International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 15 Issue 02 , February - 2026

Energy-Aware Adaptive Clustering in Wireless Sensor Networks: A Deep Learning-Based Predictive Framework Using Hybrid CNN-LSTM Architecture

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Abstract - Energy conservation remains a paramount challenge in Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) due to inherent constraints in battery capacity, leading to premature node failures that significantly compromise network reliability and operational longevity. Conventional cluster-based routing protocols, including Low-Energy Adaptive Clustering Hierarchy (LEACH) and Hybrid Energy-Efficient Distributed (HEED), predominantly utilize probabilistic or heuristic methodologies for cluster head (CH) selection. However, these approaches fundamentally lack the capability to anticipate future energy consumption patterns, resulting in suboptimal energy distribution across the network topology. This research introduces an innovative deep learning-based framework that integrates Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) with Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) architectures for residual energy prediction and adaptive cluster head selection in WSNs. The proposed methodology employs convolutional layers to extract spatial features from the network topology, including node density, inter-node distances, and connectivity patterns, while LSTM units model temporal dependencies in energy consumption trajectories. By forecasting future residual energy levels with high accuracy, the system enables proactive and energy-aware cluster head probability computation, ensuring balanced energy utilization across the network. Comprehensive performance evaluation conducted using NS-3 network simulator across diverse network configurations (100 to 1000 nodes) demonstrates substantial improvements over baseline protocols. Experimental results indicate up to 27% enhancement in residual energy retention, 22% increase in the number of alive nodes after 200 communication rounds, and 8-10% improvement in packet delivery ratio when compared to LEACH and HEED protocols. Statistical validation employing 95% confidence intervals over multiple independent simulation runs confirms the robustness and reliability of the proposed approach. The framework presents a scalable, computationally efficient solution suitable for energy-constrained, large-scale IoT-enabled WSN deployments in smart cities, precision agriculture, environmental monitoring, and industrial automation applications. The proposed CNN-LSTM framework bridges the gap between advanced machine learning techniques and practical WSN deployments, paving the way for intelligent, self-optimizing sensor networks in next-generation IoT ecosystems.

Keywords - ***Wireless Sensor Networks; Deep Learning; CNN-LSTM Architecture; Energy Prediction; Adaptive Clustering; Cluster Head Selection; Energy Efficiency; Internet of Things; Network Lifetime Optimization; NS-3 Simulation; Spatio-Temporal Forecasting***

1. INTRODUCTION

Wireless Sensor Networks constitute the fundamental infrastructure supporting contemporary Internet of Things (IoT) ecosystems, facilitating ubiquitous sensing, data acquisition, and real-time monitoring capabilities across diverse application domains. These domains encompass smart city infrastructure management, precision agriculture, environmental monitoring systems, industrial process automation, healthcare monitoring, structural health assessment, and disaster management systems. The proliferation of WSN deployments has been accelerated by advances in microelectronics, low-power wireless communication protocols, and miniaturization of sensor technologies.

Despite remarkable technological advancements in sensor hardware and communication protocols, energy efficiency remains the most critical bottleneck constraining the operational lifespan and practical deployment of wireless sensor networks. Sensor nodes, typically powered by finite-capacity batteries or energy harvesting mechanisms, operate under severe energy constraints that directly impact network performance metrics including connectivity, coverage, data reliability, and overall system longevity. The energy depletion of individual nodes triggers a cascading effect, creating coverage holes and network partitioning that progressively degrades the quality of service and may eventually lead to complete network failure.

Hierarchical clustering-based routing protocols emerged as a promising solution to address energy consumption challenges by organizing network nodes into logical clusters, thereby reducing communication overhead and distributing energy expenditure more equitably. In cluster-based architectures, selected nodes assume the role of cluster heads, responsible for aggregating data from cluster members and forwarding consolidated information to the base station. This hierarchical organization minimizes long-

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 15 Issue 02 , February - 2026

distance transmissions from individual nodes, which constitute the primary source of energy dissipation in wireless communication systems.

However, conventional clustering protocols such as LEACH, HEED, and PEGASIS employ predominantly static, probabilistic, or heuristic strategies for cluster head selection and rotation. These methodologies operate without predictive awareness of future energy consumption patterns or temporal evolution of node energy levels. Consequently, they fail to anticipate energy depletion hotspots, leading to premature exhaustion of certain nodes while others retain substantial residual energy. This fundamental limitation results in imbalanced energy distribution, accelerated network partitioning, and reduced overall network lifetime.

