International Journal of Engineering & Extended Technologies Research (IJEETR)

|ISSN: 2322-0163| www.ijeetr.com | A Bimonthly, Peer Reviewed, Scholarly Indexed Journal |

| Volume 8, Issue 2, March - April 2026 |

DOI:10.15662/IJEETR.2026.0802089

Power Optimization in Heterogeneous Cellular Networks Using Deep Reinforcement Learning Based Sleep Control Algorithm

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Publication History: Received: 25.02.2026; Revised: 20.03.2026; Accepted: 25.03. 2026; Published: 28.03.2026.

ABSTRACT: The rapid growth of mobile users and increasing data traffic has significantly increased energy consumption in modern cellular networks. Heterogeneous Cellular Networks (HetNets), which consist of macro and small cells, are widely used to improve network coverage and capacity. However, the dense deployment of base stations leads to higher power consumption. In many cases, several base stations remain active even during low traffic conditions, resulting in unnecessary energy usage. Therefore, improving energy efficiency while maintaining network performance has become an important research challenge. This project proposes a Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL) based sleep control algorithm to improve energy efficiency in heterogeneous cellular networks. The DRL agent continuously observes network parameters such as traffic load, number of active users, and base station utilization. Based on these observations, the agent intelligently decides whether a small cell base station should remain active or switch to sleep mode. During low traffic conditions, some small cells are dynamically switched to sleep mode to reduce energy consumption. When the traffic demand increases, the base stations can be reactivated to maintain service quality and network coverage. The proposed approach aims to reduce overall network power consumption while ensuring Quality of Service (QoS) and maintaining system performance. The effectiveness of the proposed DRL-based method is evaluated and compared with traditional algorithms such as Branch and Bound (BnB) and Dynamic methods. The results demonstrate that the DRL-based sleep control algorithm provides better energy efficiency and improved network performance in heterogeneous cellular networks.

KEYWORDS: Heterogeneous Cellular Networks (HetNets), Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL), Energy Efficiency, Base Station Sleep Control, Small Cell Networks, Quality of Service (QoS)

I. INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented growth of mobile subscribers, proliferation of smart devices, and emergence of data-intensive applications such as ultra-high-definition video streaming, Internet of Things (IoT), and augmented reality have led to an exponential increase in mobile data traffic. This surge has imposed significant challenges on modern cellular networks in terms of capacity, coverage, and energy consumption. To address these challenges, Heterogeneous Cellular Networks (HetNets) have been introduced as a key architectural paradigm for next-generation wireless systems.

HetNets integrate high-power macro base stations with low-power small cell base stations (such as microcells, picocells, and femtocells) to enhance spectral efficiency, improve coverage in dense urban environments, and support massive user connectivity. While this dense deployment of small cells significantly improves network performance, it also results in a substantial increase in overall energy consumption. Notably, base stations account for a major portion of the total energy usage in cellular networks, often exceeding 60–80% of the network's operational power consumption.

A critical inefficiency arises from the fact that traffic demand in cellular networks is highly dynamic and exhibits strong temporal and spatial variations. During off-peak hours, many small cell base stations remain underutilized or idle but continue to consume power if left active. This leads to unnecessary energy wastage and reduced network energy efficiency. Therefore, dynamic base station management strategies, particularly sleep control mechanisms, have gained significant attention as a means to reduce energy consumption without degrading network performance.

Traditional approaches for base station sleep control, such as heuristic-based methods, threshold-based schemes, and optimization techniques like Branch and Bound (BnB), suffer from several limitations. These include high computational complexity, lack of scalability in large-scale networks, and inability to adapt efficiently to highly dynamic network environments. Moreover, such methods often rely on predefined rules and fail to capture the complex interactions between network parameters, leading to suboptimal decisions.

