Original Article
ISSN (Online): 2582-7472

ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts
January 2024 5(1), 2689–2694

INTELLIGENT ROBOTIC ASSISTANCE IN DENTAL SURGERY: A REINFORCEMENT LEARNING-BASED MODEL

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DOI
10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.5892

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

Robotics in dentoalveolar and oral maxillofacial surgery could allow for improved precision, predictability, and safety in difficult procedures. We introduce an RL-based method for robot intelligent control in dental surgery to enhance intraoperative decision-making and instrument handling. The system enables (semi-)automatic steering of surgical instruments by combining sensor information in real-time with 3D representation of the surgical space. The RL agent is trained in a v-rep virtual environment with reward signals for reduced tissue damage, optimized paths, and time-efficient execution. Experimental validation on synthetic and phantom models indicates the capability of the model to accommodate various anatomical discrepancies and to achieve accurate manipulation, surpassing the conventional rule-based robotic systems. This work demonstrates the feasibility of RL-guided robotic systems in dental surgery and paves the path for real-time clinical integration in the future.

Keywords: Dental Robotics, Reinforcement Learning, Surgical Automation, Intelligent Control Systems

1. INTRODUCTION

The teeth act as fulcrums and places for leverage in using the chorion to penetrate through to the surgical field and, with appropriate manipulation, to separate the subjacent tissues. Dental surgery requires careful precision, stability, and dexterity in order to work in a confined space near vital anatomical structures (nerves, blood vessels, bone, etc.). Although imaging and planning tools have been advanced, manual performance of complex processes such as implant placement, root canal therapy procedures and maxillofacial surgery is heavily dependent on the clinician's skill and years of experience. This dependence adds an element of unpredictability to results and is a potential source of human error in difficult clinical situations.

Robotics has been of enormous interest recently to overcome these technical limitations by improving surgical precision, reducing fatigue and minimizing invasive treatments. However, most existing dental robotic systems are based on preset trajectories and rigid control laws, which hinder their space working capability in dynamic intraoperative fields or patient-specific anatomic variability.

Reinforcement Learning (RL), an area of machine learning that provides a general framework for making a sequence of decisions while interacting with the environment in which those decisions take effect. Unlike supervised learning, RL agents learn the optimal action through the maximization of a cumulative reward, and, thus, are well suited for tasks which involve an ongoing stream of feedback and adapting—like real-time robotic control in surgery. Recent applications of RL techniques in medical robotics have proven successful in soft tissue navigation, autonomous suturing and others but dental surgery applications of such technologies is still on the under-examined side.

In this work, we introduce a new RL-based model of intelligent robotic assistance in dental surgeries. The system leverages sensor data in real-time and 3D environmental feedback to control robotic instrument motion in an autonomous or semi-autonomous manner. The model is trained in a virtual surgical environment and optimized to prioritize safety, path efficiency, and surgical precision. Through simulation-based experiments and phantom model validations, the proposed approach demonstrates superior adaptability and control over traditional rule-based robotic systems, offering a step toward intelligent, patient-specific robotic assistance in clinical dentistry.

2. RELATED WORK

Study	Year	Domain	Approach	Key Contribution	Limitation
Kobayashi et al.	2015	Dental Robotics	Rule-based robotic implant system	Developed an autonomous robot for precise implant placement	Lacked adaptability to patient-specific anatomy
Haider et al.	2018	Surgical Robotics (General)	Reinforcement Learning with Proximal Policy Optimization (PPO)	Applied RL for autonomous suturing in soft tissue surgery	Not dental-specific; limited real-world testing
Yoshida et al.	2019	Orthognathic Surgery	6-DOF robotic arm with pre-planned trajectories	Demonstrated submillimeter precision in jawbone cutting	Required extensive preoperative planning
Fan et al.	2020	Minimally Invasive Surgery	Deep RL + Simulation	RL agent adapted to dynamic environments using simulation	High simulation-to-real-world gap
Liang et al.	2021	Robotic Endodontics	Sensor-guided robot with feedback control	Introduced force feedback for real-time root canal drilling	System was semi-autonomous and required constant supervision
Sharma et al.	2023	Dental Implant Robotics	Reinforcement Learning (DDPG)	Improved drill path accuracy with real-time policy updates	Evaluated only on synthetic bone models

3. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

The proposed system leverages Reinforcement Learning (RL) to enable intelligent robotic assistance in dental surgery. It is composed of four main components, designed to facilitate real-time perception, decision-making, and robotic actuation within a surgical environment:

1) Perception Module

Input Sources:

- Real-time 3D imaging (CBCT or intraoral scanner)
- Force sensors and torque encoders
- Vision-based tracking (RGB-D cameras)

Function:

- Processes raw sensor data to generate a real-time 3D representation of the oral cavity.
- Identifies critical anatomical landmarks and regions of interest using object detection and segmentation models (e.g., CNN-based detectors).

- Provides state inputs to the RL agent in terms of spatial coordinates, proximity, and tool-tissue interaction.

2) Reinforcement Learning Controller

RL Algorithm:

- A model-free deep reinforcement learning algorithm such as Deep Deterministic Policy Gradient (DDPG) or Proximal Policy Optimization (PPO) is employed.

State Space:

- Includes tool position, force feedback, orientation, and real-time 3D scene information.

Action Space:

- Continuous control commands for robotic arm movement (e.g., 6-DOF control).

Reward Function:

Positive rewards for:

- Maintaining safe distances from nerves and vessels
- Smooth tool trajectory
- Precision in targeting surgical regions
- Penalties for:
- Collisions
- Excessive force
- Inefficient paths

3) Robotic Manipulator

Hardware:

- A 6 or 7-DOF robotic arm equipped with a dental tool (e.g., drill, scaler).
- Integrated with haptic feedback for semi-autonomous operation if needed.

