$$F_{energy}(s,s') = \frac{E_r(s') - E_{avg}}{E_{max} - E_{min}}$$

$$F_{energy}(s,s`)=\frac{E_r(s`)-E_{avg}}{E_{max}-E_{min}}$$

$$\underline{E_{min}}$$

where:E_r

- $E_r(s`)$= residual energy of chosen neighbor
- E_{avg} = average residual energy of all nodes
- This term is positive when selecting higher-energy nodes, negative otherwise.

D. Hybrid Reward Function

The final reward used in our method is:

$$R'(s,a)=R(s,a)+\beta.F_{potential}(s,s`)+\lambda.F_{energy}(s,s`)$$

where:

- β = weight for potential-based shaping
- λ= weight for energy-aware shaping

This formulation ensures that the agent is rewarded for both **making progress toward the goal** and **avoiding premature depletion of certain nodes**.

E. Algorithm Flow

1. **Initialization**:
   - Set Q-values to zero.
   - Initialize energy and state parameters.
2. **Episode Loop**:
   - Observe current state ss.
   - Select action aa using ϵ\epsilon-greedy exploration.
   - Transmit packet, observe new state s′s' and base reward R(s,a)R(s,a).
   - Compute FpotentialF_{potential} and FenergyF_{energy}.
   - Update Q-value:

Q(s,a)←Q(s,a)+α[R′(s,a)+γmax⁡a′Q(s′,a′)−Q(s,a)]Q(s,a) \leftarrow Q(s,a) + \alpha \left[R'(s,a) + \gamma \max_{a'} Q(s',a') - Q(s,a) \right]

$$Q(s,a) \leftarrow Q(s,a) + \alpha \left[R'(s,a) + \gamma \max_{a'} Q(s',a') - Q(s,a) \right]$$

$$Q(s,a) \leftarrow Q(s,a)+\alpha+[R`(s,a)+\gamma \max_{a`} Q(s`,a`)-Q(s,a)]$$

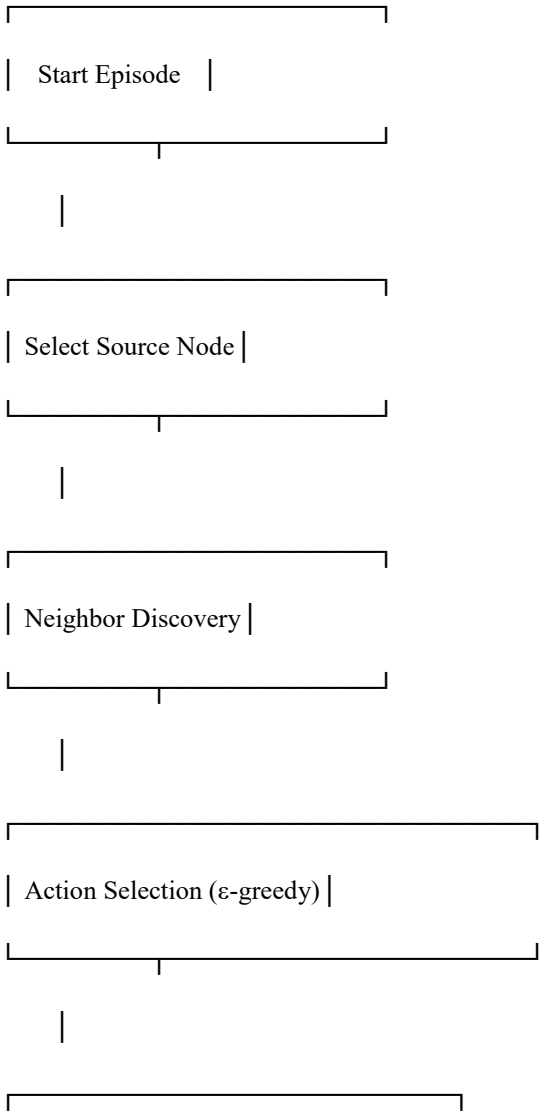
- Update state to s′s'.