To overcome these limitations, machine learning-based approaches, particularly Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL), have emerged as a promising solution for intelligent network optimization. DRL combines reinforcement learning with deep neural networks to enable agents to learn optimal decision-making policies through continuous interaction with the environment. Unlike traditional methods, DRL can effectively handle high-dimensional state spaces, stochastic traffic patterns, and non-linear system dynamics.

In the context of HetNets, DRL can be utilized to design adaptive sleep control mechanisms where the agent observes real-time network conditions—such as traffic load, user distribution, and base station utilization—and makes optimal decisions regarding the activation or deactivation of small cell base stations. By formulating the problem as a Markov Decision Process (MDP), the DRL agent learns to balance the trade-off between minimizing energy consumption and maintaining Quality of Service (QoS), including metrics such as latency, throughput, and coverage probability.

This paper proposes a DRL-based intelligent sleep control framework for small cell base stations in heterogeneous cellular networks. The objective is to minimize overall network energy consumption while ensuring reliable communication and QoS requirements. The proposed model is evaluated against conventional techniques, demonstrating its superiority in terms of energy efficiency, adaptability, and network performance.

II. RELATED WORK

In traditional cellular networks, base stations (BSs) are usually kept active all the time to meet user demands, without considering how the traffic actually varies throughout the day. As a result, even when very few users are connected, the base stations continue to consume almost the same amount of power. This leads to significant energy wastage, especially since network deployment is generally designed to handle peak traffic conditions rather than average usage. In fact, base stations alone contribute a major portion—nearly 80%—of the total energy consumption in mobile communication systems.

To reduce this unnecessary power usage, researchers have explored various techniques for dynamically controlling base station activity based on traffic conditions. The 3GPP LTE Release 11 standard introduced the idea that base stations can be temporarily switched off or put into low-power modes during periods of low activity. This opened up new possibilities for energy-efficient network operation.

Several early studies focused on reducing the number of active base stations during low traffic periods while still maintaining acceptable service quality. These approaches aimed to balance energy savings with user experience by ensuring that coverage and connectivity were not affected. Other works investigated active power control methods, where the energy consumption of base stations is adjusted dynamically based on network conditions.

Another widely studied concept is dynamic cell size adaptation, often referred to as cell zooming or cell breathing. In this approach, when a base station has low traffic, it can reduce its coverage area or switch off completely, while neighboring cells expand their coverage to compensate. This can be achieved by adjusting transmission power or through coordination between base stations. Such techniques help maintain continuous service while reducing the number of active nodes in the network.

In addition, distributed algorithms have been proposed where each base station independently decides whether to remain active or enter sleep mode. These decisions are typically based on certain utility functions that consider factors like traffic load, service requirements, and power consumption. Similarly, base station duty cycling methods allow BSs to alternate between active and sleep states based on predefined conditions.

Although these methods provide noticeable improvements in energy efficiency, most of them rely on fixed thresholds or predefined rules. This limits their ability to adapt to highly dynamic and unpredictable network environments. As a result, their performance may not always be optimal, especially in dense and complex network scenarios.

To overcome these limitations, more recent research has started focusing on intelligent and adaptive techniques such as Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL). These approaches allow the system to learn from real-time network conditions and make better decisions over time, leading to improved energy efficiency while maintaining Quality of Service (QoS).

III. SYSTEM MODEL

This work considers a two-tier downlink Heterogeneous Cellular Networks (HCN), where a macro base station (MBS) is deployed along with Msmall cell base stations (SBSs) within a finite coverage area. A total of Nuser equipments (UEs) are randomly distributed across the network. The MBS provides continuous coverage and remains always active, whereas the SBSs are dynamically controlled and can switch between active and sleep modes depending on traffic conditions.

