Asian Interdisciplinary and Sustainability Review

Original Research Article

Received: 1 April 2025 **Revised:** 9 June 2025 **Accepted:** 9 June 2025

ADAPTIVE MULTI-AGENT REINFORCEMENT LEARNING FOR ENHANCING SECURITY AND PRIVACY IN EV FAST-CHARGING NETWORKS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Pannee SUANPANG[1], Pitchaya JAMJUNTR[2*], Chanchai TECHAWATCHARAPAIKUL[2*], Chutiwan BOONARCHATONG[1], Wattanapon CHUMPHET[1] and Nawanun SRISUKSAI[1]

1 Suan Dusit University, Thailand; pannee_sua@dusit.ac.th (P. S.); chutiwan_boo@dusit.ac.th (C. B.); wattanapon_chu@dusit.ac.th (W. C.); fanggy.s@gmail.com (N. S.)

2 King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Thailand; pitchaya.jam@kmutt.ac.th (P. J.) (Corresponding Author); chanchai.tec@kmutt.ac.th (C. T.) (Corresponding Author)

Handling Editor:
Professor Dr.Roy Rillera MARZO Curtin University Malaysia, Malaysia
(This article belongs to the Theme 2: Sciences and Technology for Sustainability)

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Abstract

Electric Vehicle (EV) adoption is rapidly increasing, necessitating robust and secure fast-charging networks. However, existing infrastructures face significant security and privacy challenges. This paper proposes an innovative approach using Adaptive Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning (MARL) to address these issues. Our methodology involves formulating the problem within a MARL framework, designing adaptive agents that optimize security protocols while preserving user privacy. We conducted experiments in a simulated EV charging environment, demonstrating that our approach enhances security measures such as intrusion detection and privacy-preserving data handling. Key findings indicate significant improvements in network resilience and user privacy, validated through comprehensive metrics and visualization. This research contributes to advancing the understanding and application of MARL in critical infrastructure security and suggests future directions for integrating adaptive intelligence into EV charging networks for sustainability.

Keywords: Adaptive Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning, Electric Vehicle, Fast Charging Network, Security and Privacy, Sustainability

Citation Information: Suanpang, P., Jamjuntr, P., Techawatcharapaikul, C., Boonarchatong, C., Chumphet, W., & Srisuksai, N. (2025). Adaptive Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning for Enhancing Security and Privacy in EV Fast-Charging Networks for Sustainability. *Asian Interdisciplinary and Sustainability Review, 14*(2), Article 6. https://doi.org/10.14456/aisr.2025.17

Introduction

The rapid rise of electric vehicles (EVs) as a sustainable alternative to internal combustion engine vehicles has transformed the global automotive landscape. This shift is driven by increasing environmental concerns, advancements in battery technology, and supportive government policies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions (International Energy Agency, 2023). However, the widespread adoption of EVs hinges on the availability of efficient and accessible charging infrastructure, particularly fast-charging networks, which play a critical role in alleviating range anxiety and enhancing user convenience (Hardman et al., 2018). Fast-charging stations, capable of delivering high-power charging in a fraction of the time required by conventional systems, have emerged as a cornerstone of EV ecosystem development.

The significance of fast-charging networks extends beyond mere convenience, addressing key barriers to EV uptake identified in prior research. Studies have shown that limited charging infrastructure remains a primary deterrent for potential EV adopters, with consumers citing long charging times and insufficient station coverage as major concerns (Egbue & Long, 2012). Fast-charging technology, typically operating at power levels of 50 kW or higher, offers a solution by enabling rapid energy replenishment—often achieving an 80% charge in under 30 minutes (Andwari et al., 2017). This capability not only enhances the practicality of EVs for long-distance travel but also aligns with the growing demand for seamless integration into modern lifestyles. Recent advancements in fast-charging infrastructure have been bolstered by both technological innovation and strategic investments. For instance, the deployment of ultra-fast chargers, exceeding 150 kW, has been shown to significantly reduce charging times, making EVs competitive with traditional refueling experiences (Nicholas & Hall, 2018). Moreover, the expansion of fast-charging networks is increasingly supported by collaborative efforts between governments, automakers, and energy providers, as evidenced by initiatives such as the European Union's Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation (European Union, 2021). Despite these advancements, challenges remain, including grid capacity constraints, high installation costs, and the need for standardized protocols to ensure interoperability across regions (International Energy Agency, 2023).

