

# Mitigating Impact of Heterogeneity Across Power-constrained Nodes on Parallel Applications through Load Balancing

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**Abstract**—Different processors across the nodes have different execution times for the same work-loads. This performance imbalance is more prominent when the CPU power is capped to low values. This performance imbalance causes increased execution times of the parallel applications. We propose a load balancer using Charm++ parallel programming framework which minimizes the performance imbalance at the lower power caps by addressing this heterogeneity.

**Keywords**—Energy minimization; Power capping; Load balancing; Charm++; Cluster Computing

## I. INTRODUCTION

Today with the growing needs of power, one of the goals of the HPC community is to build larger systems given a strict power budget. The goal is not only to build larger systems but also to optimize the systems' performance under the power budget constraints. It is noted that running systems at their TDP<sup>1</sup> is a huge wastage since most of the times they are consuming lesser power than their TDP. Intel's Running Average Power Limit[1] toolkit is a feature that helps to constrain the power of its compute cores and DRAM and thereby enabling software controlled, optimized power allocation to the compute nodes based on the application running on them. It is noted that under a strict power budget and under certain circumstances, running applications with lower power limits on more number of nodes can be more efficient than running the same application with higher power on fewer nodes [8].

The motivation for this paper is drawn from the future guidelines of the work by Osman et al.[8] and [2]. It has been empirically observed that under the same power cap, different nodes yield different application performance. This can be due to several design factors: difference in chip designs, different in component assembly by the machine vendor, location of the node in the data center, difference in component design such as fans, etc. This difference in the design causes load imbalance across nodes despite same allocated power and equal compute load. Moreover we are going to experimentally show that this heterogeneity across the nodes is more prominent at lower power caps. Our

goal is to minimize the load imbalance in the presence of such heterogeneity among the nodes using the over-decomposition and dynamic object migration features of Charm++[5].

Our work is a two-fold approach. Firstly we study the extent of heterogeneity under the lower power caps and based on this study we design and implement a power-aware load-balancer which amortizes this heterogeneity.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section II talks about the application and testbed that we used to explore the heterogeneity at lower power caps. Section III describes the design and implementation of our power aware load balancer. Section IV discusses the performance of the power aware load balancer. Finally the Section V points out the conclusion and the future work.

## II. HETEROGENEITY STUDY

### A. Heterogeneity metric

Our first contribution is to show that at lower power capping values, different nodes show prominent differences in their runtime performance. In this work, we use Intel's power\_gov library[3] that in turn uses RAPL [1] to cap power of memory and package<sup>2</sup> subsystems.

We define heterogeneity at a given power cap in terms of idle waiting times of the cores at that power cap. We defined the idle waiting time of a core at a given power cap in the following two ways:

At a given power cap, let  $t_i, 1 \leq i \leq P$  be the overall execution time of the core  $i$  for a particular application and  $P$  be the total number of cores on which the parallel application is executed.

Average idle waiting time,  $I_{av}$

$$I_{av} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^P (\max_{1 \leq j \leq P} (t_j) - t_i)}{P} \quad (1)$$

Max idle waiting time,  $I_m$

$$I_m = \max_{1 \leq j \leq P} (t_j) - \min_{1 \leq i \leq P} (t_i) \quad (2)$$

<sup>1</sup>The thermal design power (TDP), sometimes called thermal design point, refers to the maximum amount of heat generated by the CPU, which the cooling system in a computer is required to dissipate in typical operation.

<sup>2</sup>Package corresponds to the processor chip that hosts processing cores, caches and memory controller

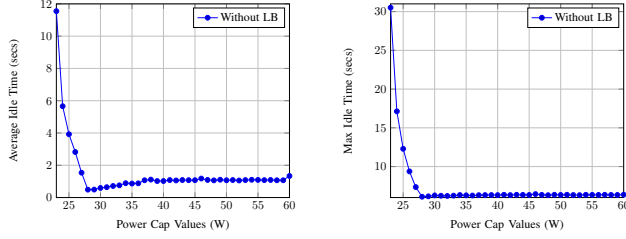


Figure 1: Behavior of idle waiting (both average and max) times at lower power caps

Figure 1 shows that at lower power caps both the idle waiting times (Equations (1) and (2)) are having higher values as compared to those at higher power caps.