Each SBS operates with a maximum transmit power P_S^{max}, while the MBS operates at a higher transmit power P_M^{max}. Based on their association, users are categorized as Small Cell User Equipments (SUEs) when served by SBSs, and Macro User Equipments (MUEs) when served by

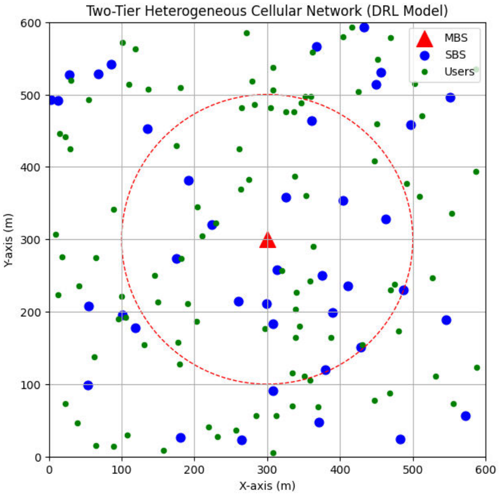

Fig 1. Heterogeneous network the MBS. The main objective of this system is to reduce overall energy consumption by intelligently managing the operational states of SBSs while ensuring Quality of Service (QoS) for all users.

3.1 Channel and Path Loss Model

The signal attenuation between the base station and user is modeled using standard path loss expressions. The path loss between the MBS and a user is given by:

$$PL_M = 128.1 + 37.6\log_{10}(D)$$

Similarly, the path loss between an SBS and a user is expressed as:

$$PL_S = 140.7 + 37.6\log_{10}(D)$$

where Drepresents the distance (in km) between the base station and the user. These models capture large-scale fading effects in the wireless channel.

3.2 SINR and Data Rate Model

The Signal-to-Interference-plus-Noise Ratio (SINR) determines the quality of the communication link. For a user iconnected to base station j, SINR is given by:

$$\zeta_{ij} = \frac{P_j a_{ij}}{\sum_{k \neq j} P_k \, a_{ik} + N_0 B}$$

where $P_j$is the transmit power of base station j, a_{ij}represents channel gain including path loss and shadowing, $N_0$is the noise power spectral density, and Bis the bandwidth of a resource block.

The achievable data rate for the user is calculated as:

$$R_{ij} = B\log_2(1 + \zeta_{ij})$$

Each user must satisfy a minimum data rate requirement $R_i^{min}$to ensure QoS.

3.3 Power Consumption Model

The power consumption of the MBS is modeled using the EARTH power model:

$$P_{macro} = N_{TRX}(P_0 + \Delta_p P_{out})$$

For SBSs, the power consumption depends on their operating state:

$$P_{SBS}^{(j)} = \begin{cases} N_{TRX}(P_0 + \Delta_p P_{out}), & \text{if active} \\ P_{sleep}, & \text{if in sleep mode} \end{cases}$$

The total power consumption of the network is given by:

$$P_{total} = P_{macro} + \sum_{j=1}^{M} P_{SBS}^{(j)}$$

To represent traffic load, the resource utilization factor is defined as:

$$\chi = \frac{R_B^{UE}}{R_B^{T}}, 0 \leq \chi \leq 1$$

3.4 DRL-Based Problem Formulation

The base station sleep control problem is formulated using Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL), where the network is treated as an environment and a centralized agent located at the MBS learns optimal control policies.

The state space includes network parameters such as traffic load, number of users, and SBS utilization:

$$S_t = \{L_t, U_t, V_t\}$$

The action space represents the ON/OFF decisions of SBSs:

$$A_t = \{v_1, v_2, \dots, v_M\}, v_j \in \{0,1\}$$

where $v_j = 1$indicates that the SBS is active and $v_j = 0$indicates sleep mode.

The reward function is designed to balance energy efficiency and QoS:

$$R_t = -\alpha P_{total} + \beta \sum_{i=1}^{N} \mathbb{I}(R_{ij} \geq R_i^{min})$$

where αand βare weighting factors.

