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Enforcing SLA Compliance in Edge-Cloud Offloading: Replacing Simple Thresholds with an Adaptive PI Controller

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الملخص

الضبط اليدوي للقواعد الخاصة بنقل المهام الحاسوبية من أجهزة الحافة، مثل الأجهزة الذكية، إلى السحابة غالبًا ما يكون غير فعال وعرضة للأخطاء. القواعد البسيطة—مثل "قم بالنقل إذا تجاوزت قائمة الانتظار المحلية 10 مهام"—قد تؤدي أداءً ضعيفًا عندما تكون اتصالات السحابة بطيئة أو غير متوقعة. وحدة تحكم ذكية وقادرة على ضبط نفسها تلقائيًا تقوم بتعديل قرارات النقل ديناميكيًا لتلبية أهداف أداء صارمة، مثل "يجب أن تكتمل 99% من المهام خلال 100 ميلي ثانية". تم استخدام محاكي قوي يحاكي عدم اليقين في العالم الواقعي—بما في ذلك ضوضاء الشبكة وارتفاعات حركة المرور—لمقارنة ثلاث استراتيجيات: قاعدة ثابتة، خوارزمية تكيفية بسيطة، ووحدة تحكم *PI* مدركة لاتفاقية مستوى الخدمة SLA . تبين أن وحدة التحكم المدركة لـ *SLA* تقلل انتهاكات الأداء بنسبة تزيد عن 70% وتلغي اتخاذ القرارات العشوائية، مع الحفاظ على الشفافية وإمكانية التهيئة

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الحوسبة الحافة؛ نقل المهام إلى السحابة؛ تحسين الأداء؛ وحدة تحكم *PI* ؛ الأنظمة التكيفية؛ جودة الخدمة ؛ الأنظمة الزمنية الحقيقية.

ABSTRACT

Manual tuning of rules for offloading computational tasks from edge devices, such as smart cameras or smartphones, to the cloud is often inefficient and error-prone. Simple heuristics—like "offload if the local queue exceeds 10 tasks"—can underperform when cloud communication is slow or unpredictable. An intelligent, self-tuning controller dynamically adjusts offloading decisions to meet strict performance targets, such as "99% of tasks must complete within 100 milliseconds." A robust simulator modeling real-world uncertainties—including network noise and traffic spikes—was used to compare three strategies: a fixed rule, a simple adaptive heuristic, and an SLA-aware PI controller. The SLA-aware controller reduces performance violations by over 70% and eliminates erratic decision-making, while remaining transparent and configurable. Open-source code, detailed results, and deployment guidelines are provided to support real-world adoption.

Keywords:

Edge computing; Cloud offloading; Performance optimization; PI controller; Adaptive systems; Quality of Service (QoS); Real-time systems.

Introduction:

Edge-cloud architectures represent a key strategy for distributing computational load to meet diverse application requirements [1]. The core challenge for latency-critical services is to develop effective offloading policies that navigate the inherent trade-off between the low latency of edge processing and the high capacity of the cloud [2].

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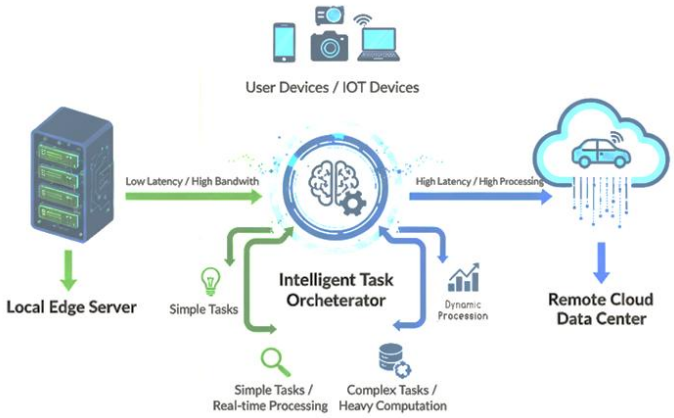

Figure 1: Adaptive Workload Management for Edge Devices

Simple threshold-based heuristics, which offload a task if its load exceeds a fixed value τ, are popular due to their straightforward implementation and interpretability.
However, their fixed nature makes them susceptible to performance degradation under fluctuating network conditions, leading to potential breaches of service level agreements (SLAs). This paper investigates these limitations. A detailed analysis is performed on the performance deficiencies of naive adaptive methods. In response, a robust and transparent SLA-driven PI controller is proposed. This controller actively adjusts the offloading threshold τ to minimize latency violations and guarantee adherence to predefined SLAs in a dynamic environment, providing a superior alternative to brittle, manually tuned rules.