### B. Testbed

Our Testbed is a 60-node Dell PowerEdge R620 cluster installed at the Department of Computer Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Each node is an Intel Xeon E5-2620 Sandy-bridge server with 6 physical cores @ 2GHz, 2-way SMT with 16GB of DRAM. The Intel Sandy Bridge processor family supports on board power measurement and capping through the Running Average Power Limit (RAPL) interface [1]. The Sandy Bridge architecture has four power planes: Package (PKG), Power Plane 0 (PP0), Power Plane 1 (PP1) and DRAM. RAPL is implemented using a series of Machine Specifics Registers (MSRs) which can be accessed to get power readings for each power plane. RAPL supports power capping PKG, PP0 and DRAM power planes by writing into the relevant MSRs. The package power<sup>3</sup> for our Testbed can be capped in the range 23W to 95W (73 integer power levels) while the memory power can be capped between 8W to 35W (28 integer power levels). The average base power per node for our cluster was 38 watts. The base power was measured using the in-built power meters on the Power Distribution Unit (PDU) that powers our cluster.

In our experiments we will **NOT** be capping the memory power as our work is focused on studying the heterogeneity that comes up at lower CPU power. The effect of lower memory power on heterogeneity is not discussed.

### C. Application used

We used an application, namely, Jacobi2D from the Charm++ test repository. We have manually instrumented this application so that we get the precise timing measurements.

- **Jacobi2D:** A 5-point stencil **memory-bound** application that computes the transmission of heat over a discretized 2D grid. The global 2D grid is divided into smaller blocks that are processed in parallel. It is an iterative application where all processors synchronize

<sup>3</sup>Package corresponds to the processor chip that hosts processing cores, caches and memory controller

at the end of each iteration. As is the case in a stencil computation, each grid point is the average of the neighboring 5 points. For example, the new value for element X (i.e. X') is the current value of X plus the current values of its left, right, top, and bottom neighbors.

$$\begin{array}{c} T \\ L \ X \ R \\ B \end{array}$$

$$X' = (X + L + R + T + B) / 5.0$$

Neighboring blocks communicate the ghost layers with each other so that averaging computations are done for all cells inside each block. This application is implemented in Charm++ using a 2D chare array.

### D. Charm++ & Load Balancing

For this research, we used Charm++ programming paradigm which supports dynamic object migration to improve performance of a parallel application[6]. It relies on techniques such as processor virtualization and over-decomposition (having more work units than the number of cores) to improve performance via adaptive overlap of computation and communication and data-driven execution. Charm++ gives the freedom to the programmer to define program into multiple grain size objects which can be migrated across the cores. The programmer need not make the application core aware. This multiple objects defined by the programmer is moved around during program execution by adaptive runtime system not only for load balancing purposes but also for communication optimization and fault tolerance. Load balancer keeps the statistics of all the migratable objects for effective load balancing act[4]. The runtime system provides load balancing strategies that can account for different application characteristics. Application programmers can provide their own implementation of load balancers based on the characteristics of the application and the ecosystem under which it is run.

### E. Observations

The following observations are made on the execution times of Jacobi2D application run on 10 cluster nodes (of the aforementioned cluster) under different power caps ranging from 23W to 60W. For this particular experiment we have not turned on any load balancer.

Figure2(a) shows how the execution times varied under different power caps. As we can see, execution time of the application increases as we move from higher power to lower power caps. We see an exponential increase of execution time as we move to the lower power values. This is partly due to reduction in frequency as the power level goes down and hence increased execution times. But we also have heterogeneity factor contributing to the increased execution times which will be discussed in the further sections.