3.5 Objective

The objective of the proposed model is to learn an optimal policy that minimizes total network power consumption while satisfying QoS requirements for all users:

$$\min P_{total}$$

subject to:

- Minimum data rate constraints
- Resource block limitations
- Continuous network coverage

IV. DRL-BASED SLEEP MODE CONTROL

The base station sleep control problem in Heterogeneous Cellular Networks is inherently a high-dimensional and dynamic optimization problem. Unlike traditional combinatorial approaches, this work adopts Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL) to learn an optimal policy for switching small cell base stations (SBSs) ON/OFF based on real-time network conditions.

In the proposed framework, the network is modeled as an environment, and a centralized DRL agent located at the macro base station (MBS) interacts with it. At each time step, the agent observes the current network state and decides the operational mode of SBSs to minimize power consumption while maintaining Quality of Service (QoS).

The DRL approach avoids exhaustive search over all possible combinations (2^M) and instead learns optimal decisions through continuous interaction, making it suitable for large-scale and dynamic networks.

4.1 DRL Framework Description

The sleep control problem is formulated as a Markov Decision Process (MDP) with the following components:
State (S_t): Includes traffic load, number of active users, SBS utilization, and current ON/OFF states.
Action (A_t): Binary vector representing SBS states:

$$A_t = \{v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_M\}, v_j \in \{0,1\}$$

Reward (R_t): Designed to minimize power consumption and ensure QoS:

$$R_t = -\alpha P_{total} + \beta \cdot QoS$$

Policy (π): Mapping from states to actions, learned using deep neural networks.

4.2 DRL Algorithm for SBS Sleep Control

The proposed method utilizes a Deep Q-Network (DQN)-based learning approach, where a neural network approximates the optimal action-value function.

Algorithm: DRL-Based SBS Sleep Control
Input: Network state parameters (users, traffic load, RB allocation)
Output: Optimal SBS ON/OFF decisions

```
Initialize replay memory D
Initialize Q-network with random weights $\theta$
Initialize target network with weights $\theta=\theta$
For each episode do
Initialize state $S_0$
For each time step t do
With probability $\varepsilon$ select random action $A_t$
Otherwise select $A_t = \arg\max Q(S_t, A; \theta)$
Execute action $A_t$ (switch SBS ON/OFF)
```

```
Observe reward $R_t$ and next state $S_{t+1}$
Store transition $(S_t, A_t, R_t, S_{t+1})$ in D
Sample mini-batch from D
Compute target:
    $Y = R_t + \gamma \max Q(S_{t+1}, A; \theta^-)$
Update Q-network by minimizing:
    $(Y - Q(S_t, A_t; \theta))^2$
Every C steps update target network:
    $\theta^- \leftarrow \theta$
End For
End For
Output optimal SBS control policy
```

V. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

As shown in Fig 1, the considered heterogeneous network setup consists of a single Macro Base Station (MBS) located at the center of the cell, with 50 Small Base Stations (SBS) randomly deployed within the coverage area. The SBS exposure regions are assumed to be uncovered, and the active users are randomly distributed throughout the cell. This deployment captures a realistic heterogeneous network scenario, which is essential for evaluating energy-efficient strategies such as BnB and the proposed DRL algorithm.

Fig. 2 shows the 24-hour variation of active users in the heterogeneous network managed by the DRL algorithm. During peak hours, more SBS remain active, while off-peak hours see lightly loaded SBS switched to sleep mode. This dynamic adaptation maintains coverage while reducing energy consumption.