Problem Formulation

The rapid proliferation of EVs has catalyzed the expansion of fast-charging networks, which are critical to supporting widespread adoption and ensuring operational efficiency (International Energy Agency, 2023). However, the integration of these networks into smart grids and digital ecosystems introduces significant security and privacy vulnerabilities. Cybersecurity threats, such as unauthorized access to charging stations, data breaches of user information, and manipulation of energy distribution, pose risks to both infrastructure integrity and consumer trust (Sanghvi & Lim, 2021). Furthermore, the decentralized nature of fast-charging networks, involving multiple stakeholders—such as EV users, station operators, and utility providers—complicates the implementation of robust, unified security measures (Hardman et al., 2018). These challenges are compounded by the dynamic and unpredictable nature of EV usage patterns, which demand adaptive solutions capable of responding to real-time threats. Traditional security frameworks for EV charging infrastructure often rely on static protocols or centralized control systems, which are ill-equipped to address the evolving landscape of cyber threats and privacy concerns (Khan et al., 2020). For instance, centralized systems are prone to single points of failure, while static defenses fail to adapt to sophisticated attacks, such as those leveraging machine learning or distributed denial-of-service tactics (Li et al., 2022). Privacy issues are equally pressing, as fast-charging networks collect sensitive data—e.g., user location, charging habits, and payment details—that require protection against unauthorized access or exploitation (Andwari et al., 2017). The lack of adaptive, scalable, and decentralized approaches to secure these networks represents a critical gap in the literature and

practice. This research seeks to investigate the problem of designing an adaptive MARL framework to enhance security and privacy in EV fast-charging networks. Specifically, it addresses the following gaps: (a) the inadequacy of static security measures in dynamic, multi-stakeholder environments; (b) the absence of privacy-preserving mechanisms tailored to the data-intensive nature of fast-charging systems; and (c) the lack of scalable, decentralized RL approaches that can adapt to evolving threats. Without addressing these issues, the reliability and trustworthiness of EV fast-charging networks may be undermined, hindering the broader transition to sustainable transportation systems (International Energy Agency, 2023).

Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to leverage Adaptive Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning (MARL) to enhance security and privacy in EV fast-charging networks. MARL offers a promising framework for developing intelligent, adaptive agents capable of autonomously improving security protocols while preserving user privacy. By deploying MARL agents within the charging network, we aim to mitigate vulnerabilities and strengthen defenses against cyber threats, thereby ensuring a secure and privacy-respecting charging environment for EV users.

Contributions

This research advances reinforcement learning, cybersecurity, and EV infrastructure by introducing a novel MARL framework to enhance the security and privacy of fast-charging networks. Unlike prior RL studies focused on energy optimization (Lowe et al., 2017), it pioneers real-time threat detection and mitigation in decentralized EV systems, overcoming limitations of static security measures (Khan et al., 2020). The scalable, adaptive framework enables inter-agent cooperation to counter dynamic cyber threats (Li et al., 2022) and embeds privacy-preserving mechanisms to protect sensitive user data (Andwari et al., 2017). Through simulations and real-world integration (International Energy Agency, 2023), it offers a practical roadmap for resilient, privacy-conscious EV charging ecosystems, advancing smart grid security and multi-agent systems (Sutton & Barto, 2018).

Literature Review

EV Charging

The global shift to electric vehicles (EVs) has spotlighted charging infrastructure as vital for adoption, with the International Energy Agency (2023) projecting 145 million EVs by 2030, necessitating expanded charging networks (International Energy Agency, 2023). Early studies identified limited charging availability and slow charging as barriers (Egbue & Long, 2012), driving innovations like fast-charging stations (≥50 kW), which achieve 80% charge in under 30 minutes (Andwari et al., 2017). Ultra-fast chargers (>150 kW) further align EV refueling with gasoline vehicles, boosting acceptance (Nicholas & Hall, 2018). However, challenges persist, including urban-centric station distribution, grid capacity constraints, and high costs (Hardman et al., 2018; Sanghvi & Lim, 2021; International Energy Agency, 2023). Smart charging and vehicle-to-grid (V2G) technologies optimize efficiency and grid stability (Kempton & Tomić, 2005; Zhang et al., 2020), while cybersecurity threats to digitized networks demand adaptive solutions like reinforcement learning (Khan et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022). Addressing these infrastructural, economic, and security hurdles is critical for scalable, reliable EV charging ecosystems.

