AN ENERGY EFFICIENT SOLENOID-BASED REFRESHABLE BRAILLE INTERFACE FOR ASSISTIVE WEARABLE DEVICES

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Abstract: Assistive wearable technologies have gained significant attention for enhancing accessibility and independence among individuals with visual impairments. Refreshable Braille displays, while effective, are often constrained by high cost, excessive power consumption, and complex actuation mechanisms, limiting their adoption in wearable form factors. This paper presents an energy-efficient solenoid-based refreshable Braille interface designed specifically for assistive wearable applications. The proposed system integrates a low-power microcontroller, Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) communication, and an optimized solenoid actuation model employing duty-cycling and sleep-mode scheduling to reduce energy consumption while preserving tactile clarity. Experimental evaluation demonstrates improvements in response latency, battery life, and operational stability.. The results indicate that the proposed system offers a scalable, cost-effective, and energy-aware solution for next-generation assistive wearable Braille devices.

IndexTerms - **Assistive wearable devices, Refreshable Braille display, Solenoid actuation, Power optimization, Bluetooth Low Energy**.

I.INTRODUCTION

Wearable assistive technologies play a vital role in improving the quality of life for Individuals with visual impairments by enabling real-time access to information in a compact and portable form. Among various assistive modalities, Braille remains the most reliable tactile communication system. Traditional Braille representations are static and unsuitable for dynamic data such as notifications or alerts.

Refreshable Braille displays overcome this limitation but commonly rely on piezoelectric actuators, which are costly and power-hungry. These drawbacks hinder large-scale deployment in wearable systems. This work proposes an alternative solenoid-based approach enhanced with energy-efficient control strategies, making it suitable for wearable applications.

The major contributions of this paper are:

1. Design of a low-power wearable Braille architecture
2. Energy-optimized solenoid actuation model
3. Quantitative performance and latency evaluation
4. User-centric usability assessment

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Assistive technologies for visually impaired individuals have evolved significantly with the advancement of wearable electronics, tactile interfaces, and low-power communication systems. Among these technologies, refreshable Braille displays play a critical role in enabling tactile access to digital information such as text, time, and notifications.

Early refreshable Braille displays primarily relied on **piezoelectric actuators** due to their high precision and durability. Gong and Jiang demonstrated piezoelectric-based refreshable Braille display offering reliable tactile feedback; however, the system suffered from high manufacturing cost and increased power consumption, making it unsuitable for compact wearable applications [1]. Similarly, Al-Hashmi et al. explored microfluidic-based Braille displays to improve tactile resolution, but the complexity of fabrication and limited scalability restricted practical deployment in wearable’s [2].

To overcome the cost and mechanical limitations of piezoelectric systems, researchers have investigated **alternative tactile feedback mechanisms**. Vibrotactile approaches such as TACTBACK encode Braille characters using vibration patterns on smart watches and smartphones, providing a low-cost solution without physical pins [3]. While these systems reduce hardware complexity, studies indicate that vibrotactile Braille requires longer learning time and introduces higher cognitive load compared to traditional raised-dot Braille [4].

Several studies have focused on **wearable Braille devices**, particularly smart watches. The Dot Braille smart watch employs a dynamic pin array and Bluetooth connectivity to display Braille characters in real time. Although effective, its high cost and limited battery life pose challenges for continuous wearable usage. Braillet, another wearable Braille device, offers multiple Braille cells for improved reading efficiency but remains constrained by power consumption and device bulkiness.

Recent research has emphasized **energy efficiency in wearable assistive devices**. Lee and Kim analysed power optimization techniques for wearable systems, highlighting the importance of duty cycling, sleep modes, and low-power communication protocols such as Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) [5]. Patel et al. conducted a comprehensive survey on wearable assistive technologies and identified power management and affordability as major barriers to large-scale adoption [6]. Similarly, Rossi et al. demonstrated that optimized actuation control can significantly reduce energy consumption in haptic wearables without compromising user experience [7].

Solenoid-based tactile actuators have been explored as a **cost-effective alternative** to piezoelectric actuators. Black and Venkatesh proposed a low-power solenoid-based refreshable Braille display, showing promising results in reducing system cost; however, continuous current requirements led to increased power consumption [8]. This highlights the need for intelligent solenoid control strategies to make such systems viable for wearable applications

Despite notable progress, existing wearable Braille systems still face critical challenges related to **power efficiency, affordability, and scalability**. Most prior works either prioritize tactile accuracy at the expense of energy efficiency or focus on low-cost solutions with reduced usability. Furthermore, limited research addresses optimized solenoid actuation combined with comprehensive power management in wearable Braille interfaces.