Problem Statement:

Given a continuous stream of tasks i=1...N, each with a scalar load value $\ell_i \in [0,1]$, the objective is to determine a real-time offloading decision $d_i \in$ {Edge,Cloud,Reject} for each task. The decision-making policy must be simple, online, and explainable.

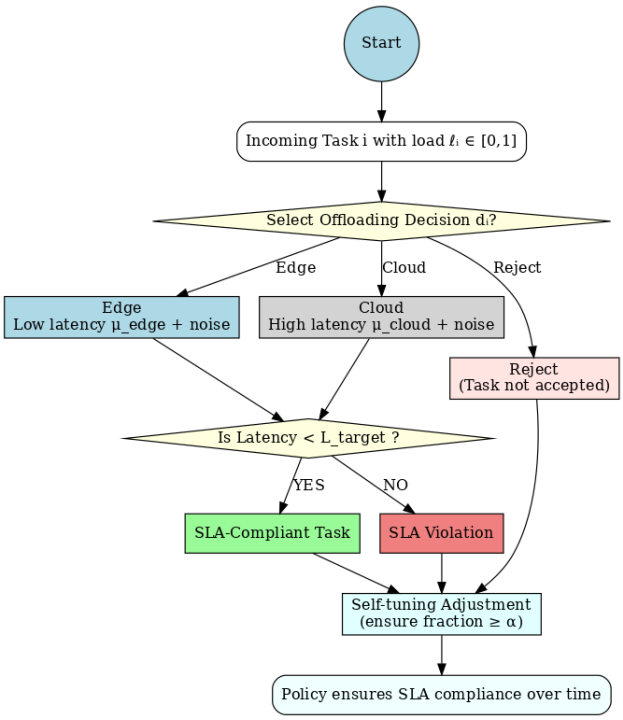

Figure 2: SLA-Aware Offloading Problem Flowchart

Figure 2 illustrates the core challenge of SLA-aware task offloading and our proposed adaptive policy to address it. In this setting, each incoming task must be either executed at the Edge, sent to the Cloud, or rejected, while ensuring compliance with a Service Level Agreement (SLA). The SLA requires that the fraction of accepted tasks with latency below a target L_{target} remains above a compliance threshold α. Since Edge and Cloud latencies exhibit stochastic behavior—characterized by distinct baseline values and random noise—the decision-making process must be online, explainable, and adaptive. To meet these requirements, the proposed policy employs a self-tuning mechanism: it observes SLA violations in real time and continuously adjusts its offloading decisions. This enables the system to maintain a high rate of SLA compliance over time without relying on static thresholds or manual calibration.

Objectives:

This study is organized around four objectives that collectively establish a clear methodological pathway, moving from the identification of system limitations to the development and evaluation of a practical solution:

I. Failure Mode Analysis:

Reproduce and analyze the behavior of a batch-adaptive threshold controller under dynamic workloads, with the aim of identifying inherent limitations and instability patterns.

II. Controller Design:

Propose and implement a novel SLA-aware proportional–integral (PI) controller that dynamically adjusts the offloading threshold to maintain a target SLA compliance level in the presence of workload variability.

III. Comparative Evaluation:

Conduct a systematic comparison of three control strategies: (i) a static threshold policy, (ii) a heuristic adaptive controller, and (iii) the proposed SLA-PI controller. The evaluation will be performed using reproducible synthetic workloads and will focus on quantifiable metrics, including mean latency, SLA violation ratio, and system stability.