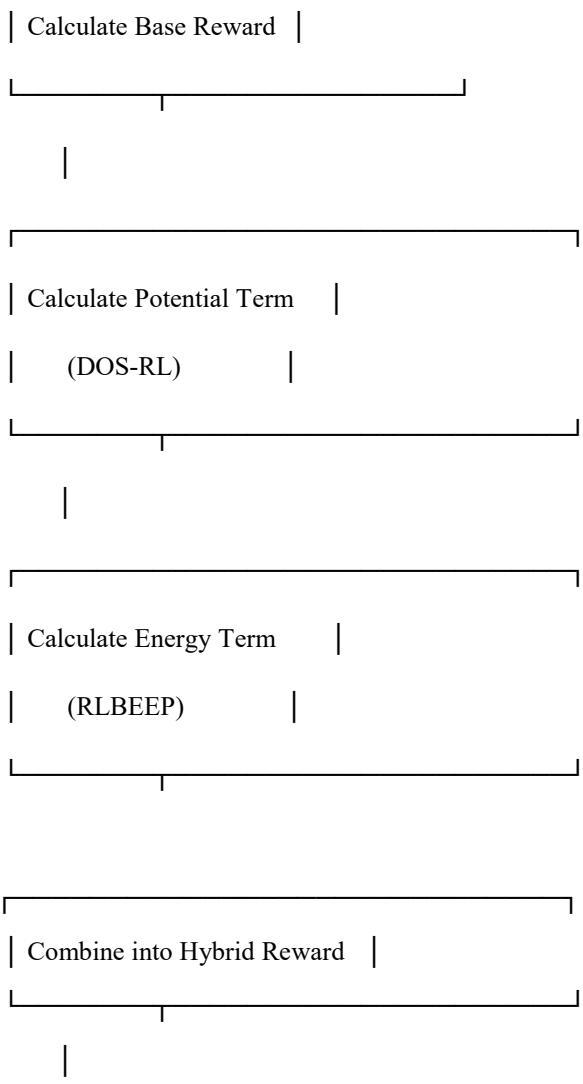
3. **Repeat** until convergence or episode limit.

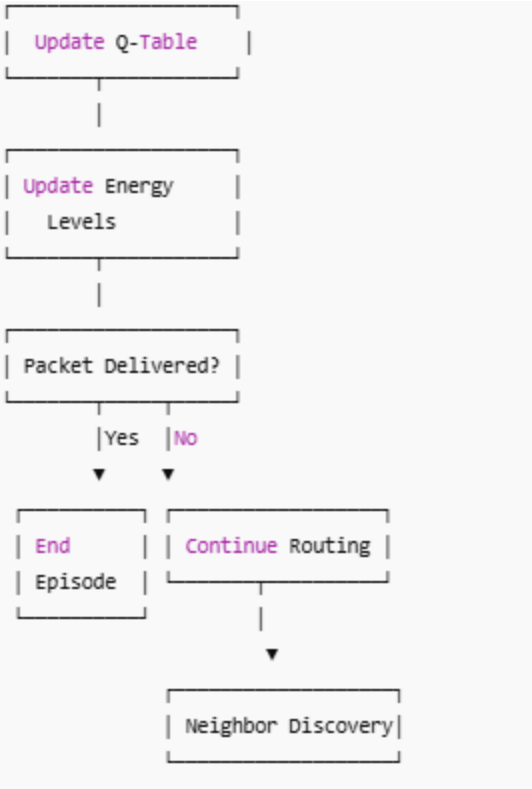
F. Flowchart

I will make a **flowchart diagram** showing this hybrid reward shaping process for the paper — it will visually show:

- Input network state → Calculate base reward → Add potential-based shaping → Add energy-aware shaping → Q-value update.




Calculate Base Reward
Calculate Potential Term
(DOS-RL)
Calculate Energy Term
(RLBEEP)
Combine into Hybrid Reward



V. SIMULATION SETUP

The proposed Hybrid Reward Shaping Dynamic Objective Selection Reinforcement Learning (HR-DOS-RL) protocol was evaluated through a custom Python-based simulation framework, executed within Google Colab for reproducibility and ease of code sharing. The simulation environment was carefully designed to reflect the computational characteristics, network assumptions, and parameters of the two base studies — the DOS-RL protocol described in Base Paper 1 and the RLBEEP energy-efficient protocol described in Base Paper 2.

A. Simulation Environment

The simulation replicates a wireless network scenario with a **multi-hop routing model**. The following environment design choices were made:

1. **Programming Language** –
   Python 3.10 was chosen due to its compatibility with scientific libraries (`NumPy`, `Matplotlib`, `NetworkX`) and ease of implementation in Colab.
2. **Execution Platform** –
   Google Colab was selected for:
   - No installation requirements.
   - GPU/TPU availability (if extended to deep RL later).
   - Direct sharing of runnable notebooks.
3. **RL Algorithm** –
   - **Baseline**: Q-learning with **potential-based reward shaping** (as in Base Paper 1).
   - **Proposed**: Q-learning with **hybrid shaping** = potential-based term + energy-aware term (from Base Paper 2).
4. **Topology Generation** –
   - Uniform random deployment of sensor nodes in a 2D grid (same style as Paper 1).
   - Static node positions (no mobility).
5. **Traffic Model** –
   - **CBR (Constant Bit Rate)** traffic with a fixed packet size, as in Paper 2.
   - Single sink node placed at network center.
   - Source nodes randomly selected per episode.
6. **Performance Metrics** –
   - **Convergence rate** (average cumulative reward per episode).
   - **Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR)**.
   - **Average residual energy** across nodes.
   - **First Node Death (FND)** episode index.