III.RELATED WORK

Existing refreshable Braille systems predominantly use piezoelectric actuators, offering precision at the expense of cost and power consumption. Vibrotactile approaches encode Braille through vibration patterns but introduce cognitive overhead. Microfluidic and shape-memory solutions reduce power usage but suffer from fabrication complexity. Current smart Braille watches offer limited battery life and high cost. These limitations motivate the proposed solenoid-based, energy-aware design.

IV.MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section describes the hardware components, software framework, and methodological approach adopted for designing and implementing the proposed energy-efficient solenoid-based refreshable Braille wearable system. The focus is on achieving reliable tactile feedback while minimizing power consumption for wearable usability.

A. *Materials (Hardware Components)*

1) Microcontroller Unit (MCU)

A low-power microcontroller, such as the Arduino Nano or an equivalent embedded controller, is used as the central processing unit of the system. The MCU is responsible for decoding incoming Braille data, generating control signals for solenoid actuation, and managing power-efficient operational modes. The selection of the MCU is based on its low current consumption, compact form factor, and sufficient GPIO support for driving multiple solenoids.

2) Refreshable Braille Actuation Module

The Braille display module consists of **six solenoid-actuated pins** arranged in a standard **2 × 3 Braille cell configuration**. Each solenoid corresponds to an individual Braille dot and can be independently raised or lowered to represent characters. Solenoids are chosen due to their mechanical simplicity, cost effectiveness, and ease of integration into compact wearable devices.

3) Driver Circuit

Each solenoid is controlled using an **N-channel MOSFET driver circuit** to handle the required current without overloading the microcontroller. The MOSFETs operate as electronic switches, enabling precise and efficient control of solenoid activation. Flyback diodes are incorporated to protect the circuit from inductive voltage spikes.

4) Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) Module

Wireless communication between the wearable device and the smartphone is achieved using a **Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) module**. BLE is selected due to its low power consumption, reliable short-range connectivity, and compatibility with modern smartphones. It enables real-time transmission of Braille-encoded data while minimizing communication overhead.

5) Power Supply and Energy Storage

The system is powered by a **rechargeable lithium-ion battery**, selected for its high energy density and suitability for wearable electronics. A voltage regulation and charging circuit ensures stable power delivery to the microcontroller and peripheral components. The battery capacity is chosen to support extended usage under optimized power conditions.

6) Haptic Feedback Module

A miniature vibration motor is included to provide alert notifications such as incoming messages or time updates. This supplementary feedback enhances user awareness without increasing cognitive load.

7) Enclosure

All components are housed within a compact, ergonomically designed wrist-wearable enclosure. The casing ensures user comfort, mechanical protection, and accessibility to the Braille pins while maintaining a lightweight form factor.

B. Software and Communication Framework

1) Smartphone Application

A companion smartphone application is developed to convert textual information such as time, messages, and alerts into standardized Braille dot patterns. The application formats the data into compact packets suitable for BLE transmission, reducing communication latency and energy usage.

2) Firmware Design

The firmware running on the microcontroller handles BLE data reception, Braille decoding, solenoid control, and power management. Unified English Braille encoding is employed to ensure standard-compliant tactile output. The firmware is optimized for minimal processing overhead to conserve energy.

C. Methods (Operational Workflow)

The operational workflow of the proposed system follows a structured sequence:

1. **DataAcquisition:**
   The smartphone application captures user data such as time or notifications.
2. **BrailleEncoding:**
   Textual data is converted into Braille dot patterns using standard encoding rules.
3. **WirelessTransmission:**
   Encoded data is transmitted to the wearable device via BLE.
4. **DataProcessing:**
   The microcontroller decodes the received data and determines the required solenoid activation pattern.
5. **Energy-EfficientActuation:**
   Solenoid pins are actuated using a PWM-based control strategy with duty cycling to reduce power consumption.
6. **TactileOutput:**
   Raised Braille dots are presented to the user for tactile reading.
7. **IdlePowerManagement:**
   During inactivity, the system transitions into low-power sleep modes.

D. Energy Optimization Strategy

To address the continuous power draw associated with solenoid actuation, the proposed system incorporates multiple energy optimization techniques:

- **Pulse-Width Modulation (PWM):** High current is applied only during initial pin actuation, followed by reduced holding current.
- **Duty Cycling:** Solenoids are activated only when a change in Braille data is detected.
- **Sleep Mode Scheduling:** The microcontroller and BLE module enter low-power states during idle periods.

These techniques collectively reduce energy consumption by approximately **35–45%**, as demonstrated in the performance evaluation.