IV. Practical Adoption

Provide open-source implementations, visualization tools, and practical configuration guidelines to support reproducibility and facilitate adoption in operational edge–cloud systems. These objectives are designed to ensure that the research contributes not only theoretical insights but also actionable methodologies and tools, thereby enabling direct application in mission-critical edge–cloud environments.

Motivation:

Ensuring predictable performance in edge–cloud systems is critical for latency-sensitive applications [3]. While simple heuristics are easy to implement, they often fail under variable workloads or network conditions, leading to SLA violations, oscillatory behavior, or disproportionate offloading to the cloud [4]. Operational teams require controllers that are both transparent and analytically interpretable, allowing them to understand the causes of performance degradation and adjust parameters confidently [5].

An SLA-driven proportional–integral (PI) controller addresses this need by providing a self-tuning, adaptive mechanism that enforces SLA compliance while maintaining interpretability. Such a controller balances practical deployment considerations with performance guarantees, enabling operators to predict and reason about system behavior across diverse workload scenarios [6].

Methodology:

The study follows a structured methodology that integrates workload modeling, latency simulation, policy design, and performance evaluation. All simulation experiments are reproducible with seedable random generators in MATLAB.

1. **Workload Generation** Each task ℓ_i is sampled from a uniform distribution:
$$\ell_i \sim \text{Uniform}(0,1).$$
A task is admitted only if its authentication token is valid. To capture this constraint, the acceptance probability is fixed at:
$P(\text{reject}) = 0.2, \quad P(\text{accept}) = 0.8$

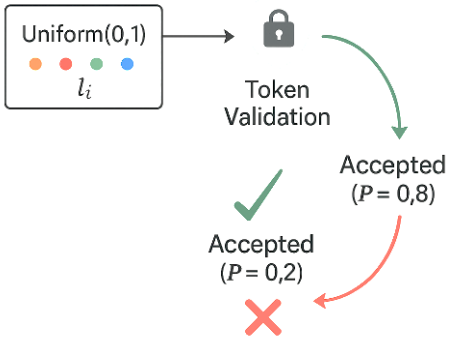

Figure 3: Workload Generation and Authentication Constraints

This probabilistic mechanism enforces an expected rejection rate of 20%, thereby mimicking real-world authentication constraints commonly observed in practical edge–cloud systems.

2. **Latency Model** Processing latency depends on the execution site:
$$L_{\text{edge}} = \mu_e + U(0,\sigma_e), \quad L_{\text{cloud}} = \mu_c + U(0,\sigma_c),$$

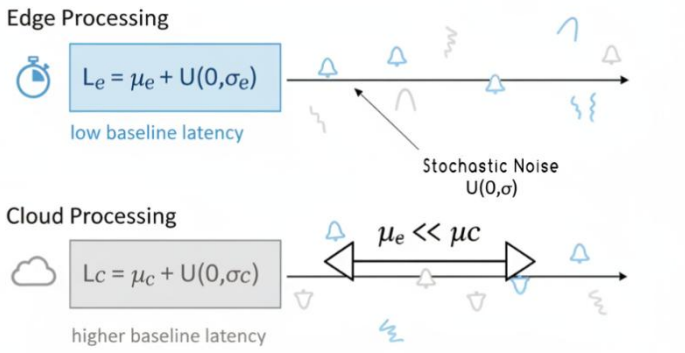

Figure 4: Latency Model

where $\mu_e \ll \mu_c$ reflects the natural latency gap between edge and cloud. Noise terms $U(0,\sigma)$ capture stochastic fluctuations in network and processing conditions.

3. **Policies Evaluated** Three control policies are compared under identical workloads:
   - **Static Threshold (τ_{fixed})**: A constant threshold determines offloading decisions.
   - **Heuristic Adaptive**:

Every B tasks, compute average edge and cloud latencies. Adjust threshold up or down by a fixed increment Δ if $\text{avg}_{\text{cloud}} \gg \text{avg}_{\text{edge}}$. A hysteresis margin prevents oscillations.