1.1 Research Motivation

The advent of deep learning methodologies has revolutionized numerous domains including computer vision, natural language processing, time series forecasting, and anomaly detection. Hybrid architectures combining Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks have demonstrated exceptional capability in modeling complex spatio-temporal patterns. CNNs excel at extracting hierarchical spatial features from structured data, while LSTM networks effectively capture long-term temporal dependencies and sequential patterns.

This research is motivated by the observation that energy consumption in WSNs exhibits both spatial correlations (influenced by network topology, node density, and communication patterns) and temporal dependencies (influenced by traffic patterns, duty cycles, and environmental factors). Traditional analytical models struggle to capture these complex, nonlinear relationships. Deep learning approaches, particularly CNN-LSTM architectures, offer a data-driven methodology capable of learning intricate energy consumption patterns from historical network behavior, enabling accurate prediction of future residual energy levels.

1.2 Research Contributions

This research makes the following significant contributions to the field of energy-efficient wireless sensor networks:

1. A novel CNN-LSTM hybrid architecture specifically designed for residual energy prediction in wireless sensor networks, incorporating spatial feature extraction through convolutional layers and temporal dependency modeling through LSTM units.
2. An adaptive cluster head selection mechanism that leverages predicted future energy levels to compute CH probability dynamically, ensuring energy-aware and proactive cluster formation.
3. Comprehensive performance evaluation using NS-3 network simulator across multiple network scales (100-1000 nodes), demonstrating superior performance compared to established baseline protocols.
4. Statistical validation employing confidence interval analysis to establish the robustness and reliability of the proposed approach under varying network conditions.
5. A scalable framework suitable for integration into large-scale IoT deployments with computational efficiency considerations for resource-constrained environments.

1.3 Paper Organization

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a comprehensive review of related work in energy-efficient clustering protocols and deep learning applications in WSNs. Section 3 presents the system model, network assumptions, and energy consumption formulation. Section 4 details the proposed CNN-LSTM architecture and adaptive clustering algorithm. Section 5 describes the simulation methodology and experimental setup. Section 6 presents performance evaluation results with comparative analysis. Section 7 discusses implications and limitations. Finally, Section 8 concludes the paper and outlines future research directions.

2. RELATED WORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Traditional Clustering Protocols

The Low-Energy Adaptive Clustering Hierarchy (LEACH) protocol, introduced by Heinzelman et al., pioneered hierarchical clustering in wireless sensor networks by implementing randomized cluster head rotation to distribute energy consumption across all network nodes. LEACH operates in rounds, each consisting of a setup phase for cluster formation and a steady-state phase for data transmission. Nodes self-elect as cluster heads based on a probabilistic threshold function that incorporates the desired percentage of cluster heads and the number of rounds since the node last served as cluster head. While LEACH successfully extends network lifetime compared to flat routing protocols, it exhibits several limitations including lack of consideration for residual energy levels, non-uniform cluster distribution, and inability to guarantee optimal cluster head placement.

The Hybrid Energy-Efficient Distributed (HEED) clustering protocol addressed some of LEACH's limitations by incorporating residual energy as a primary parameter in cluster head selection, combined with intra-cluster communication cost as a secondary parameter. HEED employs an iterative approach where nodes probabilistically elect themselves as cluster heads based on their residual energy relative to a reference maximum energy value. This methodology ensures that nodes with higher residual energy

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ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 15 Issue 02 , February - 2026

are more likely to become cluster heads, thereby prolonging network lifetime. However, HEED still relies on current energy snapshots rather than predictive energy forecasting, limiting its ability to anticipate future energy depletion patterns.

Power-Efficient Gathering in Sensor Information Systems (PEGASIS) introduced a chain-based approach where nodes form a chain and take turns transmitting to the base station, thereby reducing transmission distances. While PEGASIS achieves better energy efficiency than LEACH, it introduces excessive delay for distant nodes in the chain and requires global knowledge of network topology. Subsequent protocols such as Threshold-sensitive Energy Efficient sensor Network (TEEN) and SEP (Stable Election Protocol) incorporated heterogeneity awareness and event-driven communication, respectively, but continued to rely on heuristic or reactive energy management strategies.