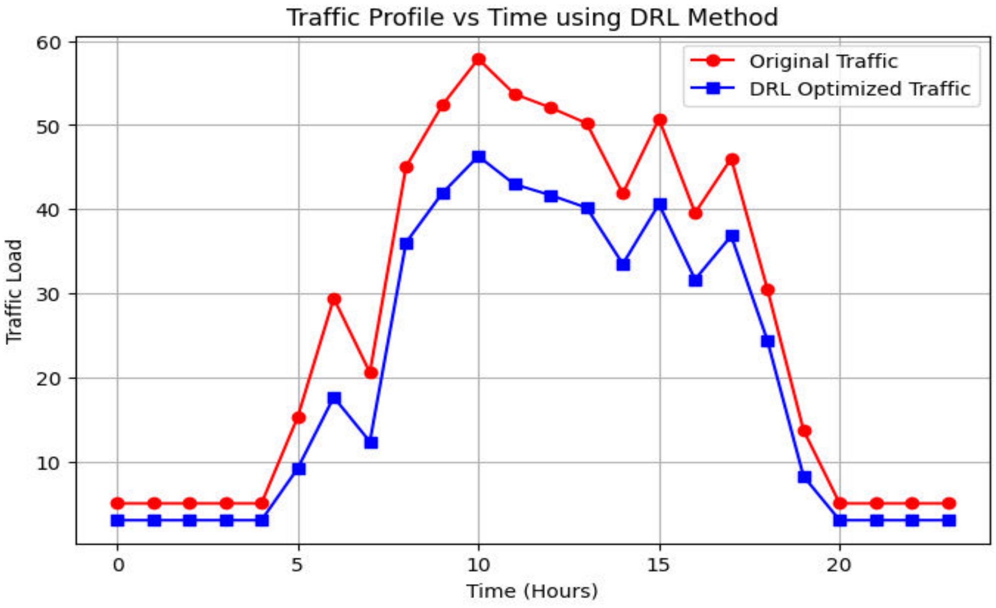

Fig2. 24-hour user traffic profile under DRL

Fig. 3 shows the path loss for MBS and SBS in the heterogeneous network, calculated using LTE-A models with distance-dependent path loss and shadow fading.

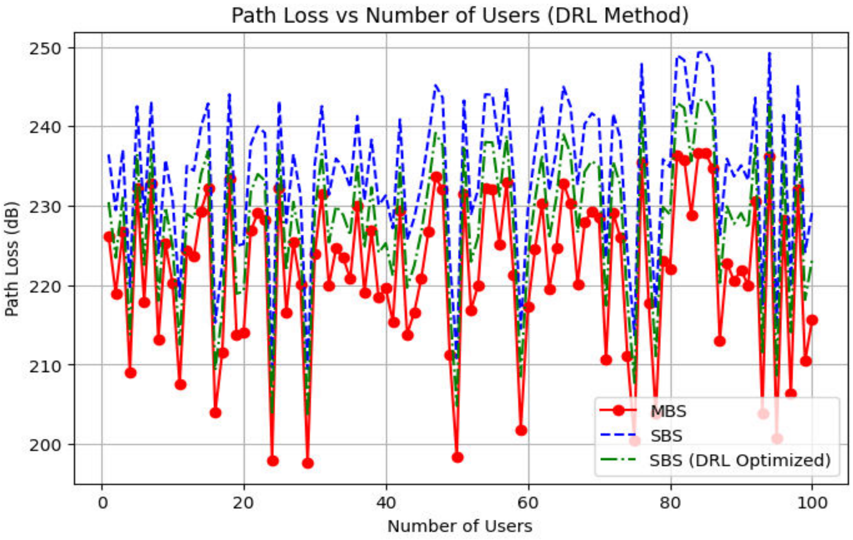

Fig3. Path loss for MBS and SBS in the network

Fig. 4 illustrates the DRL algorithm, which collects real-time traffic data, evaluates SBS load and distance, and dynamically switches SBS ON/OFF to minimize power consumption while maintaining service quality. figure demonstrates that SBS, distributed randomly, exhibit variable path loss depending on the distance between users and SBS, forming the basis for coverage evaluation and DRL optimization.