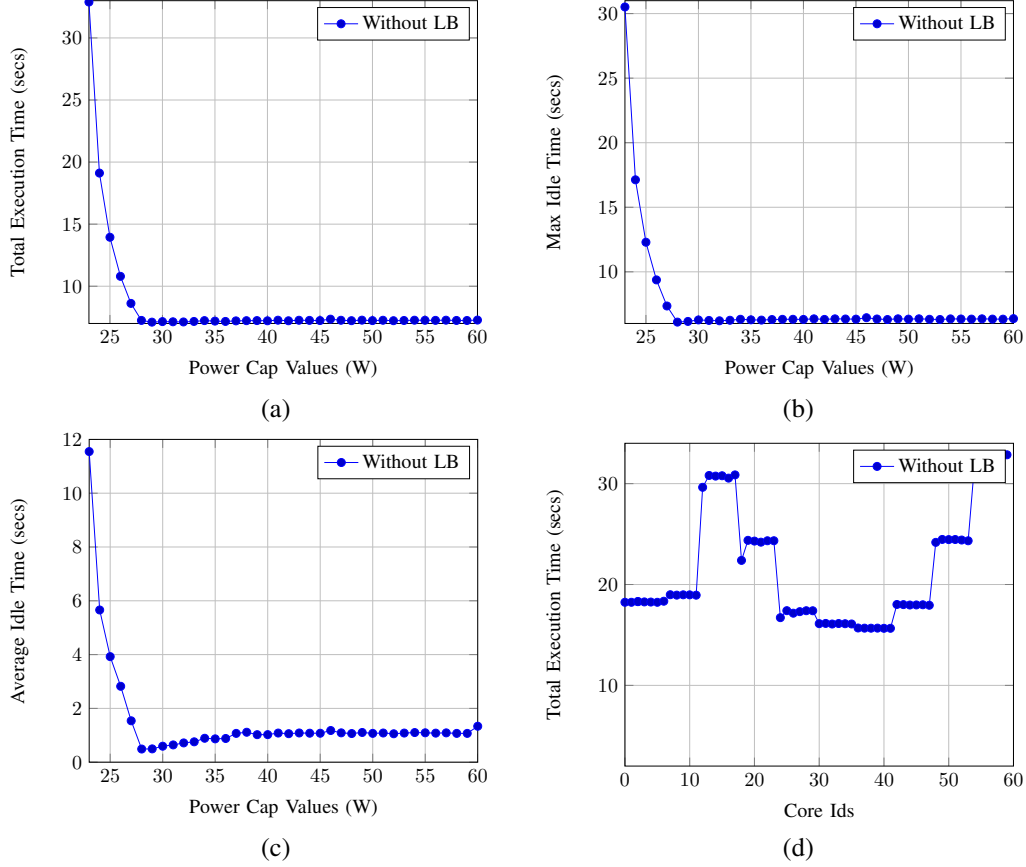


Figure 2: Experiment to highlight the heterogeneity involved among the nodes when Jacobi2D application is run on 10 cluster nodes with different power caps ranging from 23W to 60W. (a) Total Execution Time vs Power (b) Max Idle Time vs Power (c) Average Idle Time vs Power (d) Heterogeneity at Power cap of 23W

Figure 2(b) shows how Max Idle Time metric varies under different power values. As we can see under lower power regions the max idle times increases exponentially. This means the difference in execution times vary a lot under lower power regions. This suggests that there is a big margin between the processors which finish its load quickly and the processor which finished the last. In the next part let's see how average idle times varies under lower power capping regions. This metric gives a better understanding of how the idle time varies across the nodes and not just the difference between the best and the worst performer unlike this graph.

Figure 2(c) how Average Idle Time metric varies under different power values. As we can see the average idle time varies exponentially under lower power capping regions. This shows that most or all processors exhibit different execution times and thereby having different idle times and hence we see increased average idle times under lower power regions. This further establishes the fact that heterogeneity is present across the nodes and not just only with few nodes. Next we will show the extent of heterogeneity among the processors.

Figure 2(d) shows how the execution time has varied across the processors at 23W. As we see we have huge difference in execution times among the processors. The difference in these execution times as we have seen is best captured by max idle time and average idle time graphs. The execution time of the processors within a node is more or less a constant. The execution times vary only among the PEs across the nodes. This shows that heterogeneity holds good across the nodes and not within the same node.

### III. DESIGN OF POWER AWARE LOAD BALANCER

Our second contribution is to minimize the above heterogeneity using the Charm++ load balancing strategies. We first observed the working of existing load balancers like *RefineLB* & *GreedyLB* to understand their efficiency under lower power caps.

#### A. Existing Load-balancers

Load balancing is a technique of distributing computational and communication load evenly across processors of a parallel machine so that no single processor is overloaded. Charm++ implements a generic, measurement-based load

balancing framework which automatically instruments all Charm++ objects, collects computation load and communication structure during execution and stores them into a load balancing database. Charm++ then provides a collection of load balancing strategies whose job is to decide on a new mapping of objects to processors based on the information from the database. These strategies work under the assumption that objects in a Charm++ application tend to exhibit temporal correlation in their computation and communication patterns, i.e. future can be predicted to some extent using the collected data, allowing effective measurement-based load balancing without application-specific knowledge. Following are the two widely used load balancing strategies:

1) *RefineLB*: The objective of this strategy is to move objects away from the most overloaded processors to less overloaded ones so as to reach an average load on each processors. Algorithm 1 shows the pseudo-code for this strategy:

```

Data:  $V_t$ : the set of objects;  $V_p$ : the set of processors
Result: Map:  $V_t \rightarrow V_p$  (An object mapping)
// build a heap of heavily loaded processors and a set
of lightly loaded ones;
ProcessorHeap heavyProcs( $V_p$ );
Set lightProcs( $V_p$ );
while !done do
    donor = heavyProcessors  $\rightarrow$  deleteMax();
    while lighProcs do
        (obj, lightProc)  $\leftarrow$  BestObjFromDonor(donor);
        if obj.load + lightProc.load > avg_load then
            | continue;
        end
        if obj_obtained then
            | break;
        end
        deAssign(obj, donor);
        assign(obj, lightProc);
    end
end

```

**Algorithm 1:** RefineLB Pseudocode

As evident from the above algorithm that it tries to migrate objects based on a global average which is computed as the average of each processor's load. As a result it restricts the number of migrations which is otherwise possible. At lower power cap the opportunity for objects migration will be more due to increased heterogeneity. But this strategy being dependent on a global metric which may stay nearly the same as we go towards the lower power region.

2) *GreedyLB*: This uses a greedy algorithm that always assigns the heaviest object (load-wise) to the least loaded processor.

The assumption for object migration is that the time taken

```

Data:  $V_t$ : the set of chare objects;
 $V_p$ : the set of processors;
 $G_p$ : the background load of processors // due to
non-migratable objects, etc.
Result: Map:  $V_t \rightarrow V_p$  (An object mapping)
// Build a max heap of  $V_t$  ;
MaxHeap objHeap( $|V_t|$ );
objHeap  $\leftarrow V_t$  ;
// Build min heap of  $G_p$ ;
MinHeap cpuHeap( $|V_p|$ );
cpuHeap  $\leftarrow G_p$ ;
for  $i \leftarrow 1$  to  $|objHeap|$  do
    o  $\leftarrow$  objHeap.deleteMax();
    donor  $\leftarrow$  cpuHeap.deleteMin();
    Assign c to donor and record it in Map;
    donor.load += c.load cpuHeap.insert(donor) ;
end

```

**Algorithm 2:** GreedyLB Pseudocode

by the object to execute on a processor will remain the same both before and after the migration. This assumption is valid at higher power caps because (1) all the objects are of same size and (2) at higher power capping values the processors are running at nearly the same frequencies and hence the time taken by a chare to run any of them is nearly equal. But these assumptions fall apart at lower power caps because of the heterogeneity introduced between the processors and as a result it may so happen that the object time would be significantly different after the migration. Algorithm 2 shows the corresponding pseudo-code.

## B. Design: Power Aware Load Balancer

We have established the fact that current load-balancers in charm++ are not power aware. Current Load Balancers do not load balance based on the individual performance of the processor at lower power caps. We have also established that there is a definite scope for improvement in execution time of the application by minimizing the maximum idle and the average idle times of the processor. Our motive behind the design was to make all the processors finish the execution at the same point of time. This approach takes relative speeds of the processors into consideration for balancing the load. We use the object time of the chares, which is defined as the time taken by the chare to run on a particular processor, as a measure of the relative speeds of the processors. We explain in the next section, the reason to choose object time for the load balancing. In this approach we try to average out the execution time by assigning the load in such a way that each of them is assigned exactly that much amount of load which helps all the PEs finish at almost the same time. The following two equations explain our load distribution strategy.

$$(w_1x_1) = (w_2x_2) = (w_3x_3) = \dots = (w_nx_n) \quad (3)$$

$$x_1 + x_2 + x_3 + \dots + x_n = N \quad (4)$$

where,  $w_i, 1 \leq i \leq n$  is the weight (in terms of times) for executing  $x_i$  number of objects on processors  $PE_i$  and  $N$  is the total number of objects. Before the load balancing all the  $x_i$ 's are the same as the Charm++ runtime does an equal distribution of work on each processor. The challenge is to choose the parameter  $w_i$  in such a way that it correctly reflects the heterogeneity in performance of  $i^{th}$  processor at lower power values and on the other hand remain almost the same for higher power figures. We have chosen the metric of object time for this purpose. The next subsection explains our choice. By using the above equation we get the proportionality based on which the number of objects need to be assigned while load balancing. For instance, processor  $PE_1$  could be 2 times faster than  $PE_2$  and  $PE_3$  could be 0.5 times faster than  $PE_2$ . In which case we will have the following proportionality:  $PE_1 : PE_2 : PE_3 = 2 : 1 : 0.5$ . Now based on this proportionality each processor is assigned such a load that everyone can finish their execution at almost the same point of time.