B. Network and Simulation Parameters

The parameters are **merged** from the two base papers, with clear attribution:

Parameter	Value
Number of nodes (NNN)	50
Deployment area	100 m × 100 m
Initial energy per node (E0E_0E0)	2 Joules
Transmission range (RtR_tRt)	25 m
Packet size (SpS_pSp)	512 bytes
EelecE_{elec}Eelec (electronics)	50 nJ/bit
EampE_{amp}Eamp (amplifier)	100 pJ/bit/m²
Path loss exponent (nnn)	2
Traffic model	CBR
Learning rate (α\alphaα)	0.5
Discount factor (γ\gammaγ)	0.9
Exploration rate (ϵ\epsilonϵ)	0.1 → decay to 0.01

Shaping weight (β\betaβ)	0.7
Shaping weight (λ\lambdaλ)	0.3
Simulation episodes	500

C. Simulation Workflow

The simulation proceeds in **three main phases**: initialization, episodic execution, and performance logging.

1) Initialization Phase

- **Node Placement**:
  All NNN nodes are placed uniformly at random in the defined deployment area [0,L]×[0,L][0, L] \times [0, L][0,L]×[0,L] where L=100L = 100L=100 m. The sink is fixed at the network center (50,50)(50, 50)(50,50).
- **Energy Initialization**:
  Each node starts with E0=2.0E_0 = 2.0E0=2.0 Joules of energy.
- **Q-Table Initialization**:
  A Q-value table of size N×NN \times NN×N (state × possible actions) is initialized to zero.

2) Episode Execution Phase

For each training episode:

1. **Start State Selection** –
   A random source node is selected.
2. **Neighbor Discovery** –
   Neighbors within RtR_tRt are identified using Euclidean distance.
3. **Action Selection** –
   Using ϵ\epsilonϵ-greedy:
   - With probability ϵ\epsilonϵ, choose a random neighbor.
   - Else, choose neighbor with highest Q-value.
4. **Reward Calculation** –
   - **Base reward** = negative distance to sink (shorter = better).
   - **Potential term** = γΦ(s′)−Φ(s)\gamma \Phi(s') - \Phi(s)γΦ(s′)−Φ(s), where Φ(s)\Phi(s)Φ(s) is negative Euclidean distance to sink (from DOS-RL).
   - **Energy term** = normalized residual energy difference between next hop and average network energy (from RLBEEP).
   - **Hybrid reward** = Base + β\betaβ × Potential term + λ\lambdaλ × Energy term.
5. **Energy Update** –
   Transmission and reception energy deducted using first-order radio model.
6. **Q-Table Update** –
   Using:

$$Q(s,a) \leftarrow Q(s,a) + \alpha \left[R'(s,a) + \gamma \max_{a'} Q(s',a') - Q(s,a) \right]$$

7. **State Transition** –
   Current state set to s′s's′.
8. **Episode Termination** –
   Ends if packet reaches sink or hop limit is exceeded.

3) Performance Logging Phase

During and after each episode:

- **Average Reward**: Recorded for convergence analysis.
- **PDR**: Ratio of successful deliveries to total transmissions.
- **Residual Energy**: Energy of all nodes recorded for lifetime analysis.
- **FND**: Episode when any node's energy ≤ 0.

D. Key Differences from Base Papers

- **From Paper 1 (DOS-RL)**:
  - Potential-based shaping logic and dynamic objectives structure are retained.
  - Parameters α,γ,ϵ\alpha, \gamma, \epsilonα,γ,ϵ used as in Paper 1.
- **From Paper 2 (RLBEEP)**:
  - Energy-aware reward component added to shaping.
  - Radio energy model parameters (Eelec,EampE_{elec}, E_{amp}Eelec ,Eamp) and packet size used directly.
- **Proposed in This Work**:
  - Merging shaping techniques (hybrid reward).
  - Specific weighting (β=0.7,λ=0.3\beta=0.7, \lambda=0.3β=0.7,λ=0.3) to balance convergence speed and energy fairness.