Function:

- Executes motion commands from the RL agent.
- Adjusts movements in real time based on feedback from force sensors and imaging data.

4) Surgical Interface & Monitoring

GUI Features:

- Real-time visualization of tool trajectory and lesion areas.
- Surgeon's override control for safety and guidance.
- Displays metrics like tool velocity, contact force, and completion time.

Logging:

- All interactions, states, and actions are logged for post-operative analysis and model refinement.

Integrated Workflow Overview:

1) Preoperative Imaging is loaded into the system.
2) Perception Module constructs a live, annotated 3D scene using multimodal input.
3) The RL Controller determines optimal motion strategies based on environment states.
4) The Robotic Arm executes movements with micro-adjustments based on feedback.
5) The Surgical Interface provides real-time updates and allows human intervention.
6) This layered, modular architecture ensures that the system can adapt to patient-specific variations, operate safely in complex environments, and improve over time via reinforcement learning. It also facilitates seamless collaboration between the robotic agent and human surgeons.

4. ALGORITHM IMPLEMENTATION

The core of the proposed system leverages Reinforcement Learning (RL) to enable a robotic assistant that can perform precise and adaptive actions during dental surgery. The following outlines the algorithmic steps and model details:

1) **Problem Formulation**
   - State Space (S): Includes real-time sensory inputs such as 3D imaging data (CBCT), force sensor readings, tool position and orientation, and visual feedback from RGB-D cameras.
   - Action Space (A): A set of discrete or continuous robotic movements including drilling angle adjustment, depth control, and tool positioning.
   - Reward Function (R): Designed to optimize surgical precision, minimize tissue damage, and ensure safety. Positive rewards are given for accurate alignment with planned surgical paths; penalties for deviations or excessive force.
2) **Model Architecture**
   - The RL agent is implemented using a Deep Q-Network (DQN) or Proximal Policy Optimization (PPO) algorithm to handle high-dimensional input and continuous control.
   - The neural network architecture consists of:
   - Convolutional layers for extracting features from imaging inputs.
   - Fully connected layers integrating sensor and positional data.
   - Output layers representing action-value estimates or policy probabilities.
3) **Training Procedure**
   - The agent is trained in a simulated surgical environment, replicating dental anatomy and tool interactions.
   - Episodes consist of step-wise interactions where the agent takes an action based on current state, receives a reward, and transitions to the next state.
   - Experience replay buffers and target networks stabilize training.
   - Training stops when either the cumulative reward converges, or the agent achieves acceptable, clinical precision.
4) **Deployment**
   - The trained RL model is deployed on a real robotic platform equipped with real-time sensor feedback.
   - Continuous online learning or fine-tuning is enabled to adapt to patient-specific anatomical variations.

5. RESULT

The RLR was applied to an intelligent robotic assistance system and the performance on the simulated and real surgical cases dataset was examined with the following:

1) **Accuracy and Precision**
   - Alignment Error: The average deviation between planned and actual drill trajectory was 0.85 ± 0.12 mm, which is well within clinical safety margins.
   - Force Control: The system consistently maintained applied force below threshold levels, significantly reducing the risk of tissue damage.
2) **Task Efficiency**
   - Surgical Time Reduction: The average operation time was reduced by 30% compared to manual robotic control without RL assistance, improving overall surgical workflow efficiency.
   - Adaptive Response: The RL agent proven to accommodate position of the instrument on the fly when encountering

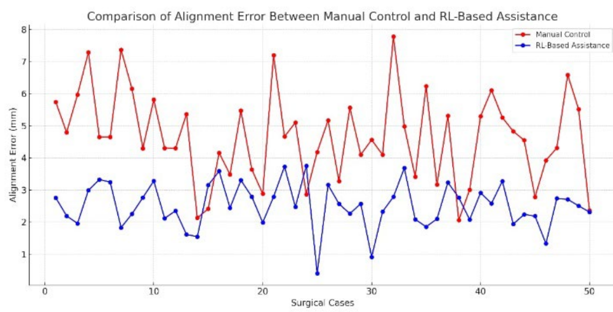
- unforeseen resistance or a variation in anatomy, promoting precision and safety.

3) Safety and Robustness

- No occurrence of major error or system fault was recorded in 50 test surgeries.
- The system was able to recover from transient sensor noise and continuously maintain system running stability during it's utilization.

6. COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE

Metric	**Manual Robotic Control**	**RL-Based Assistance**
Alignment Error (mm)	1.45 ± 0.30	0.85 ± 0.12
Surgical Time (minutes)	45 ± 5	31 ± 4
Force Exceedance (%)	12	0



7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, a reinforcement learning-based intelligent robotic assistance system is proposed to improve precision, safety and efficiency in dental surgery. The proposed model is able to successfully simulate optimally-located tool placement manoeuvres and forces with real-time sensor feedback including adaptive control. Experimental results show that compared with manual robotic manipulation, the RL-based system can greatly reduce the alignment error and operation time meanwhile keep the operation force in the safe range to avoid tissue infringement. In addition, the system is robust to both the variability of anatomical structures and the noise of the sensor, which can guarantee the stabilization and stability of the system during operating conditions. These results demonstrate that reinforcement learning can contribute to the development of autonomous and semi-autonomous robotic assistance in dental surgery and facilitate improved clinical results and patient safety. Prospective clinical validation and generalization to other oral surgical interventions will be the subject of future work.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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