We use the both the equations ( 5) and ( 4) to determine  $x_i$ 's,  $1 \leq i \leq n$ , which is the new load for its respective processors. The newly assigned load  $x_i$  for each of the PEs is proportional to  $w_i$  which we strive to reflect the relative speeds of the processors at a given power cap.

### C. Selection of metric “w”

We have considered processor idletime, processor background time <sup>4</sup> and processor object time <sup>5</sup> as candidates for our selection.

We measure these values for each processor at a power cap of 24W. Figures 3 and 4 show the experimental plots. The metric which has the maximum variance depicts the heterogeneity in the best possible way. In Figure 3(a) percentage change between the maximum and minimum idle time was 0.35, in Figure 3(b) the percentage change between the maximum and minimum background time was 1.41 and in Figure 4 that for processor object time was 4.09. Using the above observations we chose processor's object time as a metric for “w” because this shows the maximum variance at lower power caps.

## IV. RESULTS

We used the existing Charm++ implementation of Jacobi2D and executed the application at different power caps ranging from 23W to 60W. Each execution of the Jacobi2D

<sup>4</sup>Processor background time amounts to the overhead due to non migratable objects on that processor.

<sup>5</sup>A processor's object time is defined as the sum of object times of all the objects executing on that processor.

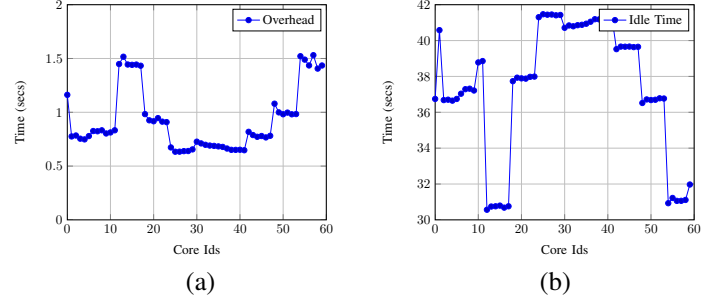


Figure 3: Idle and Background time over the cores at 24W power cap

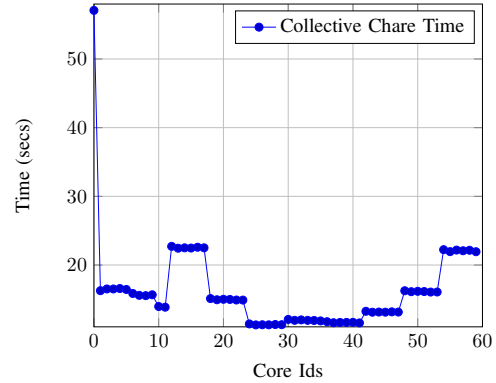


Figure 4: Processor object time on each processor at 24W power cap.

application (at a particular power cap) is done with the following parameters:

- 1) Grid size =  $36000 \times 36000$
- 2) Chare Size(or block size) =  $600 \times 600$
- 3) Number of Iterations = 20

### A. Performance Evaluation Of Power Aware Load Balancer

We run Charm++ applications (1) without load balancing (2) with existing load balancing strategies (like RefineLB and GreedyLB) and (3) with our Power Aware strategy and the results are compared based on the the metrics of heterogeneity, i.e. Equations (1) and (2). Power aware LB <sup>6</sup> has proved to be more efficient than other LBs. The main reason is the frequency awareness our load balancer takes into account while trying to minimize the load among the processors whereas RefineLB and GreedyLB are not aware of the differences in frequency that exists at lower power caps.

