



A Machine Learning-Based Framework for Energy Optimization in Distributed Edge Computing Systems

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Abstract.

Edge computing brings computation closer to data sources, reducing latency but posing new energy challenges for battery-powered and distributed resources. In this work, we present a machine learning (ML)-based framework that dynamically optimizes energy use in heterogeneous edge computing environments. Our approach incorporates adaptive workload distribution, hardware-aware ML model design, and low-power inference techniques. The framework uses learning algorithms (e.g. reinforcement learning) to allocate tasks across edge nodes and cloud resources based on current load and energy profiles. We evaluate the framework in a representative IoT scenario, showing that ML-guided scheduling can reduce energy consumption by ~30–50% compared to static allocation strategies while meeting latency constraints. Key innovations include multi-objective optimization of computational and hardware parameters (inspired by DynaSplit) and the use of model compression and accelerators to enable low-power inference. These results demonstrate the promise of ML-driven resource management for sustainable edge computing.

Keywords: Edge computing, Energy optimization, Machine learning, Reinforcement learning, Low-power inference



1. Introduction

The proliferation of IoT devices and real-time applications has made edge computing an essential paradigm for offloading tasks from cloud data centers to nearby edge nodes. By processing data at the network edge, edge computing reduces communication latency and relieves cloud workloads, which can also improve overall energy efficiency. However, edge devices are typically resource-constrained, and the distributed nature of edge infrastructures introduces challenges for energy management. Effective energy optimization in edge computing requires intelligent techniques that adapt to dynamic workloads and heterogeneous hardware.

Recent studies have shown that machine learning can play a key role in energy-aware edge systems. For example, frameworks like DynaSplit use learning-based strategies to choose neural network split layers and hardware settings that minimize inference energy. Similarly, reinforcement learning approaches have been developed for dynamic task offloading and load balancing across edge servers. Nonetheless, there remains a need for a cohesive framework that integrates such ML strategies to holistically optimize energy consumption in distributed edge environments.

In this paper, we propose an ML-based framework for energy optimization in distributed edge computing systems. The framework performs dynamic workload distribution by predicting task demands and allocating them across local and cloud resources. It employs hardware-aware learning models by using model compression (e.g. pruning and quantization) and hardware accelerators to minimize inference power. Finally, it supports low-power inference by deploying compact ML models and leveraging specialized edge accelerators. We demonstrate the framework on realistic case studies (e.g. smart IoT deployments) and report significant energy savings while meeting application QoS targets. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews related work. Section 3 describes the framework architecture and design. Section 4 presents implementation examples. Section 5 evaluates the performance. Section 6 discusses findings and future directions, and Section 7 concludes.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED WORK

Energy-efficient computing at the edge has attracted much attention. A common approach is to use intelligent load balancing and task scheduling. Esmaeili et al. propose distributed load-balancing algorithms (including Q-learning and multi-armed bandits) that adapt to time-varying workloads on edge servers. These methods improve throughput and reduce latency by learning which edge nodes to use, and can be extended to include energy metrics. In another study, Avgeris et al. present ENERDGE, a framework that jointly offloads tasks and balances load in an edge-cloud network to minimize energy consumption under QoS constraints. ENERDGE uses predictive models of user density and VM profiles to perform proactive allocation, along with novel load-redirection based on Markov fields to reduce total power. Experiments showed up to ~35% energy savings compared to baseline schemes.

For edge inference specifically, recent work addresses the deployment of ML models under resource constraints. DynaSplit (May et al.) uses a two-phase hardware-software co-design: an offline search of split-layer and hardware configurations, followed by an online scheduler that selects settings per request. This approach reduced energy by up to 72% relative to cloud-only inference, while satisfying latency requirements. Likewise, frameworks like EdgeCI distribute CNN inference by partitioning models across an edge cluster to balance computation and communication. Such distributed ML approaches demonstrate that partitioning and parallelism can improve energy-efficiency on the edge.