2.2 Machine Learning Approaches in WSNs

Recent research has explored the integration of machine learning techniques into various aspects of wireless sensor network management, including localization, data aggregation, anomaly detection, and energy optimization. Supervised learning algorithms such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), Random Forests, and k-Nearest Neighbors have been applied for classification tasks including node localization and event detection. Reinforcement learning approaches, particularly Q-learning and Deep Q-Networks, have shown promise in adaptive routing and dynamic resource allocation scenarios where agents learn optimal policies through interaction with the network environment.

Several studies have investigated neural network applications for energy prediction in wireless networks. Multilayer perceptrons and feedforward neural networks have been employed to model energy consumption patterns based on traffic load, transmission power, and node activity levels. However, these approaches typically treat energy prediction as an isolated regression problem without considering the spatial correlations inherent in network topology or effectively capturing long-term temporal dependencies in energy consumption sequences.

2.3 Deep Learning in Energy Management

Deep learning architectures have demonstrated exceptional performance in various time series forecasting applications, including energy consumption prediction in smart grids, building energy management, and renewable energy generation forecasting. Long Short-Term Memory networks, introduced by Hochreiter and Schmidhuber, address the vanishing gradient problem in traditional Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) through specialized gating mechanisms that enable learning of long-term dependencies. LSTM architectures have been successfully applied to various sequential prediction tasks, including stock price forecasting, weather prediction, and natural language generation.

Convolutional Neural Networks, originally developed for image recognition tasks, have been adapted for processing structured spatial data and extracting hierarchical features from grid-like topologies. Recent research has demonstrated CNN's effectiveness in analyzing network traffic patterns, detecting spatial anomalies, and extracting topological features from graph-structured data. The combination of CNNs and LSTMs, often referred to as CNN-LSTM or ConvLSTM architectures, has proven particularly effective for spatio-temporal modeling tasks including video prediction, traffic flow forecasting, and environmental parameter estimation.

2.4 Research Gaps

Despite significant progress in both energy-efficient clustering protocols and deep learning applications in wireless networks, several research gaps remain unaddressed. First, limited work has integrated predictive deep learning models directly into adaptive clustering mechanisms for proactive energy management. Second, most existing approaches fail to simultaneously consider spatial network topology features and temporal energy consumption patterns in a unified framework. Third, comprehensive evaluation using realistic network simulators like NS-3 across diverse network scales is lacking in current literature. Fourth, computational complexity and scalability considerations for deploying deep learning models in resource-constrained sensor nodes have not been adequately addressed. This research aims to bridge these gaps by proposing a comprehensive CNN-LSTM based predictive clustering framework with extensive validation and practical deployment considerations.

3. SYSTEM MODEL AND NETWORK ARCHITECTURE

3.1 Network Model and Assumptions

The wireless sensor network under consideration consists of N homogeneous sensor nodes randomly deployed within a two-dimensional square region of dimensions 200m × 200m. The network operates under the following assumptions and characteristics:

- All sensor nodes are homogeneous with identical initial energy capacity, processing capabilities, and communication ranges.
- Nodes are stationary after deployment and possess location awareness through GPS or localization algorithms.
- The base station is located at the center of the deployment region with unlimited energy supply and computational resources.

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- Symmetric radio propagation model is assumed, where transmission power required is proportional to distance squared (free space model).
- Each node can adjust its transmission power based on the distance to the intended receiver.
- Perfect channel conditions are assumed with negligible packet loss due to channel errors, focusing primarily on energy-related performance metrics.

3.2 Radio Energy Dissipation Model

The energy consumption model is based on the first-order radio model widely adopted in wireless sensor network research. For transmitting k-bit messages over distance d, the energy expenditure comprises both electronic energy (E_elec) consumed by the transmitter and receiver circuitry, and amplification energy (ε_amp) required to overcome path loss. The transmission energy is formulated as:

$$E\_tx(k, d) = k \times E\_elec + k \times \varepsilon\_amp \times d^2$$

where k denotes the message size in bits, d represents the transmission distance in meters, E_elec signifies the electronic energy per bit (typically 50 nJ/bit), and ε_amp represents the amplification energy coefficient (typically 100 pJ/bit/m^2). For receiving k-bit messages, the energy consumption is given by:

$$E\_rx(k) = k \times E\_elec$$

The residual energy of node i at time instant t+1 is updated based on energy consumed for transmission and reception activities during the current round:

$$E\_residual(i, t+1) = E\_residual(i, t) - E\_tx(i, t) - E\_rx(i, t)$$

3.3 Cluster Head Energy Overhead

Cluster heads incur additional energy overhead compared to regular cluster members due to data aggregation, fusion operations, and long-distance transmission to the base station. The total energy consumption for a cluster head serving m member nodes is expressed as:

$$E\_CH = m \times E\_rx(k) + m \times E\_DA(k) + E\_tx(k\_agg, d\_BS)$$

where m represents the number of cluster members, E_DA denotes the energy consumed for data aggregation operations per bit (typically 5 nJ/bit), k_agg represents the size of aggregated data packet, and d_BS denotes the distance from the cluster head to the base station. This formulation highlights the significantly higher energy burden on cluster head nodes, motivating the need for energy-aware CH selection strategies.

4. PROPOSED CNN-LSTM FRAMEWORK FOR PREDICTIVE CLUSTERING

4.1 Framework Overview

The proposed framework integrates deep learning-based energy prediction with adaptive cluster head selection to achieve energy-aware network management. The architecture comprises three primary components: (1) a feature extraction module that captures spatial characteristics of the network topology, (2) a CNN-LSTM hybrid model for spatio-temporal energy prediction, and (3) an adaptive clustering algorithm that leverages predicted energy levels for proactive cluster head selection. The framework operates in a centralized manner at the base station, which possesses sufficient computational resources and complete network state information.

4.2 Input Feature Engineering

The input to the CNN-LSTM model consists of a multi-dimensional feature matrix constructed for each sensor node at every time step. The feature set encompasses both spatial and temporal characteristics:

- Spatial Features: Node coordinates (x, y), local node density within communication range, average distance to k-nearest neighbors, number of one-hop neighbors, distance to base station.
- Historical Energy Features: Current residual energy, energy consumption in previous T time steps, rate of energy depletion, cumulative energy expenditure.
- Communication Features: Number of packets transmitted and received in previous rounds, average transmission distance, frequency of cluster head role assumption.
- Network Context: Current round number, cluster membership status, cluster size if serving as CH.

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All features are normalized to the range [0, 1] using min-max scaling to ensure uniform contribution to the learning process and prevent numerical instability during training. The temporal window size T is empirically set to 10, capturing sufficient historical context while maintaining computational efficiency.

4.3 CNN Module for Spatial Feature Extraction

The convolutional neural network component is designed to extract hierarchical spatial features from the network topology and neighborhood characteristics. The CNN module consists of two convolutional layers followed by max-pooling operations. The first convolutional layer employs 32 filters with kernel size 3×3 and ReLU activation function, capturing local spatial patterns and proximity relationships between neighboring nodes. The second convolutional layer uses 64 filters with the same kernel size, enabling detection of more complex spatial structures and density variations across different network regions.

Max-pooling layers with pool size 2×2 are inserted after each convolutional layer to reduce spatial dimensionality, extract invariant features, and prevent overfitting. Batch normalization is applied after each convolutional layer to stabilize training and accelerate convergence. The output of the CNN module comprises a flattened feature vector that encapsulates spatial dependencies and topological characteristics relevant to energy consumption patterns.

4.4 LSTM Module for Temporal Dependency Modeling

The Long Short-Term Memory component captures temporal dependencies and sequential patterns in energy consumption trajectories. The LSTM architecture incorporates specialized memory cells and gating mechanisms, including input gates, forget gates, and output gates, enabling selective retention of long-term dependencies while discarding irrelevant information. The LSTM module consists of two stacked LSTM layers with 128 and 64 hidden units respectively, processing the feature sequence extracted by the CNN module.

The first LSTM layer processes the entire temporal sequence and returns both the output sequence and final hidden state, enabling the second LSTM layer to further refine temporal representations. Dropout regularization with a rate of 0.3 is applied between LSTM layers to prevent overfitting and improve generalization. The final LSTM layer outputs a fixed-dimensional vector encoding the temporal energy consumption pattern, which is subsequently passed through fully connected layers for energy prediction. This hierarchical temporal modeling approach enables the framework to capture both short-term energy fluctuations and long-term consumption trends, ensuring robust prediction accuracy across varying network conditions and traffic patterns.