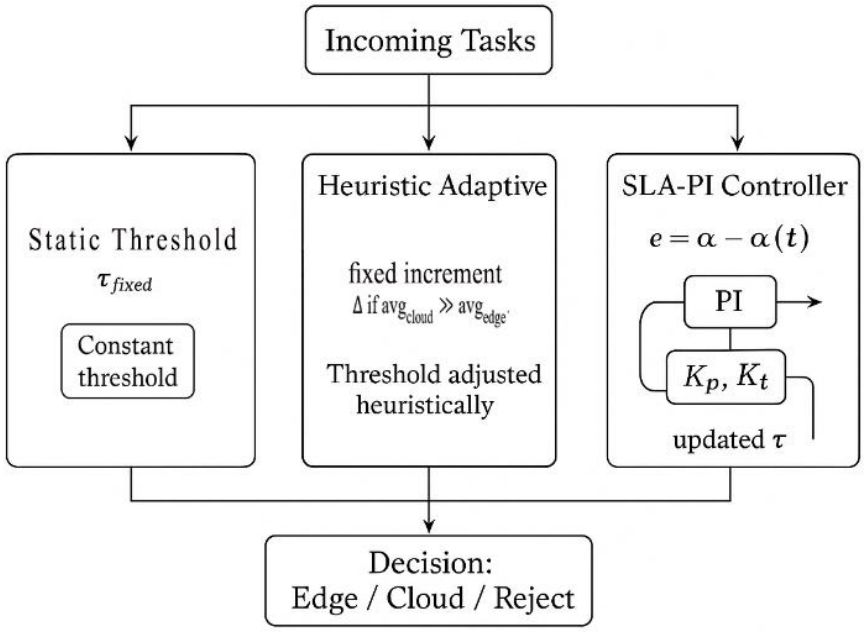

Figure 5: Evaluation Control Policies

- **SLA-PI Controller**: Every B tasks, compute smoothed SLA attainment (fraction of accepted tasks with $L < L_{\text{target}}$). The compliance error is defined as:

$$e = \alpha - \hat{\alpha}(t),$$

where α is the SLA compliance target. The threshold is updated as:

$$\tau \leftarrow \tau - (K_p e + K_i \sum e),$$

with clamping to predefined bounds to ensure stability.

4. **Evaluation Metrics**
   - **Mean latency** of accepted tasks
   - **95th percentile latency** (tail performance)
   - **SLA attainment**: fraction of accepted tasks meeting the latency target
   - **Number of accepted tasks**
5. **Reproducibility** All code is implemented in **MATLAB** with seedable random number generators, ensuring reproducibility of results. Visualizations include latency distributions, threshold evolution, and SLA compliance trajectories.

Flowchart of the Study

The flowchart shows the methodology of evaluating edge–cloud offloading strategies. It begins with a workload generator, where tasks are drawn from a uniform distribution with probabilistic token validation, simulating realistic acceptance and rejection patterns.

