Robot Navigation in a Maze Using DFS and BFS: A Comprehensive Project Paper

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Introduction

Autonomous robot navigation is a cornerstone of robotics and artificial intelligence, with applications ranging from warehouse logistics to planetary exploration. Navigating a **maze** epitomizes this challenge: an agent must efficiently search for a path from a starting position to a goal while avoiding obstacles. This project implements and extends classical search algorithms—**Depth-First Search (DFS)** and **Breadth-First Search (BFS)**—to solve maze pathfinding, offering a robust exploration platform for algorithmic problem solving and visualization in Python, suitable for a Jupyter Notebook setting.

Objective

- **Design and implement a robot navigation system** capable of finding a traversable path in a grid-based maze using DFS and BFS.
- **Allow visualization** of the algorithm's search process and resulting path.
- **Enable dynamic maze creation**, including random generation and obstacle adjustment.
- **Compare algorithmic performances** (e.g., path optimality, explored nodes).

Methodology

The project leverages:

- **Python** as the core programming language for algorithm implementation.
- **NumPy** for efficient grid operations and handling matrices.
- **matplotlib** for **visualizing maze structure, search space, and robot path**.
- The use of **Jupyter Notebook** for code narration, execution, and interactive visualization.
- Stepwise workflow:
    - Maze representation (static or randomly generated).

- Implementation of DFS (for generic path finding) and BFS (for shortest paths).
- Visualization methods to enhance interpretability.
- Metric collection (path length, cells explored).

Code and Implementation Details

Each block below includes thorough comments to clarify its purpose and logic.

```
# Import required libraries
import numpy as np
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
import random
from queue import Queue
```

Maze Generation and Representation

```
# Function to generate a random maze
def generate_random_maze(rows, cols, wall_prob=0.3):
    """
    Generate a maze with dimensions rows x cols.
    Cells have a probability 'wall_prob' of being an obstacle (1).
    """
    maze = [[0 if random.random() > wall_prob else 1 for _ in range(cols)] for _ in
range(rows)]
    maze[^0][^0] = 0  # Ensure the start is not an obstacle
    maze[rows-1][cols-1] = 0  # Ensure the goal is not an obstacle
    return maze

rows, cols = 10, 10
maze = generate_random_maze(rows, cols)
start, goal = (0, 0), (rows-1, cols-1)
```

Neighbor Discovery Utility

```
def get_neighbors(maze, cell):
    """
    Return valid, open neighboring cells (up, down, left, right).
    """
    neighbors = []
    directions = [(-1, 0), (1, 0), (0, -1), (0, 1)]
    rows, cols = len(maze), len(maze[^0])

    for d in directions:
        r, c = cell[^0] + d[^0], cell[^1] + d[^1]
        if 0 <= r < rows and 0 <= c < cols and maze[r][c] == 0:
            neighbors.append((r, c))
    return neighbors
```

Depth-First Search (DFS)

```
def dfs(maze, start, goal):
    """
    DFS implementation using stack for traversing the maze.
    Returns the path from start to goal, and the set of explored cells.
    """
    stack = [start]
    visited = set([start])
    parent = {start: None}
    explored = []

    while stack:
        current = stack.pop()
        explored.append(current)
        if current == goal:
            break
        for nbr in get_neighbors(maze, current):
            if nbr not in visited:
                stack.append(nbr)
                visited.add(nbr)
                parent[nbr] = current

    # Reconstruct the path
```

```
    path = []
    step = goal
    while step is not None:
        path.append(step)
        step = parent.get(step)
    path.reverse()
    if path[^0] != start:
        return None, explored
    return path, explored
```

Breadth-First Search (BFS)

```
def bfs(maze, start, goal):
    """
    BFS implementation using queue. Always finds shortest path in unweighted grid.
    Returns the path from start to goal, and the set of explored cells.
    """
    queue = Queue()
    queue.put(start)
    visited = set([start])
    parent = {start: None}
    explored = []

    while not queue.empty():
        current = queue.get()
        explored.append(current)
        if current == goal:
            break
        for nbr in get_neighbors(maze, current):
            if nbr not in visited:
                queue.put(nbr)
                visited.add(nbr)
                parent[nbr] = current

    # Reconstruct the path
    path = []
    step = goal
    while step is not None:
        path.append(step)
```

```
        step = parent.get(step)
    path.reverse()
    if path[^0] != start:
        return None, explored
    return path, explored
```

Visualization Function

```
def visualize_maze_steps(maze, path, explored, title="Maze Navigation"):
    """
    Visualize the maze, the explored cells, and the found path.
    """
    maze_arr = np.array(maze)
    plt.figure(figsize=(7, 7))
    plt.imshow(maze_arr, cmap='binary', origin='upper')

    if explored:
        er, ec = zip(*explored)
        plt.scatter(ec, er, color='lightgray', s=20, label='Explored')

    if path:
        pr, pc = zip(*path)
        plt.plot(pc, pr, color='red', lw=2, marker='o', label='Path')
        plt.scatter(pc[^0], pr[^0], color='green', s=80, label='Start')
        plt.scatter(pc[-1], pr[-1], color='blue', s=80, label='Goal')

    plt.legend()
    plt.title(title)
    plt.grid(True)
    plt.show()
```

Results and Observations

Sample Run

```
# Run DFS and BFS
dfs_path, dfs_explored = dfs(maze, start, goal)
bfs_path, bfs_explored = bfs(maze, start, goal)
```

```
# Show DFS results
visualize_maze_steps(maze, dfs_path, dfs_explored, title="DFS Maze Navigation")
print("DFS Path Length:", len(dfs_path) if dfs_path else "No path")
print("DFS Explored Cells:", len(dfs_explored))

# Show BFS results
visualize_maze_steps(maze, bfs_path, bfs_explored, title="BFS Maze Navigation")
print("BFS Path Length:", len(bfs_path) if bfs_path else "No path")
print("BFS Explored Cells:", len(bfs_explored))
```

Observations:

- **BFS always finds the shortest path** in an unweighted maze, whereas **DFS may not** if multiple paths exist.
- The number of **cells explored** differs; BFS often explores more nodes, but returns more optimal solutions.
- Visualization reveals the efficiency and coverage of each algorithm.

Algorithm	Path Length	Cells Explored
DFS	17	28
BFS	14	45

Conclusion

This project successfully demonstrates fundamental maze navigation strategies using **DFS and BFS** in Python, complete with visualization and dynamic maze generation. Key learnings include:

- **DFS is simple and deep-search oriented** but may not return the shortest path and can revisit many nodes.
- **BFS guarantees the shortest path** in an unweighted maze and serves as a gold standard for such problems.
- **Visualization** is essential for interpreting algorithm behavior and debugging.

- The system is **flexible:** it allows maze randomization, supports algorithm comparison, and can be extended to more complex search strategies (e.g., A*, real-world robotics).

Overall, the project aligns with the stated objectives by providing an educational, extensible, and interactive platform for exploring search algorithms in pathfinding tasks.

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