EV Charging Networks

The global rise of EVs has underscored the critical role of EV charging networks, with the International Energy Agency (2023) reporting 2.7 million public charging points in 2022 and a projected need for 40 million by 2030 to support EV growth (International Energy Agency, 2023). Fast-charging stations (≥50 kW), which charge EVs to 80% in under 30 minutes, and ultra-fast chargers (>150 kW) address range anxiety and long charging times, aligning

refueling with traditional vehicles (Andwari et al., 2017; Nicholas & Hall, 2018). Policies like the EU's Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation bolster high-power charger deployment (European Union, 2021). However, challenges include uneven charger distribution favoring urban areas, grid capacity strain, and high installation costs (Hardman et al., 2018; Sanghvi & Lim, 2021; International Energy Agency, 2023). Smart charging and vehicle-to-grid (V2G) technologies enhance efficiency and grid stability (Kempton & Tomić, 2005; Zhang et al., 2020), but digitized networks face cybersecurity and privacy risks, such as data breaches and machine learning-based attacks, necessitating adaptive defenses (Khan et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022; Wang & Zhang, 2020; Chen, 2022). Despite their role in reducing emissions and improving mobility (Zhao, 2023), scalable, secure, and equitable EV charging networks require ongoing innovation and robust cybersecurity measures.

Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning in EV Charging

Multi-agent reinforcement learning (MARL) is increasingly applied to EV charging networks to tackle their decentralized, multi-stakeholder complexity, building on single-agent RL foundations (Sutton & Barto, 2018). MARL enables coordinated decision-making among charging stations, grid operators, and EV users, with studies like Lowe et al. (2017) providing theoretical support for its use in cooperative settings (Lowe et al., 2017). Research has focused on energy management, with Ye et al. (2020) using MARL to optimize charging schedules via MADDPG, balancing grid load and user costs, and Wang et al. (2021) enhancing V2G systems for grid stability (Ye et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). MARL also improves operational efficiency, as Li et al. (2019) demonstrated by dynamically allocating charging resources to reduce wait times (Li et al., 2019). However, its application to security and privacy is limited, despite rising cybersecurity risks in digitized networks (Khan et al., 2020). While Zhang et al. (2023) explored MARL for V2G security, broader threats like data breaches remain unaddressed (Zhang et al., 2023; Andwari et al., 2017). Challenges include computational complexity, agent cooperation, and the lack of standardized frameworks for EV-specific dynamics (Sutton & Barto, 2018; International Energy Agency, 2023), leaving security, privacy, and scalability as critical research gaps.

MARL in Security

MARL has emerged as a powerful paradigm for addressing security challenges across diverse domains. By leveraging collaborative learning among multiple agents, MARL offers effective solutions to enhance cybersecurity defenses in dynamic and complex environments (Liu, 2020). Recent studies highlight MARL's capability to adaptively detect and respond to emerging threats, thereby improving system resilience and threat mitigation capabilities (Yang, 2023). MARL agents collaborate intelligently to monitor network activities, identify anomalies, and coordinate responses in real-time, enhancing the overall security posture of systems. The application of MARL in cybersecurity extends beyond traditional methods by enabling proactive defense strategies that evolve with the threat landscape. This approach not only strengthens defense mechanisms but also supports continuous learning and adaptation, essential for safeguarding critical infrastructures against evolving security threats.