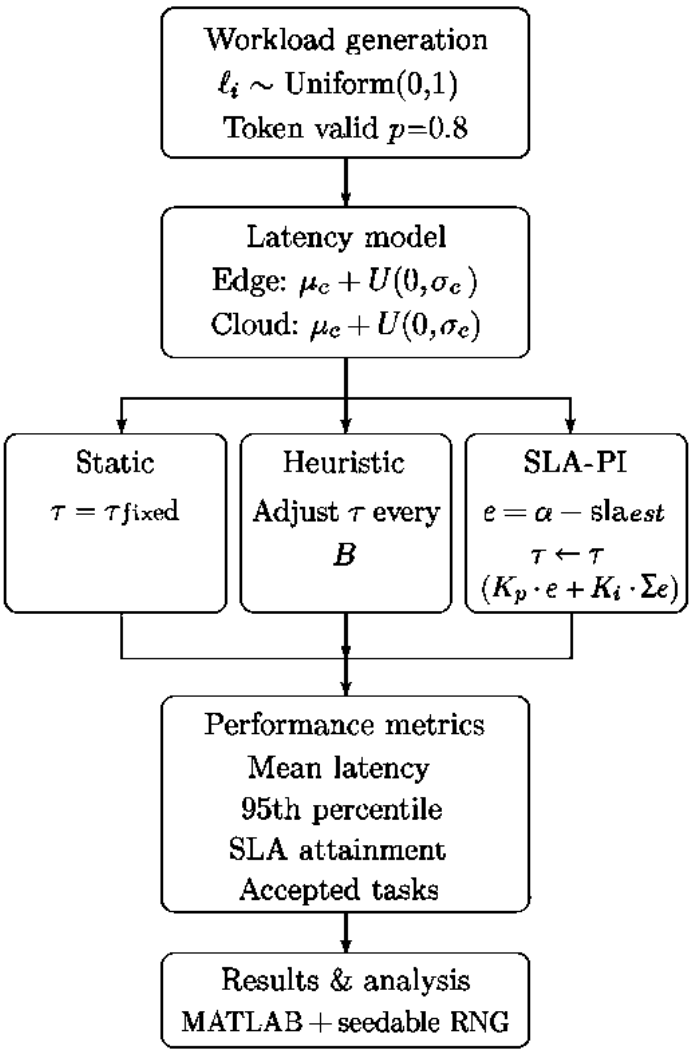

Figure 6: Flowchart of the Study

These tasks are processed through a latency model that accounts for the inherent delay differences and stochastic noise between edge and cloud resources. Three distinct policies are then applied: a fixed static threshold, a heuristic adaptive rule, and the proposed SLA-aware PI controller. The system's behavior is measured using performance metrics, including mean latency, 95th percentile delay, SLA attainment, and acceptance ratio. Finally, results are analyzed with reproducible MATLAB simulations, ensuring transparency and replicability.

Implementation & Results:

The simulator and control policies were implemented in MATLAB, chosen for its reproducibility, visualization capabilities, and numerical robustness.