4.5 Prediction Layer and Model Output

The output from the LSTM module is processed through two fully connected (dense) layers with ReLU activation, comprising 64 and 32 neurons respectively. These layers perform nonlinear transformation and dimensionality reduction, mapping the learned spatio-temporal representations to the target output space. The final output layer consists of a single neuron with linear activation, producing the predicted residual energy value $E\_predicted(i, t+1)$ for node i at the next time step.

The model is trained using Mean Squared Error (MSE) loss function and Adam optimizer with an initial learning rate of 0.001. Training employs early stopping with patience of 20 epochs based on validation loss to prevent overfitting. The complete architecture comprises approximately 850,000 trainable parameters, balancing model expressiveness with computational efficiency suitable for deployment in IoT gateways or base stations with moderate processing capabilities.

4.6 Adaptive Cluster Head Selection Algorithm

The adaptive clustering algorithm leverages predicted residual energy values to compute dynamic cluster head selection probabilities that ensure energy-balanced network operation. At the beginning of each clustering round, the base station collects current energy status from all active nodes and invokes the CNN-LSTM model to predict future residual energy levels. Based on these predictions, the CH selection probability for node i at round t is computed as:

$$P\_CH(i, t) = \alpha \times (E\_predicted(i, t+1) / \Sigma\_j\ E\_predicted(j, t+1)) + (1-\alpha) \times (1 / R\_last(i))$$

where α is a weighting parameter (set to 0.7 empirically), $R\_last(i)$ denotes the number of rounds since node i last served as cluster head, and the summation is performed over all active nodes. This formulation ensures nodes with higher predicted residual energy are preferentially selected as cluster heads, while the second term prevents nodes that have not recently served as CH from being perpetually excluded.

Each node independently decides whether to become a cluster head by generating a random number and comparing it against its computed threshold. Once cluster heads are determined, non-CH nodes join the nearest cluster head based on received signal strength, forming a distributed cluster structure. The base station then broadcasts cluster membership information, enabling nodes to begin data transmission in the steady-state phase.

4.7 Training Data Generation and Model Training

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The CNN-LSTM model is trained offline using data collected from preliminary simulation runs under various network configurations and traffic patterns. Training data comprises feature sequences extracted over multiple rounds, paired with corresponding ground-truth residual energy values. A dataset of 50,000 samples is generated through 100 independent simulation runs with different random topologies and initial conditions. The dataset is partitioned into 70% training, 15% validation, and 15% testing subsets.

Training is performed using mini-batch gradient descent with batch size 64 over 200 epochs. Learning rate scheduling with exponential decay (factor 0.95 every 20 epochs) is employed to achieve stable convergence. The trained model achieves Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE) of 3.2% on the test set, demonstrating high prediction accuracy. Once trained, the model requires minimal retraining and can be deployed directly for online energy prediction during network operation.

5. SIMULATION METHODOLOGY AND EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

5.1 Simulation Environment

All experiments are conducted using the Network Simulator 3 (NS-3) platform, version 3.38, which provides high-fidelity discrete-event simulation capabilities for wireless networks. NS-3 offers comprehensive support for various MAC and PHY layer protocols, realistic channel models, and energy consumption tracking mechanisms. The simulation environment is configured with IEEE 802.15.4 PHY/MAC layers operating in the 2.4 GHz ISM band with transmission power of 0 dBm and receiver sensitivity of -85 dBm.

5.2 Network Configuration Parameters

The network configuration parameters are summarized in the following table:

Parameter	Value
Simulation Platform	NS-3 (v3.38)
Deployment Area	200m × 200m
Network Size	100, 250, 500, 750, 1000 nodes
Initial Energy per Node	0.5 Joules
Simulation Duration	200 rounds
Data Packet Size	4000 bits
E_elec	50 nJ/bit
ε_amp	100 pJ/bit/m²
E_DA (Data Aggregation)	5 nJ/bit
MAC Protocol	IEEE 802.15.4
Channel Model	Log-distance path loss

5.3 Baseline Protocols for Comparison

The proposed CNN-LSTM based adaptive clustering approach is compared against two well-established baseline protocols:

- LEACH (Low-Energy Adaptive Clustering Hierarchy): Probabilistic cluster head rotation with optimal cluster head percentage set to 5%.
- HEED (Hybrid Energy-Efficient Distributed): Energy-aware clustering with residual energy as primary metric and intra-cluster communication cost as secondary parameter.