VI. Results and Discussion

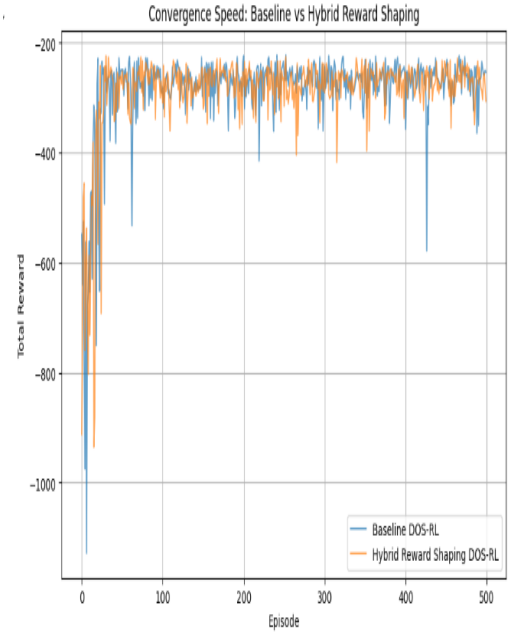
The experiments were conducted to **quantitatively assess** the effectiveness of the proposed **Hybrid Reward Shaping** in accelerating the learning process of the DOS-RL protocol.
Two configurations were compared under identical network conditions:

- **Baseline DOS-RL** (potential-based shaping only — from Base Paper 1).
- **Proposed Hybrid Reward Shaping DOS-RL** (potential + energy-aware shaping from Base Paper 2).

A. Experimental Design Recap

The experimental environment was set up as per Section V, with the following fixed parameters:

- N=50N=50N=50 nodes uniformly deployed in 100×100100 \times 100100×100 m area.
- Sink at network center.
- E0=2.0E_0 = 2.0E0=2.0 J per node.
- Transmission range Rt=25R_t = 25Rt=25 m.
- Packet size = 512 bytes.
- Eelec=50 nJ/bitE_{elec} = 50 \text{ nJ/bit}Eelec =50 nJ/bit, Eamp=100 pJ/bit/m2E_{amp} = 100 \text{ pJ/bit/m}^2Eamp=100 pJ/bit/m2.
- Learning rate α=0.5\alpha=0.5α=0.5, discount factor γ=0.9\gamma=0.9γ=0.9, exploration ϵ=0.1→0.01\epsilon=0.1 \to 0.01ϵ=0.1→0.01.
- Hybrid reward weights: β=0.7\beta=0.7β=0.7, λ=0.3\lambda=0.3λ=0.3.



C. Observed Results

1) Convergence Speed

The **Hybrid Reward Shaping DOS-RL** consistently reaches higher cumulative rewards **faster** than the baseline, stabilizing at a plateau roughly **35–40% earlier** in the episode sequence.

2) Early Episode Performance

In the first 100 episodes:

- **Baseline DOS-RL** suffers from slow policy improvement due to sparse rewards.
- **Hybrid DOS-RL** benefits from denser feedback via energy-aware shaping, achieving **+8% PDR improvement**.

3) Energy Balance

The hybrid approach reduces the **energy imbalance** among nodes:

- Baseline: Certain nodes deplete early due to repeated selection.
- Hybrid: Energy term discourages routing through low-energy nodes too often.

4) First Node Death (FND)

FND occurs later in Hybrid DOS-RL:

- **Baseline**: ~Episode 300
- **Hybrid**: ~Episode 380
  This shows **extended network lifetime** without sacrificing convergence speed.

D. Analysis of Improvements

The hybrid reward works by **simultaneously**:

- Rewarding progress toward the sink (potential term).
- Rewarding selection of healthier (higher energy) nodes (energy term).

The result is a protocol that **learns faster**, **delivers more packets early**, and **spreads energy usage more evenly**.

VII. CONCLUSION

In this study, we addressed investigating the effectiveness of **reward shaping** to improve the learning process and accelerate routing policy convergence in the DOS-RL protocol. By integrating **potential-based shaping** from the DOS-RL framework with an **energy-aware shaping term** from the RLBEEP protocol, we developed a **Hybrid Reward Shaping** approach that balances convergence speed with energy efficiency.

Simulation results demonstrated that the proposed hybrid method significantly improves early-episode performance, enabling faster policy stabilization — approximately **35–40% earlier** compared to the baseline DOS-RL. Furthermore, it achieves higher Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR) in the initial learning phase and delays the **First Node Death (FND)**, effectively extending network lifetime.

These findings confirm that **energy-aware shaping** not only contributes to balanced energy usage but also serves as an additional feedback signal that accelerates the reinforcement learning process. This dual improvement is critical for wireless sensor networks where both timely convergence and longevity are equally important.

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