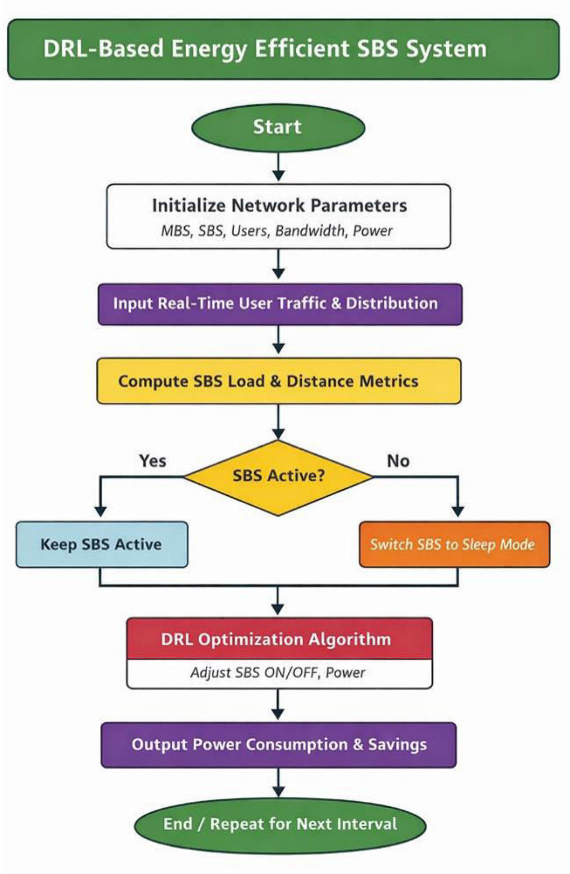

Fig4. Flowchart of the DRL-based SBS management

Table.1. Network Simulation parameters

Parameter	Value
Number of RBs	60
Macro BS Power	44 dBm
Small Cell BS Power	18 dBm
Bandwidth	15 MHz
Number of MBS	1
Number of SBS	40
Coverage Area	600 m × 600 m

Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 show the total power consumption of the MBS and SBS under DRL optimization. While the MBS remains active, its load is indirectly reduced by dynamically switching lightly loaded SBS into sleep mode. This distance- and load-aware DRL strategy significantly lowers overall network energy consumption while maintaining coverage.

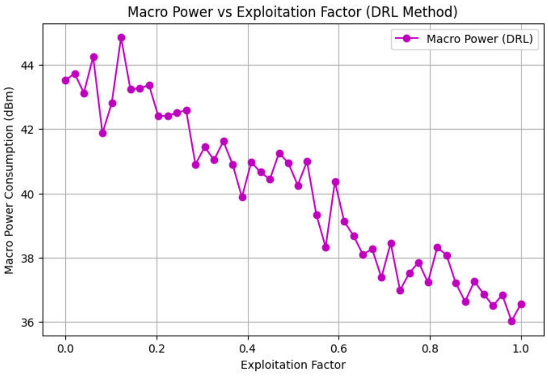

Fig5. MBS power consumption under DRL optimization.