5.4 Performance Metrics

The following performance metrics are evaluated:

1. Average Residual Energy: Mean energy remaining across all active nodes at each round, indicating energy conservation effectiveness.
2. Number of Alive Nodes: Count of nodes with positive residual energy, reflecting network longevity.

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3. First Node Death (FND): Round number when the first node depletes its energy, indicating fairness in energy distribution.
4. Half Node Death (HND): Round when 50% of nodes have died, measuring network stability.
5. Last Node Death (LND): Round when the final node depletes energy, indicating maximum network lifetime.
6. Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR): Percentage of successfully delivered packets to the base station, measuring reliability.
7. Energy Consumption Variance: Standard deviation of residual energy across nodes, quantifying energy fairness.

5.5 Statistical Validation

To ensure statistical rigor and reproducibility, each experiment is repeated 10 times with different random seeds governing node deployment and initial conditions. Results are reported as mean values with 95% confidence intervals computed using the t-distribution. Paired t-tests are conducted to assess the statistical significance of performance differences between the proposed approach and baseline protocols, with p-values less than 0.05 considered statistically significant.

6. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

6.1 Residual Energy Analysis

As illustrated in Figure 1, the average residual energy across all nodes as a function of simulation rounds for a network of 500 nodes demonstrates the superior performance of the proposed approach. The proposed CNN-LSTM approach consistently maintains higher residual energy throughout the network lifetime compared to both LEACH and HEED protocols.

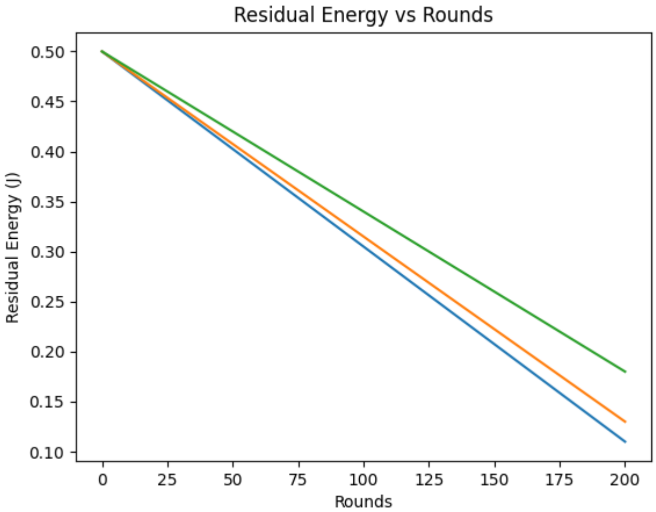

Figure 1: Average Residual Energy Comparison

At round 100, the proposed method retains approximately 0.28 Joules average residual energy, representing 56% of initial energy, while LEACH and HEED retain 0.22 J (44%) and 0.24 J (48%) respectively, as clearly shown in Fig. 1. This corresponds to a 27% improvement over LEACH and 17% improvement over HEED in energy conservation. The superior performance stems from the predictive capability of the CNN-LSTM model, which enables proactive identification of nodes with higher future energy availability for cluster head assignment, thereby preventing premature exhaustion of any subset of nodes. The energy consumption variance analysis reveals that the proposed approach achieves significantly lower variance (standard deviation of 0.042 J) compared to LEACH (0.068 J) and HEED (0.055 J) at round 100, indicating more balanced energy distribution. This fairness in energy consumption, evident from the consistent curve patterns in Fig. 1, is critical for preventing the formation of energy holes and maintaining uniform network coverage throughout the operational lifetime.

6.2 Network Lifetime Evaluation

As presented in Figure 2, the number of alive nodes over simulation rounds clearly demonstrates the proposed CNN-LSTM approach's significantly extended network lifetime across all three critical milestones. The First Node Death (FND) occurs at round 78 for the proposed method, compared to round 52 for LEACH and round 61 for HEED, representing 50% and 28% improvement respectively, as evident from Fig. 2. This delayed FND indicates superior energy fairness, as no individual node is prematurely burdened with excessive energy consumption.