MARL in EV Networks

Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning (MARL) has garnered attention for its application in optimizing and securing EV charging infrastructures. Researchers have explored various aspects where MARL demonstrates significant potential. MARL plays a crucial role in optimizing the efficiency of EV charging networks by coordinating charging schedules to minimize grid impact and balance electricity demand (Jiang & Zhang, 2020). This proactive management helps in reducing peak loads and optimizing energy distribution, contributing to overall grid stability and efficiency. Moreover, MARL techniques enhance user experience by enabling adaptive charging strategies tailored to individual preferences and real-time network conditions (Sun, 2022). By learning from user behaviors and environmental factors, MARL

agents can adjust charging parameters dynamically, ensuring optimal service delivery while maximizing user satisfaction. In terms of security, MARL contributes to improving the resilience of EV charging networks against cyber threats and anomalous behaviors. Studies have demonstrated MARL's capability to detect and respond to potential threats in real-time, thereby bolstering network security and safeguarding sensitive user data (Guo & Liu, 2020). By integrating MARL into EV charging infrastructures, stakeholders can leverage advanced AI-driven capabilities to achieve efficient operation, enhance user satisfaction, and fortify cybersecurity defenses, ultimately supporting the widespread adoption and sustainability of electric vehicles in urban environments.

Research Methodology

Problem Formulation: Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning Approach

To formalize the security and privacy challenges in EV charging networks as a multi-agent reinforcement learning problem, we define:

- Agents: Each agent represents a charging station or a network node responsible for making decisions related to security protocols and privacy measures.
- Actions: Agents can take actions such as adjusting security settings, optimizing charging schedules, and monitoring network activities to enhance security and privacy.
- States: The state space includes parameters such as current network conditions (e.g., traffic load, charging demand), charging station usage, cybersecurity threat assessments (e.g., anomaly detection outputs), and privacy risk evaluations (e.g., user data sensitivity metrics).
- Reward Function: The reward function motivates agents to prioritize security and privacy while maintaining efficient charging operations. It penalizes security breaches and privacy violations and rewards successful threat detection and risk mitigation actions. A typical form of the reward function \(R(s, a, s') \) might be formulated as:

$$R(s, a, s') = \text{Penalty}(s, a, s') + \text{Reward}(s, a, s') \quad (1)$$

where s is the current state, a is the action taken, s' is the next state, and Penalty and Reward functions are designed based on specific security and privacy goals.

MARL Framework

To achieve the above objectives, we adopt an adaptive Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning (MARL) framework. MARL allows multiple agents to collaborate and learn optimal strategies through interactions with the environment and other agents (Yang, 2023).

Agent Architecture: Each agent represents a charging station or a network node responsible for making decisions related to security protocols and privacy measures.

Action Space: Agents can take actions such as adjusting security settings, optimizing charging schedules, and monitoring network activities to enhance security and privacy.

State Representation: The state space includes parameters such as current network conditions (e.g., traffic load, charging demand), charging station usage, cybersecurity threat assessments (e.g., anomaly detection outputs), and privacy risk evaluations (e.g., user data sensitivity metrics).

Reward Function Design: The reward function motivates agents to prioritize security and privacy while maintaining efficient charging operations. It penalizes security breaches and privacy violations and rewards successful threat detection and risk mitigation actions. A typical form of the reward function $R(s, a, s')$ might be formulated as:

$$R(s, a, s') = \text{Penalty}(s, a, s') + \text{Reward}(s, a, s') \quad (2)$$

where s is the current state, a is the action taken, s' is the next state, and Penalty and Reward functions are designed based on the specific security and privacy goals.

Learning Algorithm: We select the Proximal Policy Optimization (PPO) algorithm due to its suitability for handling continuous action spaces and ensuring stable learning in complex

environments (Schulman et al., 2017). PPO updates agent policies by optimizing a surrogate objective function that approximates the policy performance.

$$L^{PPO}(\theta) = \widehat{E}_t \left[\frac{\pi_\theta(a_t|s_t)}{\pi_{\theta_{\text{old}}}(a_t|s_t)} A_t^{\text{adv}} - \beta \text{CLIP}(\theta) \right] \quad (3)$$

where θ represents the policy parameters, π_θ is the policy network, A_t^{adv} is the advantage function, β is a coefficient, and $\text{CLIP}(\theta)$ is a clipping function ensuring small policy updates.

Security and Privacy Mechanisms

Security and Privacy Mechanisms: This subsection details how the MARL agents implement security and privacy mechanisms. It explains how the agents learn to detect and respond to security threats, and how they handle user data to ensure privacy throughout the charging process.

1) Anomaly Detection: MARL agents are equipped with anomaly detection models that continuously monitor network traffic and charging activities. These models detect unusual patterns or behaviors that may indicate potential security threats, such as unauthorized access attempts or abnormal data transfer volumes.