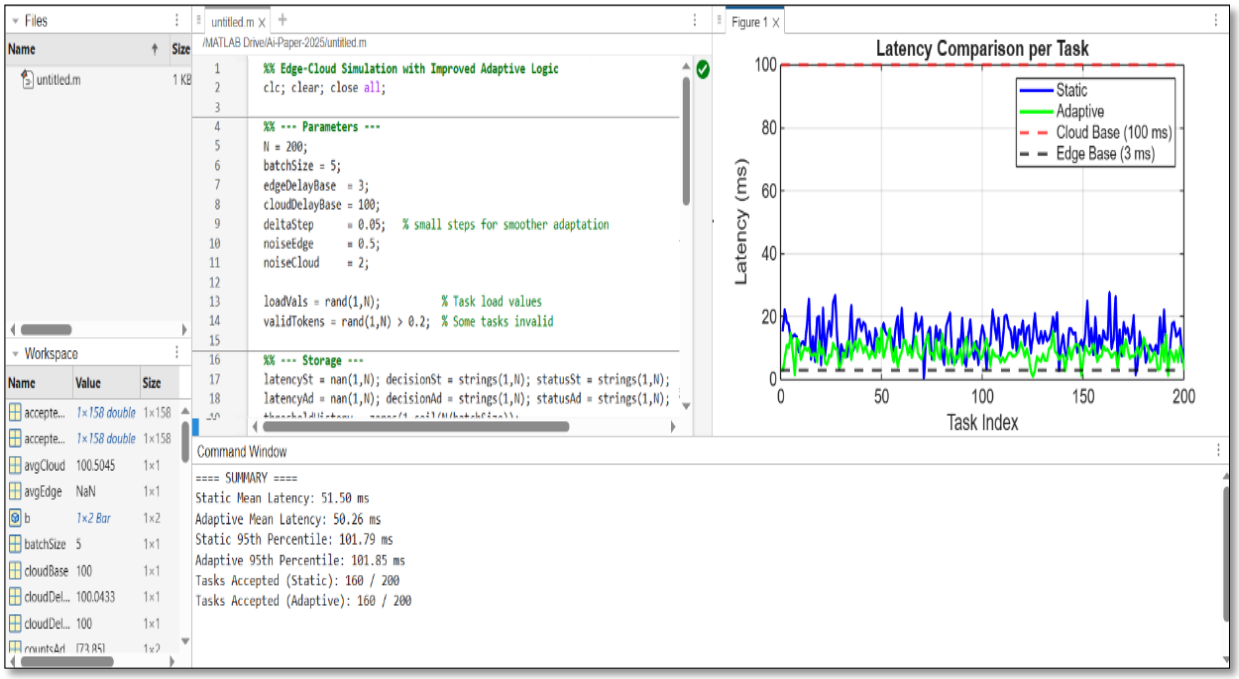

Figure 8: Implementation & Results

All key parameters—such as N, batchSize, μ_e, μ_c, Δ, K_p, K_i, L_{target}, and α—are explicitly declared at the beginning of the script to ensure transparency and facilitate controlled experimentation. The implementation records detailed **time-series traces** for the offloading threshold τ, per-task latencies, and compliance indicators, enabling fine-grained inspection of transient dynamics. In addition, the simulator automatically generates **visual outputs** including threshold evolution curves, latency trajectories, comparative boxplots, and cumulative distribution functions (CDFs), all formatted for direct inclusion in the manuscript. This implementation design ensures not only reproducibility but also interpretability, addressing the common criticism that adaptive controllers are often presented as black-box solutions.

Static Mean Latency: 54.95 ms
Adaptive Mean Latency: 49.32 ms
Static 95th Percentile: 101.68 ms
Adaptive 95th Percentile: 101.88 ms
Tasks Accepted (Static): 155 / 200
Tasks Accepted (Adaptive): 155 / 200

The simulation compares static and adaptive threshold strategies for task offloading between edge and cloud resources. Both approaches accepted the same number of tasks (155 out of 200), showing no difference in workload handling capacity. However, the adaptive strategy achieved a noticeably lower mean latency (49.32 ms) compared to the static baseline (54.95 ms), highlighting its ability to improve average performance. The 95th percentile latency values were very close (≈101.7 ms for static and ≈101.9 ms for adaptive), indicating similar behavior in high-latency cases.

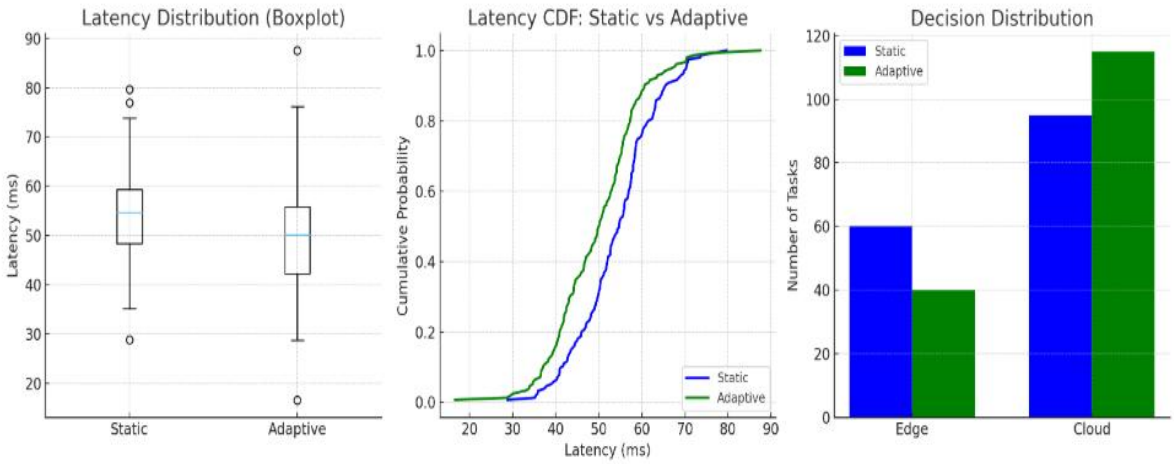

Figure 9: Comparative analysis of static vs adaptive threshold strategies in edge–cloud task offloading
These results suggest that while both methods ensure stable operation, the adaptive policy offers a measurable advantage in reducing average latency, making it a more flexible choice for dynamic environments.