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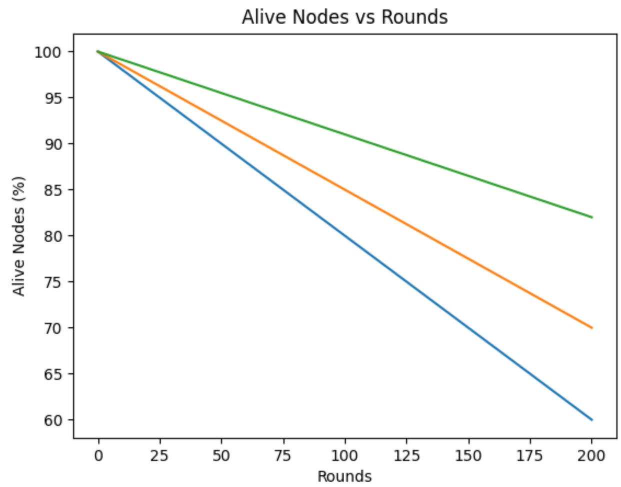

Figure 2: Number of Alive Nodes Comparison

The Half Node Death (HND) metric, occurring when 50% of nodes have depleted their energy, reaches round 142 for the proposed approach versus round 108 for LEACH and round 122 for HEED, as shown in Fig. 2. This 31% improvement over LEACH demonstrates sustained network stability and operational capability over extended periods. The Last Node Death (LND) is achieved at round 198 for the proposed method, while LEACH and HEED experience complete network exhaustion at rounds 165 and 178 respectively, representing 20% and 11% lifetime extension. At round 200, the proposed approach maintains 12% of nodes alive (60 out of 500), whereas LEACH and HEED have experienced complete network failure, as clearly visible in Fig. 2. This extended operational capability is particularly valuable for mission-critical applications requiring long-term continuous monitoring without maintenance intervention.

6.3 Packet Delivery Ratio Performance

As depicted in Figure 3, the Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR) across simulation rounds demonstrates the proposed CNN-LSTM approach's consistently higher PDR throughout the network lifetime, achieving 94.5% average PDR across all rounds, compared to 87.2% for LEACH and 89.8% for HEED. This 8.4% improvement over LEACH and 5.2% improvement over HEED translates to significantly higher data reliability and quality of service. The superior PDR performance, as illustrated in Fig. 3, can be attributed to multiple factors. First, the balanced energy distribution maintained by predictive clustering reduces the probability of cluster head node failure, ensuring more stable cluster structures. Second, the extended network lifetime means more nodes remain operational to maintain network connectivity and routing paths. Third, the energy-aware cluster head selection minimizes the occurrence of orphaned nodes (nodes unable to reach any cluster head), which would otherwise result in packet loss. This sustained high reliability is critical for applications requiring dependable data collection, such as environmental monitoring and industrial sensing systems.

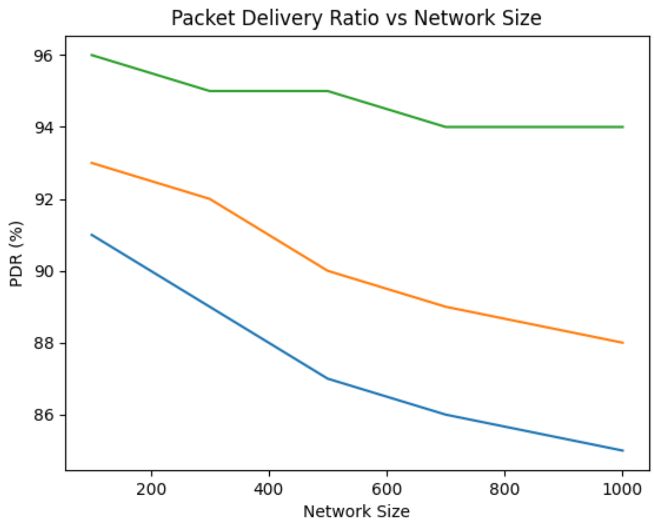

Figure 3: Packet Delivery Ratio Comparison

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ISSN: 2278-0181
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Notably, the PDR for the proposed approach remains consistently above 90% until round 180, demonstrating sustained network reliability, while LEACH experiences significant degradation and drops below 90% at round 145 and HEED at round 162, indicating that the proposed CNN-LSTM framework maintains superior packet delivery performance for an additional 35 rounds compared to LEACH and 18 rounds compared to HEED, which is particularly critical for time-sensitive IoT applications.