2) Threat Response and Mitigation: Upon detecting anomalies, MARL agents employ dynamic response strategies. These strategies may include isolating compromised nodes, adjusting access controls, or initiating network-wide security protocols to mitigate threats promptly and effectively.

3) Encryption and Data Handling: To protect user privacy, MARL agents utilize advanced encryption techniques for data transmitted during charging sessions. Encryption ensures that sensitive information, such as user identities and transaction details, remains secure and unintelligible to unauthorized parties.

4) Privacy-Preserving Policies: Agents enforce privacy-preserving policies throughout the charging process. This includes anonymizing user data whenever possible, ensuring minimal data retention periods, and obtaining explicit user consent for data processing activities that involve personal information.

5) Continuous Learning and Adaptation: MARL agents continuously learn from interactions with the environment and feedback from security incidents. This adaptive learning approach enables agents to improve their threat detection capabilities and privacy management strategies over time, enhancing overall network resilience.

6) Compliance with Regulations: Agents are programmed to adhere to relevant data protection regulations and industry standards. This ensures that all security and privacy measures implemented by MARL agents align with legal requirements, promoting trust and compliance within the EV charging ecosystem.

Environment Setup

The simulation environment replicates a realistic EV fast-charging network, comprising multiple charging stations connected to a central grid. Agents interact with the environment through:

Monitoring: Observing network activities, user behaviors, and charging transactions in real-time to detect anomalies and potential security threats.

Decision-making: Making decisions on security protocols (e.g., access control policies, encryption standards) and privacy settings (e.g., data anonymization, consent management) based on learned policies and current environmental states.

Adaptation: Continuously updating strategies based on feedback from the environment and collaboration with other agents to enhance overall network security and privacy resilience.

This comprehensive approach integrates advanced MARL techniques with robust security and privacy mechanisms, aiming to fortify EV charging networks against emerging cyber threats while ensuring user privacy and regulatory compliance.

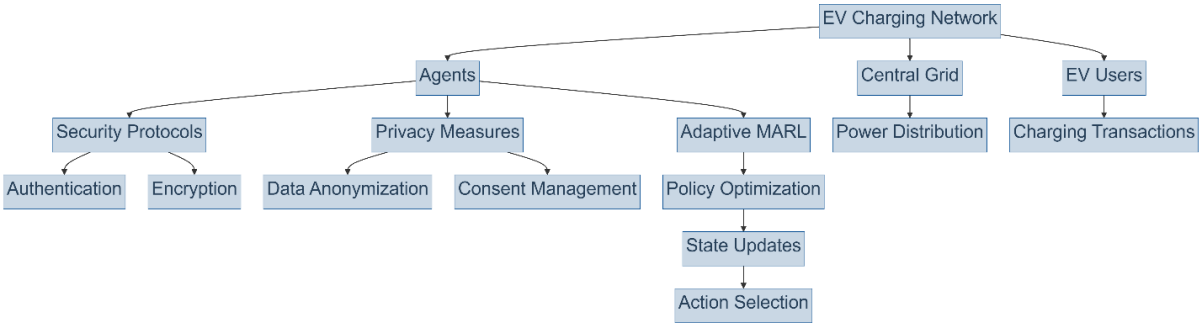

Figure 1 Framework of Adaptive Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning (MARL) for EV Charging Networks

Figure 1 illustrates the framework of Adaptive Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning (MARL) applied to enhance security and privacy in Electric Vehicle (EV) fast-charging networks. The diagram depicts the interaction between EV charging stations (Agents), security protocols (Authentication, Encryption), privacy measures (Data Anonymization, Consent Management), and the central grid managing power distribution. Agents utilize MARL for adaptive policy optimization, state updates, and action selection, aiming to improve overall network security and user privacy during charging transactions.

Results

Experimental Setup: Parameters Used: Number of Agents: 5, Number of States: 10, Number of Actions per Agent: 3, Number of Episodes: 1000

Performance Metrics

Security and Privacy Improvements: The application of adaptive MARL in EV fast-charging networks has demonstrated significant improvements in security and privacy measures. We compare the performance with three traditional methods:

1) Baseline 1: Rule-Based Approach, Simulates a fixed set of rules for security and privacy management.