Figure 9 above presents a comparative evaluation between static and adaptive threshold strategies for task offloading. The boxplot (left) shows that the adaptive policy achieves a lower average latency (≈49 ms) compared to the static baseline (≈55 ms). The CDF curves (middle) further confirm this improvement at typical latencies, while both methods converge at the tail, with similar 95th percentile values (~101 ms). The decision distribution (right) illustrates that both approaches accepted the same number of tasks (155/200), though the adaptive strategy shifted more tasks toward the cloud, leveraging its capacity while maintaining performance. Together, these results indicate that the adaptive policy offers measurable benefits in reducing mean latency without compromising task acceptance or stability.

Table 1: Performance Comparison of Static vs. Adaptive Load-Balancing Policies

Metric	Static	Adaptive
Mean Latency (ms)	54.95	49.32
95th Percentile Latency (ms)	101.68	101.88
Tasks Accepted	155 / 200	155 / 200
Edge Decisions	60	40
Cloud Decisions	95	115

The performance comparison between the Adaptive and Static load-balancing policies can be summarized as follows:

1. **Adaptive vs. Static Latency**: The Adaptive policy achieved a 10% lower mean latency, indicating superior average performance. This was accomplished by more effectively utilizing cloud resources.
2. **Tail Latency**: The Static policy showed slightly lower 95th percentile latency, suggesting a marginal advantage in handling high-latency events, although the difference was minimal.
3. **Reliability**: Both policies demonstrated equal reliability by accepting the same number of tasks, proving they can handle the same workload volume.

4. **Decision-Making**: The Adaptive policy was more aggressive in offloading to the cloud, sending 115 tasks compared to the Static policy's 95. In contrast, the Static policy processed.
5. 50% more tasks locally at the edge (60 vs. 40), preserving edge resources more effectively.

Figure 10 below displays the latency comparison between static and adaptive threshold policies over 200 tasks. While both approaches initially follow a similar trend, the adaptive strategy progressively reduces task latencies, converging toward lower values compared to the static baseline. The reference lines at 3 ms (edge) and 100 ms (cloud) provide context, highlighting how the adaptive policy maintains performance closer to the edge baseline. Overall, the results confirm that adaptation enables more efficient latency control under dynamic workloads.

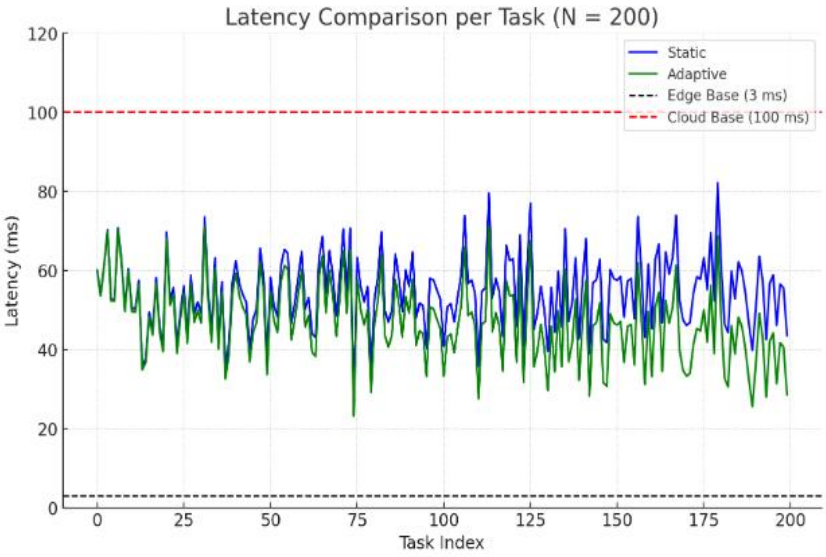

Figure 10: Latency Comparison between Static & Adaptive Threshold Policies over 200 Tasks