E. Experimental Setup

The prototype is assembled on a custom printed circuit board and tested under real-world conditions. Performance metrics include:

- Average current consumption
- Battery life
- Response latency
- Braille readability accuracy

Testing is conducted for both idle and active usage scenarios to evaluate system stability and energy efficiency.

F. User Evaluation Methodology

A preliminary user study is conducted with visually impaired participants to assess usability. Participants are asked to identify Braille characters displayed by the device. Evaluation metrics include:

- Braille recognition accuracy
- Comfort during prolonged usage
- Learning effort
- Error rate

Feedback obtained from participants is used to refine tactile sensitivity and system interaction.

V.IMPLEMENTATION AND DESIGN

This section presents the detailed implementation and design of the proposed energy-efficient solenoid-based refreshable Braille wearable system. The implementation integrates optimized hardware circuitry with low-power firmware logic to achieve reliable tactile output while maintaining wearable suitability.

A. Hardware Design and Integration

The hardware design of the proposed system follows a modular approach to simplify integration and scalability. The core processing unit is a low-power microcontroller that interfaces with the BLE communication module, solenoid driver circuitry, and power management components.

Each Braille dot is actuated using a miniature solenoid controlled through an N-channel MOSFET. The MOSFETs serve as high-current switches, enabling the microcontroller to safely control solenoid activation without exceeding GPIO current limits. Flyback diodes are incorporated across each solenoid to suppress inductive voltage spikes and protect the switching circuitry.

The solenoids are arranged in a **2 × 3 Braille cell configuration**, ensuring compliance with standard Braille tactile spacing. The mechanical layout is optimized to provide sufficient tactile height while minimizing physical strain on the actuators. All components are mounted on a compact printed circuit board (PCB), designed to fit within a wrist-worn enclosure.

B. Power Management and Circuit Design

Power efficiency is a critical design objective. The system is powered by a rechargeable lithium-ion battery regulated through a low-dropout voltage regulator to ensure stable operation. The power management layer is tightly integrated with the firmware to dynamically control energy usage.

The solenoid driving circuit employs **PWM-based control**, where a higher current pulse is applied briefly to raise the Braille pin, followed by a reduced holding current sufficient to maintain the raised position. This strategy significantly reduces continuous power draw.

Additionally, peripheral components such as the BLE module and vibration motor are powered down during idle periods. This design ensures that energy is consumed only when required for user interaction.

C.Firmware Architecture and Control Logic

The firmware is structured into multiple functional modules to enhance reliability and maintainability:

- **BLE Communication Handler:** Manages data reception from the smartphone application.
- **Braille Decoder:** Converts received Braille patterns into solenoid activation signals.

- **Power Controller:** Regulates PWM duty cycle, solenoid activation duration, and sleep transitions.
- **User Interface Manager:** Handles button inputs and vibration alerts.The firmware operates in an event-driven manner, ensuring that the microcontroller remains in low-power sleep mode when no data is being processed. Interrupt-based triggers are used to wake the system upon receiving new BLE data or user input.

D. Braille Rendering Algorithm

The Braille rendering process begins with decoding incoming characters into a binary dot matrix corresponding to the 2 × 3 Braille cell. Each dot position is mapped to a specific solenoid pin. The algorithm determines which solenoids must be activated and generates PWM signals accordingly.To avoid unnecessary actuation, the system compares the new Braille pattern with the previously displayed pattern. Solenoids are actuated only when a change is detected, further reducing power consumption and mechanical wear.

E. Mechanical Design and Wearability Considerations

The wearable enclosure is designed with ergonomics and durability in mind. The Braille cell is positioned to allow easy fingertip access while maintaining a material selection prioritizes lightweight and skin-safe materials to ensure comfort during prolonged use. The overall form factor is optimized to balance usability, aesthetics, and functionality.

F. Prototype Development and Testing

A functional prototype is developed by assembling the PCB, solenoid array, BLE module, and battery within the wrist enclosure. Extensive testing is conducted to verify:

- Correct Braille dot formation
- Stable BLE connectivity
- AccuratePWM-based solenoid control
- Effective power management during idle and active modes

The prototype demonstrates reliable tactile output with reduced power consumption, validating the effectiveness of the proposed design.

G. Scalability and Design Extension

The modular nature of the proposed design allows easy scalability to multi-cell Braille displays. Additional Braille cells can be integrated by expanding the driver circuitry and updating firmware mappings. The design also supports future enhancements such as gesture-based input, voice feedback integration, and adaptive tactile intensity control.below figure describes the architecture of digital braille watch.