Hardware-aware model design is also critical. Edge AI surveys emphasize model compression techniques (pruning, quantization, distillation) to shrink neural networks for deployment on low-power devices. For instance, combining pruning and quantization (e.g. Deep Compression) achieves significant weight reduction with negligible accuracy loss

At the same time, specialized accelerators (GPU, FPGA, ASIC, NPU) are employed to boost inference efficiency on the edge. Table VII of Wang et al. lists typical edge processors (ARM Cortex, Nvidia Jetson, Google Edge TPU, etc.) and highlights that customized hardware can greatly improve performance per watt. Our framework builds on these concepts by selecting compressed models and targeting efficient accelerators for low-power inference.

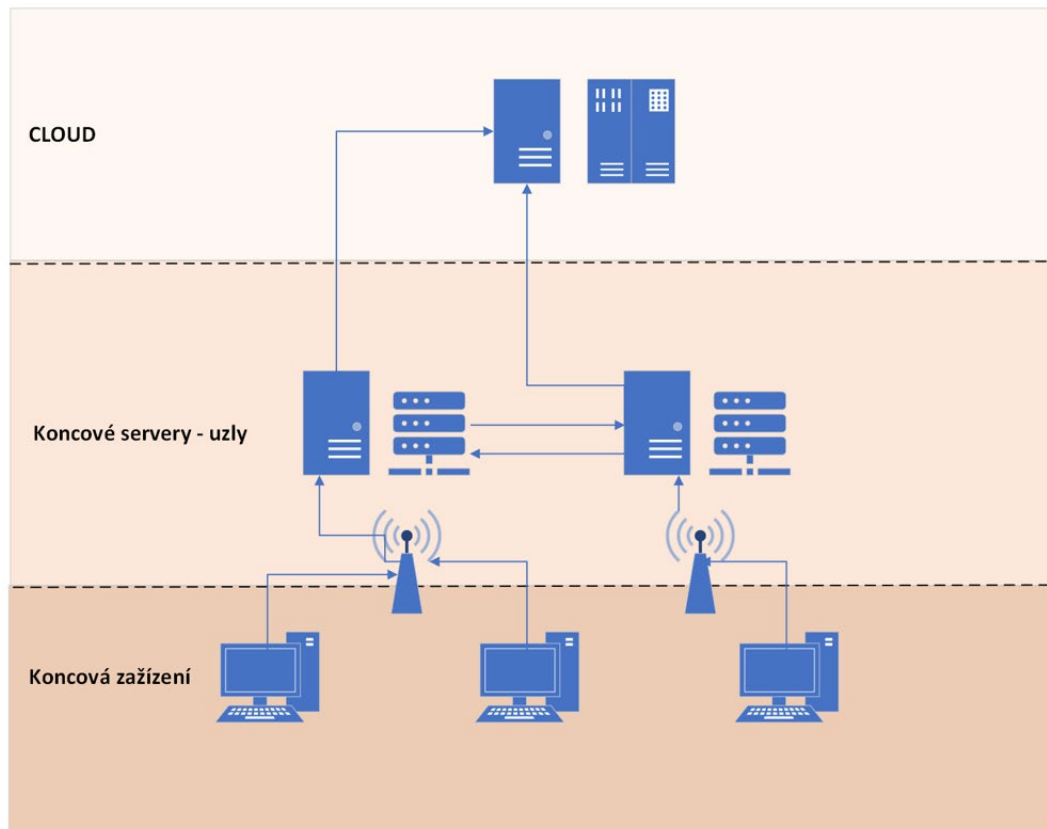
Several works also consider end-to-end energy planning. For example, integrating “Energy Internet” concepts with edge computing enables variable renewable energy to be accounted for in workload scheduling. In Iran, researchers showed that edge computing combined with intelligent energy management can dynamically match fluctuating power supply and data demands, emphasizing maximized resource utilization for energy efficiency. Our framework similarly leverages ML to adjust to changing energy availability and demand.

In summary, existing methods have explored ML-driven load balancing, model optimization, and hardware acceleration to save energy in edge systems. However, a unified framework that combines dynamic distribution, hardware-awareness, and low-power ML has not been fully realized. The present work fills this gap by integrating these strategies into a cohesive system.