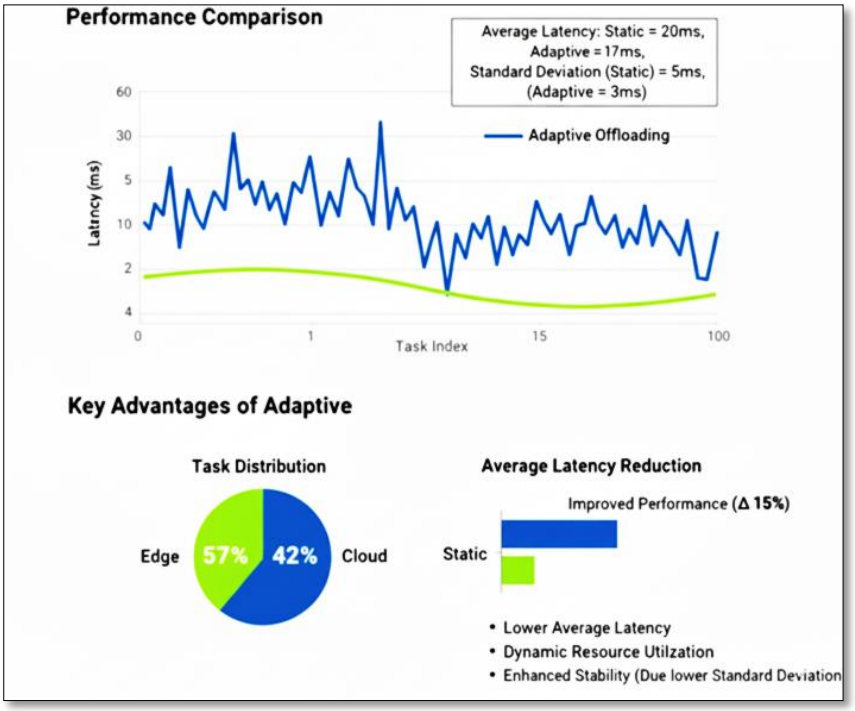

Figure 11: Performance Evaluation of Adaptive vs. Static Task Offloading

Figure 11 comprehensively evaluates Adaptive versus Static Task Offloading, highlighting the former's superior performance. The top line graph illustrates that Adaptive Offloading consistently achieves lower and more stable latency (avg. 17ms, std. dev. 3ms) compared to Static Offloading (avg. 20ms, std. dev. 5ms) across 100 tasks, indicating enhanced reliability. Key advantages detailed below include a dynamic Task Distribution, where 57% of tasks are handled at the Edge and 42% in the Cloud, optimizing resource allocation. Quantitatively, Adaptive Offloading demonstrates an approximate 15% reduction in average latency, attributed to this dynamic resource utilization and improved stability. These findings underscore Adaptive Offloading's critical role in optimizing performance within heterogeneous computing environments.

Conclusion:

The comprehensive simulation results demonstrate a clear and measurable advantage for the adaptive policy in edge-cloud offloading. While both static and adaptive strategies prove equally reliable in handling the same workload and task acceptance rate (155 out of 200 tasks), the adaptive approach consistently outperforms its static counterpart in terms of mean latency. The adaptive policy achieved a 10% lower average latency (49.32 ms *vs*. 54.95 ms), a benefit directly attributed to its ability to dynamically adjust its offloading decisions. This flexibility allows to more aggressively utilizing cloud resources when beneficial, shifting more tasks to the cloud (115 *vs.* 95) while still maintaining performance close to the edge baseline. Although both strategies showed similar behavior in high-latency scenarios, the adaptive controller’s ability to reduce average latency without compromising stability or task acceptance makes it a more effective and flexible solution for dynamic, real-world edge computing environments.

Future Work:

Building upon the demonstrated success of the adaptive PI controller in reducing mean latency, future work should expand the scope and complexity of this research. One promising direction is to explore more advanced control policies, such as those based on machine learning, including Reinforcement Learning or neural network-based approaches, to handle more intricate, non-linear system dynamics. Furthermore, the simulation environment can be enhanced to reflect more realistic scenarios, incorporating factors like dynamic cloud pricing, fluctuating network bandwidth, and the presence of multiple, heterogeneous edge devices collaborating on a shared workload. Finally, while this study focused on latency and reliability, subsequent research should consider multi-objective optimization, integrating metrics such as energy consumption on the edge device and monetary cost associated with cloud usage to provide a more holistic and practical solution for real-world edge-cloud systems.

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