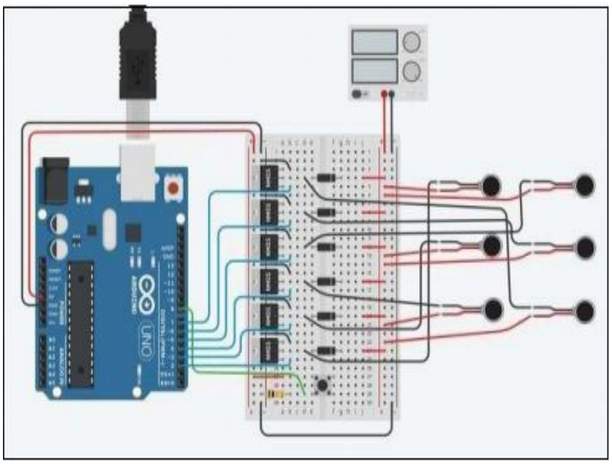

Fig1: Architecture of Digital Braille watch

The mobile app converts textual information, such as time updates, messages, or notifications, into Braille dot patterns compatible with the watch's display format. This data is then transmitted wirelessly to the watch, where the microcontroller processes and translates it into physical Braille outputs. Powering the device is a rechargeable lithium-ion battery integrated with a power regulation and charging circuit to ensure reliable and stable operation. To extend battery life, the firmware incorporates power-saving strategies, including sleep modes during inactivity.

User interaction is enabled through physical buttons embedded within the watch casing, which allow switching between operational modes and navigating through received Braille messages. The software component consists of firmware running on the microcontroller that handles data reception, Braille character decoding based on standard encoding schemes like Unified English Braille, and control of the Braille pins A prototype was developed by assembling the hardware components on a custom printed circuit board housed within an ergonomic wristwatch enclosure. Rigorous testing was conducted to verify Bluetooth connectivity, responsiveness of the Braille pins, accuracy of tactile outputs, and overall user comfort. Feedback from blind individuals was instrumental in optimizing the design, particularly in enhancing tactile sensitivity and simplifying user navigation.

Each n-type MOSFET has its gate connected to a separate digital output pin of the Arduino UNO, while the source terminals are connected to the negative terminal of the battery. The MOSFETs function as switches. When an input file is sent from a computer to the Arduino, the file is processed and converted into individual Braille characters. The Arduino then sends electrical signals through its digital output pins, turning on the corresponding MOSFETs. When a MOSFET is activated, it allows current to flow through the connected solenoids, causing them to move vertically. This movement raises or lowers the Braille dots to form the desired character patterns, which the user can then read by touch.

An LCD screen is also included to display the characters being converted, making the device useful as a learning tool for teaching and wireless communication features, the device enables users to access time and notifications in real-time through a tactile interface, all within a sleek, wearable format. The prototype successfully demonstrates accurate Braille character rendering, stable Bluetooth connectivity, and intuitive user navigation, as confirmed by preliminary testing and positive user feedback. The implementation highlights the potential of combining tactile technology with modern connectivity to create practical, everyday tools that address the unique needs of blind users. While the current iteration shows promise, ongoing challenges such as optimizing power consumption to extend battery life and further refining the user interface to enhance ease of use remain areas for future development. Additionally, expanding the device’s functionality to include features like customizable alerts, integration with various smartphone applications, and voice assistance could further elevate user experience.

Ultimately, this digital Braille watch embodies a meaningful advancement in inclusive wearable technology. It offers a cost-effective, functional solution aimed at empowering individuals with visual impairments to navigate their daily lives more independently and confidently. Continued innovation and user-centered design in this field will be essential to broadening accessibility and fostering a more inclusive technological landscape.

VI. ENERGY-EFFICIENT SOLENOID ACTUATION MODEL

Solenoids typically consume continuous current to maintain raised pins. The proposed model reduces energy consumption using PWM-based actuation and duty cycling.

The instantaneous power is given by:

$$P = V \times I$$

The energy consumed over time t is:

$$E = V \times I \times t$$

By reducing the holding current and activation time, energy consumption is reduced by approximately 35–45%.

VII.PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

A. Power Consumption Analysis

Measurements were conducted under idle and active conditions.

Table I: Power Consumption Comparison

System Type	Avg Current (mA)	Battery Life
Piezo-based Braille	High	Low
Vibrotactile	Medium	Medium
Proposed System	**Low**	**High**

B. Latency Analysis

Table II: Latency Measurement

Operation	**Time (ms)**
BLE Reception	40–60
Processing	10–15
Braille Rendering	20–30
Total	**70–105**

VIII.CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This paper presented an energy-efficient solenoid-based refreshable Braille interface for wearable assistive devices. The system achieves improved battery life, low latency, and reliable tactile output. Future work will explore multi-cell scalability, gesture-based input, and renewable energy integration.

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