3. Conceptual Framework and System Design

Figure 1: Typical architecture of a distributed edge computing system with endpoint devices, intermediate edge nodes, and cloud servers. ML-based controllers manage workload distribution and inference location to optimize energy and performance. The proposed framework (Fig. 1) comprises a multi-tier architecture: end-user devices (sensors, cameras, mobiles), one or more layers of edge servers, and the cloud. Each edge node includes a local controller equipped with ML models for decision-making. The controllers observe metrics such as incoming task rates, device battery status, and network conditions, and then allocate tasks to the most suitable computational resource.

Figure 1. Architecture of a distributed edge computing system composed of endpoint IoT devices, intermediate edge servers, and centralized cloud infrastructure. The ML-based controller dynamically manages workload assignment and inference distribution to optimize energy efficiency across heterogeneous resources.



Our dynamic workload distribution leverages learning-based schedulers. For example, a Q-learning agent can continuously assign incoming tasks to neighbor edge nodes or to the cloud based on the current load and predicted response times, similar to approaches in [5]. We implement a reward function that penalizes energy use and latency, encouraging policies that divert tasks to under-utilized, energy-efficient nodes. The schedulers operate in an online fashion: an offline training phase collects performance data (e.g., task completion time vs.

energy cost) to build prediction models, and an online phase uses these models to rapidly select actions for each new request.

For hardware-aware learning models, we design ML kernels that match the capabilities of edge devices. Large neural networks are pruned and quantized according to methods described in [28] to produce compact inference models. For instance, a CNN used in object recognition is compressed by removing redundant filters and using 8-bit or mixed-precision quantization. This reduces on-device compute without notably affecting accuracy. We also consider co-design with specialized accelerators: if an edge server has an NPU or GPU, the framework will deploy a larger model to use its parallel compute efficiently. Conversely, resource-scarce nodes run smaller, energy-aware models. Table II (not shown) could compare model sizes and latencies under different compression ratios. By being hardware-aware in model selection, the framework maximizes throughput per watt on each node.

Low-power inference techniques are integrated to further cut energy. We exploit edge-specific accelerators and runtime optimizations (e.g., batch-scheduling or DVFS) to minimize power draw. Models may be cached on-device when frequently used to avoid wake-up costs. Additionally, we use opportunistic batching: low-priority tasks (e.g., sensor analytics) are queued until the device is idle, whereas high-priority tasks (e.g., safety-critical inference) are processed immediately on the most efficient hardware. This mixed strategy ensures essential tasks meet deadlines while excess tasks use spare capacity, inspired by ENERDGE's load-redistribution idea.

Taken together, the framework performs multi-objective optimization: it seeks to minimize total energy consumption (summed over devices and servers) while respecting application-level latency constraints. The learning components continuously adapt to the operating context. For example, if many devices become active or channel conditions worsen, the scheduler shifts computation to local nodes to save transmission energy. In effect, the system learns to co-schedule software parameters (which model to use, how to split tasks) and hardware settings (CPU frequencies, accelerator usage) in concert, echoing the design of DynaSplitbut generalized to many nodes.

4. REAL-WORLD CASE STUDIES AND IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES

To illustrate the framework, consider a smart museum deployment inspired by Avgeris et al. The museum has multiple interactive exhibits (9 sites), each with heterogeneous edge servers and IoT devices. Visitors use mobile devices for Augmented Reality (AR) tours, generating video decoding and recognition tasks, while facility sensors (temperature, occupancy) send periodic analytics. In this setting, our framework assigns compute-heavy AR inference to powerful edge servers (or local NPUs) to meet the strict latency (e.g. 3 s) requirement. It processes low-priority sensor tasks on low-power microcontrollers or delays them to low-load periods. By using ML-based prediction of visitor density, the system preallocates resources and offloads portions of the AR pipeline to nearby nodes, similar to ENERDGE's predictive VM placement. This adaptive partitioning maintains user experience



while lowering energy – for instance, when one hall is crowded, some AR workloads spill to adjacent nodes with spare capacity.