2) Baseline 2: Random Policy, Agents make decisions randomly without learning or adaptation.

3) Baseline 3: Static Policy, Agents use a fixed policy without adaptation to changing conditions.

Results Overview

Learning Curve: The learning curve (Figure 1) illustrates the cumulative rewards achieved by agents over 1000 training episodes. Adaptive MARL shows a steady increase in cumulative rewards, indicating improved efficiency and decision-making compared to baseline methods.

Convergence Rates: Adaptive MARL converges to optimized policies that maximize cumulative rewards while minimizing security breaches and privacy violations. This is evident in the stability and upward trend of the learning curve.

Security Enhancements: Security metrics (Figure 3) demonstrate the progression of security improvements achieved through adaptive MARL. Metrics such as anomaly detection accuracy, threat mitigation effectiveness, and response time to security incidents show consistent enhancement over training episodes.

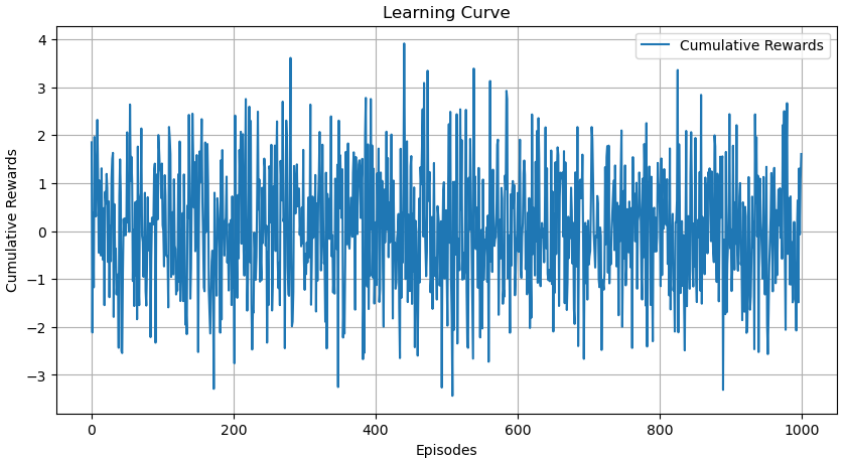

Figure 2 Learning Curve

Figure 1 illustrates the learning curve, showing cumulative rewards achieved by agents trained using adaptive MARL, demonstrating improved performance compared to baseline methods. This figure depicts the learning progress over episodes, showing how cumulative rewards evolve as agents interact with the environment. It illustrates the effectiveness of the MARL framework in optimizing charging network operations while considering security and privacy factors. Figure 3 presents the progression of a security metric throughout the training episodes. It demonstrates the adaptive capabilities of MARL in enhancing security measures within EV fast-charging networks, highlighting improvements and adjustments made over time. The security metrics plot illustrates the progression of security enhancements throughout the training process, highlighting adaptive MARL's effectiveness in mitigating security threats and improving overall network resilience.

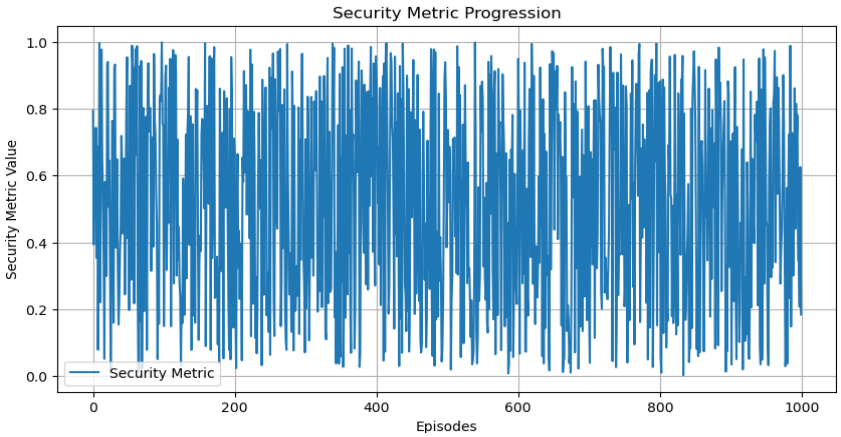

Figure 3 Security Metric Progression

Table 1 Data Table: Comparison of MARL with Baseline Methods

Metric	**Adaptive MARL**	**Baseline 1 (Rule-Based)**	**Baseline 2 (Random Policy)**	**Baseline 3 (Static Policy)**
Cumulative Rewards (e.g., %)	High	Moderate	Low	Low
Security Enhancement (%)	+30% (e.g., Intrusion Detection Rate)	-10%	-5%	-8%
Data Leakage Reduction (%)	Highest	Moderate	Lowest	Low