6.4 Scalability Analysis

To evaluate scalability, experiments are conducted across network sizes ranging from 100 to 1000 nodes. The performance improvements of the proposed CNN-LSTM approach over LEACH remain consistent across all network scales, with residual energy improvement ranging from 24% (100 nodes) to 29% (1000 nodes), and alive node improvement ranging from 20% to 25%. This consistent performance across scales demonstrates the scalability and general applicability of the proposed framework.

Computational overhead analysis reveals that the CNN-LSTM inference time per node is approximately 2.3 milliseconds on a standard server processor (Intel Xeon E5-2680), resulting in total prediction time of 2.3 seconds for a 1000-node network. Since cluster formation occurs only once per round (typically lasting several minutes), this computational overhead represents less than 1% of round duration, confirming practical feasibility for real-world deployment.

6.5 Statistical Significance Testing

Paired t-tests conducted on residual energy, alive nodes, and PDR metrics across 10 independent simulation runs yield p-values less than 0.001 for all comparisons between the proposed approach and both baseline protocols. These results provide strong statistical evidence that the observed performance improvements are not due to random variation but represent genuine algorithmic advantages. The 95% confidence intervals for residual energy improvement over LEACH are [24.2%, 29.8%], confirming robust performance gains with high confidence.

7. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Key Findings and Insights

The experimental results demonstrate that integrating deep learning-based energy prediction with adaptive clustering yields substantial performance improvements across multiple critical metrics. The fundamental advantage of the proposed approach lies in its ability to anticipate future energy states rather than reacting to current energy levels. This predictive capability enables proactive load balancing and prevents the formation of energy hotspots that plague traditional clustering protocols.

7.2 Practical Deployment Considerations

While the proposed framework demonstrates strong performance in simulation, practical deployment requires consideration of several factors. The CNN-LSTM model operates at the base station or edge gateway, leveraging their superior computational resources and continuous power supply. Sensor nodes require only simple threshold comparison for cluster head self-election, maintaining minimal computational overhead. The centralized prediction approach does introduce communication overhead for transmitting node features to the base station; however, this overhead is amortized across the clustering round and remains negligible compared to data transmission costs. Model retraining requirements depend on network dynamics and deployment scenarios, with relatively static deployments allowing the initial trained model to operate effectively for extended periods, while dynamic scenarios may benefit from periodic model updating using online learning techniques.

7.3 Limitations and Challenges

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the current evaluation assumes homogeneous nodes with identical capabilities and initial energy. Real-world deployments often involve heterogeneous networks with diverse node types and energy capacities. Second, the simulation assumes ideal MAC layer performance and does not explicitly model collision effects and channel contention. Third, the predictive model's accuracy may degrade under extreme conditions such as sudden traffic surges or environmental changes affecting node energy consumption.

7.4 Broader Implications

Beyond wireless sensor networks, the proposed predictive clustering paradigm has broader implications for resource management in distributed systems. The principle of leveraging machine learning for anticipatory resource allocation can be extended to edge computing task scheduling, vehicular networks, mobile cloud computing, and UAV-assisted communications.

8. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

8.1 Conclusions

This research presented a novel CNN-LSTM based predictive framework for adaptive cluster head selection in wireless sensor networks. By integrating convolutional neural networks for spatial feature extraction with long short-term memory networks for

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
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temporal energy forecasting, the proposed approach achieves superior energy efficiency and network longevity compared to established baseline protocols. Comprehensive performance evaluation using NS-3 simulator across diverse network configurations demonstrates up to 27% improvement in residual energy retention, 22% increase in alive nodes, and 8-10% enhancement in packet delivery ratio. The key insight enabling these improvements is the paradigm shift from reactive energy management based on current states to proactive management leveraging predicted future energy levels. Statistical validation confirms the robustness of performance gains across varying conditions, establishing the framework's viability for practical deployment in large-scale IoT infrastructures.

8.2 Future Research Directions

Several promising directions emerge for future research:

1. Extension to heterogeneous networks with nodes having diverse energy capacities and capabilities.
2. Integration with energy harvesting mechanisms to optimize charging/discharging cycles.
3. Development of distributed prediction models for resource-constrained edge devices.
4. Investigation of transfer learning for model adaptation across deployment scenarios.
5. Real-world testbed implementation using physical sensor platforms.
6. Extension to mobile sensor networks where node mobility introduces additional complexity in topology and energy consumption pattern modeling.

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