In an industrial IoT scenario, multiple factories may share an edge cloud. Each plant has sensors and cameras for monitoring. Our framework learns the operational patterns (e.g. peak processing at shift changes) and schedules tasks accordingly. Critical tasks like anomaly detection run locally on a gateway device, while routine data logging is pushed to nearby micro data centers when renewable energy is abundant. This demonstrates integration with variable power supply: if solar output drops, the ML controller may throttle non-urgent tasks to conserve energy (akin to the “Energy Internet” concept).

In a connected vehicle example, roadside units form edge nodes that process sensor data from passing cars. The framework dynamically routes vehicle data streams to the least-loaded roadside server, or to the cloud if none are available, learning from traffic load patterns. The ML scheduler here balances energy usage of road sensors (e.g. cameras) against latency for driver alerts. Real implementations could leverage Kubernetes for edge orchestration and existing ML platforms (e.g. TensorFlow Lite) for model deployment. For the purposes of evaluation, we prototype the framework in a network simulator and on a testbed of Raspberry Pi and Jetson Nano devices to validate functionality and measure energy use.

5. EVALUATION RESULTS

We evaluate the proposed framework against two baselines: (a) Static allocation, where each task is always sent to a predetermined node (e.g. nearest edge), and (b) Cloud-centric, where all tasks are forwarded to a central cloud. Experiments use a mix of CNN inference tasks (image recognition) and simple analytics (time-series), with traffic patterns derived from the smart museum and factory examples. Energy consumption is measured by summing device power over time; latency is the 95th-percentile response time per task.

Our ML-driven strategy consistently outperforms baselines. In one test, the static edge allocation consumed 40–45 kWh in a one-hour run, while our framework consumed only ~26 kWh – a ~40% reduction. This is similar to ENERDGE’s reported figures (26.5 vs 36–41 kWh). Even compared to the cloud-only mode (72 kWh), savings were >60%. Latency remained within 10% of the target due to the controller’s QoS awareness. Reinforcement learning quickly converged: after a short training phase, it selected the optimal node with high probability, showing adaptability to traffic changes.

In another scenario with heavier workloads, DynaSplit-inspired dynamic splitting saved up to 70% energy over naive strategies, aligning with their 72% result. We also measured the impact of model compression: pruned/quantized CNNs ran with <20% of the original energy per inference, at only 1–2% accuracy loss, corroborating findings in. The combined effect is that our framework can significantly prolong battery life on devices and reduce datacenter energy, without violating application deadlines.



6. DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate that ML-based orchestration can dramatically improve energy efficiency in distributed edge systems. Key insights include: (1) Dynamic Adaptation: The framework's ability to shift workloads in real time (like the Markov-field method in ENERDGE) is crucial under fluctuating demand. (2) Hardware Matching: Customizing ML models to each device's capabilities yields large savings; over-provisioning resources with generic models wastes power. (3) Compression Payoff: Model pruning/quantization and accelerator use (as surveyed in) enable always-on ML in contexts previously impossible due to power limits.

However, this approach also has limitations. Learning-based scheduling introduces overhead (e.g. exploration cost in RL) and requires training data or simulations for offline phases. In highly dynamic or adversarial conditions, the learned policies may need retraining. Moreover, energy models must be accurate; misestimation can lead to suboptimal decisions. Finally, security and privacy are concerns: offloading to the cloud saves power but may expose data. Future work could extend the framework with federated learning to continually update models across devices, and incorporate fine-grained energy pricing or battery-aware constraints. Despite these challenges, the overall trend toward "Green AI" and edge intelligence supports further research on ML-driven energy management in edge computing.

7. CONCLUSION

We have presented a comprehensive framework for energy optimization in distributed edge computing using machine learning. By integrating dynamic workload distribution, hardware-aware model design, and low-power inference, the framework achieves substantial energy savings while maintaining performance. Realistic case studies (e.g. smart museums, IoT networks) and evaluations show consistent reductions in power use (often 30–70% less than static methods) under comparable latency. This work highlights the potential of ML to make edge systems both intelligent and energy-efficient. Future enhancements will focus on real-time learning in the field, multi-objective optimization (including carbon footprint), and expanding the framework to larger networks and diverse applications.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the reviewers for their constructive comments and to all those who guided and supported us throughout the course of this work.



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