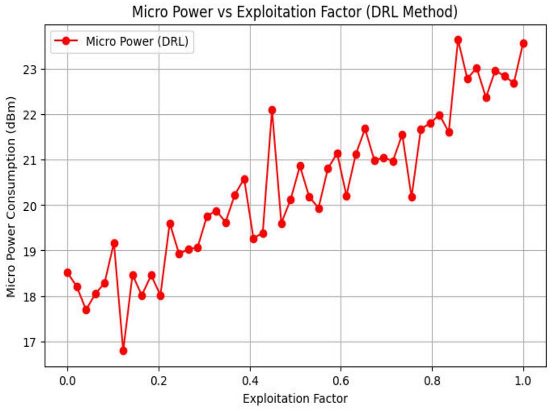

Fig6. SBS power consumption under DRL optimization

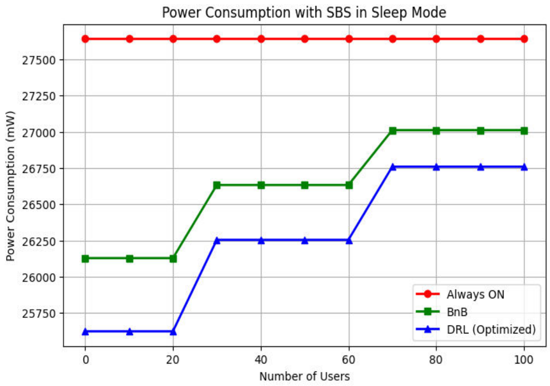

Fig7. Active SBS under different conditions with DRL

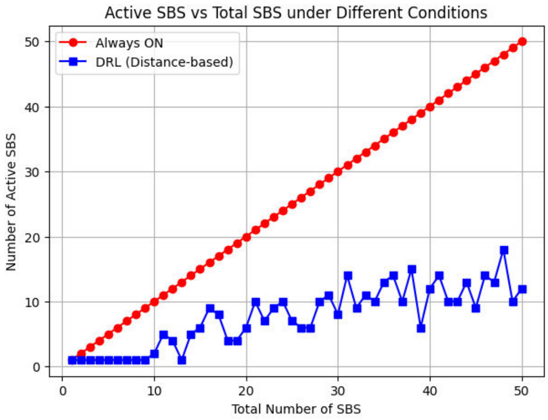

Fig8. Network power consumption

Figs. 7 and 8 show active SBS and total network power consumption under different strategies. Considering distance alone keeps ~50% of SBS active, while load-based evaluation reduces this to 36%. By dynamically switching SBS based on load and distance, the DRL algorithm achieves substantial energy savings, consuming significantly less power than Always On and BnB—up to ~60% reduction.

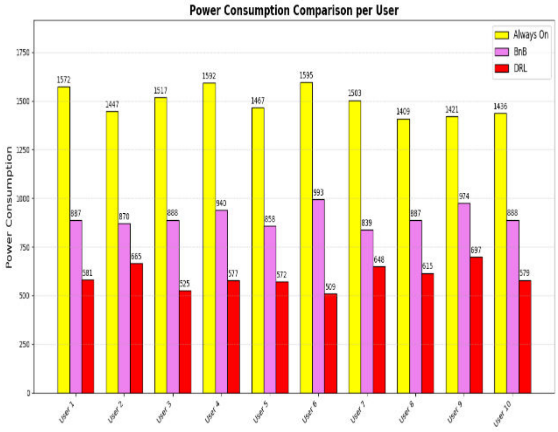

Fig9. Power consumption comparison: Always On, BnB, and DRL.

Table2. Average Power Consumption of Different SBS Management Strategies

Strategy	**Average Power Consumption (W)**
Always On	1500
BnB	900
DRL	600

The results demonstrate that the DRL algorithm effectively reduces SBS energy usage and also lowers MBS power load, improving overall network energy efficiency. In the Always On scenario, all SBS remain active, leading to maximum power consumption. BnB reduces energy by switching off lightly loaded SBS based on static thresholds, but its savings are limited. In contrast, DRL dynamically monitors real-time traffic and distance metrics, activating only the necessary SBS. This adaptive strategy achieves up to ~60% energy savings compared to Always On while outperforming BnB, and maintains network coverage and QoS, as illustrated in Figure 9.6.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper presented a Dynamic Load and Resource (DRL) based energy-efficient management strategy for Small Base Stations (SBS) in heterogeneous cellular networks. The proposed DRL algorithm dynamically monitors real-time user traffic and distance metrics to decide SBS activation or sleep mode, ensuring that only the required SBS remain active at any time. The simulation results demonstrate that DRL significantly reduces power consumption compared to conventional Always On and BnB strategies, achieving up to ~60% energy savings while maintaining network coverage and quality of service. By adaptively controlling SBS activity, the method not only optimizes SBS energy usage but also indirectly lowers the load on the Macro Base Station (MBS), improving overall network-level efficiency. Future work can explore the integration of renewable energy sources to power SBS, further minimizing carbon footprint and enhancing sustainability in heterogeneous networks.

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