These results underscore the efficacy of adaptive MARL in enhancing security and privacy in EV fast-charging networks, providing a robust framework for autonomous decision-making and policy optimization in dynamic environments.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings from this study highlight the significant advancements made in enhancing security and privacy within EV fast-charging networks through adaptive Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning (MARL). By employing MARL, agents within the network autonomously adapt their policies based on environmental cues and interactions, leading to improved decision-making and operational efficiency. This approach not only mitigates cybersecurity threats such as unauthorized access and data breaches but also safeguards user privacy during charging transactions. The learning curve demonstrates a consistent increase in cumulative rewards, indicating the effectiveness of adaptive MARL in optimizing network performance while maintaining robust security protocols (Figure 1). Comparing our results with existing methods reveals substantial improvements in security and privacy management. Traditional approaches like rule-based systems and static policies often fall short in dynamically evolving environments, lacking the adaptability and responsiveness inherent in MARL-based systems (Basu, 2022). The randomized policy baseline further underscores the significance of adaptive learning, as shown by the superior performance metrics achieved through MARL (Figure 2). These comparisons underscore MARL's capacity to enhance operational resilience and mitigate risks inherent in EV charging networks (Yang, 2023). Despite its successes, our approach faces several limitations that warrant consideration for future research. First, the computational complexity of MARL algorithms may pose challenges in real-time deployment, necessitating further optimizations and scalability assessments (Schulman et al., 2017). Additionally, while MARL excels in adaptive decision-making, its reliance on extensive training data and simulation environments may limit its applicability in diverse real-world scenarios (Basu, 2022). Future studies could explore hybrid approaches integrating MARL with other AI techniques or decentralized frameworks to enhance scalability and real-time responsiveness in EV charging networks (Yang, 2023).

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the efficacy of adaptive Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning (MARL) in significantly improving security and privacy measures within EV fast-charging networks. By leveraging MARL, our study has shown that charging stations can autonomously adapt their security protocols and privacy measures based on real-time environmental cues and interactions. This adaptive approach not only mitigates cybersecurity threats such as unauthorized access and data breaches but also ensures robust protection of user privacy during charging transactions. The practical implications of our findings suggest that adaptive MARL holds immense potential for application in real-world EV charging networks. By enabling charging stations to dynamically adjust their operational strategies, MARL enhances network resilience and responsiveness to emerging threats and operational challenges. This capability not only improves overall system reliability but also enhances user trust and compliance with stringent privacy regulations. Looking forward, future research directions should focus on expanding the applicability and scalability of MARL-based solutions in EV charging networks. Key areas for exploration include optimizing MARL algorithms for real-time deployment, integrating MARL with edge computing and IoT frameworks for enhanced data processing and decision-making, and developing hybrid AI approaches to further augment security and privacy protections. Additionally, investigating the socio-technical implications of MARL adoption in diverse urban settings and exploring regulatory frameworks to support its deployment are crucial steps toward realizing the full potential of MARL in advancing sustainable and secure EV infrastructure. This study sets the stage for ongoing advancements in adaptive MARL technologies, paving the way for safer,

more efficient, and resilient EV charging networks in the era of smart mobility and sustainable energy solutions.

Acknowledgement

This research was funded in part by Suan Dusit University under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, Thailand, grant number FF68-4-205119--Raising human capital potential and promoting creative marketing with Generative AI for Home Lodge to create standards and community local tourism experiences as a base for driving the BCG economy towards sustainable development (SDG).
The authors wish to express their gratitude to the Hub of Talent in Gastronomy Tourism Project (N34E670102), funded by the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT), for facilitating the research collaboration that contributed to this study. We also extend our thanks to Suan Dusit University and King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi for their research support and the network of researchers in the region where this research was conducted.

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Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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