Figure 5 shows the execution time of Jacobi2D when run without any LB, with RefineLB, with GreedyLB and with Power-aware LB. Using these execution times speedups are computed in Table I. A maximum speedup of  $1.3 \times$  was

<sup>6</sup>Going forward LB will be used as a short notation for the term “load balancing”

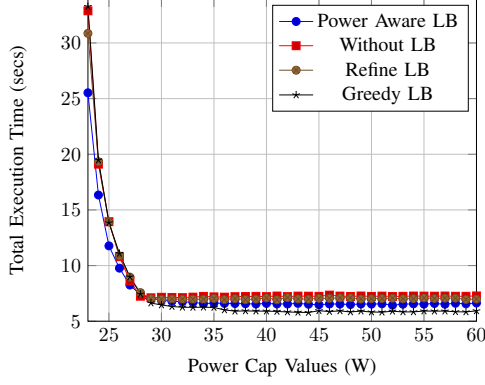


Figure 5: Total Execution Time Vs Power Comparison between LBs

seen when compared to GreedyLB. Maximum speedup of  $1.2\times$  w.r.t to RefineLB and  $1.28\times$  w.r.t without LB. The total execution time when run without any load balancer at 23W power cap is  $\approx 33\text{sec}$ . This is somewhat reduced in case of RefineLB. But the power aware LB is able to decrease is to  $\approx 26\text{sec}$  as shown in figure 5.

Power (W)	$S_{WithoutLB}$	$S_{WithRefineLB}$	$S_{WithGreedyLB}$
27	1.04	1.08	1.08
26	1.10	1.11	1.13
25	1.18	1.18	1.17
24	1.16	1.18	1.19
23	1.28	1.20	1.30

Table I: Speedup,  $S_x = (\text{Application run time with Power Aware LB}) / (\text{Application run time with LB strategy } x)$

There is little or no speed up gain in cases of higher power caps when using the power aware load balancer. The reason behind this is the absence of heterogeneity at higher power caps. The product of processor object time  $w$  and the workload  $x$  comes to be almost the same, and so it leaves power aware LB no scope of further balancing the workload based on frequency. Load imbalance is observed only at lower power caps. Hence, there is very little migration that power aware load balancer does at higher power caps.

Performance of power aware LB is further analyzed with respect to other LBs in terms of heterogeneity metrics average idle time ( $I_{av}$ ) and max idle time ( $I_m$ ). In Table II, for a particular load balancing strategy  $l_{bx}$ , we have measured the percentage reduction in Average Idle time,  $R_{xlb}^{av}$  and percentage reduction in Max Idle time,  $R_{xlb}^m$  as follows:

$$R_{l_{bx}}^{av} = \frac{(I_{av} \text{ for Power Aware LB} - I_{av} \text{ for } l_{bx}) \times 100}{I_{av} \text{ for } l_{bx}}$$

$$R_{l_{bx}}^m = \frac{(I_m \text{ for Power Aware LB} - I_m \text{ for } l_{bx}) \times 100}{I_m \text{ for } l_{bx}} \quad (5)$$

Its evident that Power aware LB has out performed the other

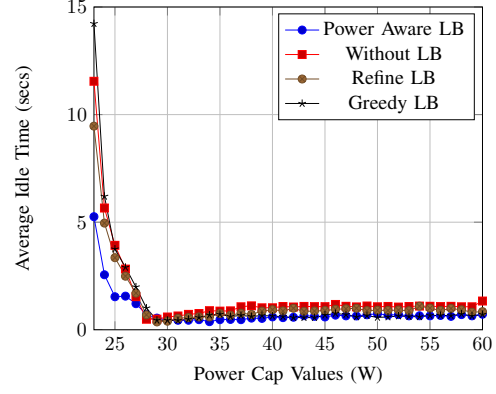


Figure 6: Average Idle Time vs Power Comparison between LBs

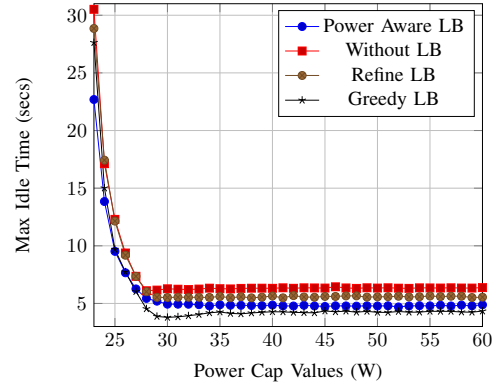


Figure 7: Max Idle Time vs Power Comparison between LBs

existing power unaware LBs in terms of average and max idle times at lower power caps. The average idle time is reduced using the power aware LB by as high as 60% when compared to the average idle time of the run without any LB. If compared with RefineLB and GreedyLB, the reduction is as high as 54% and 63% respectively. The average idle time at 23W comes to be  $\approx 12$ ,  $\approx 10$ ,  $\approx 14$  and  $\approx 5\text{sec}$  for runs without LB, with Refine, Greedy and power aware LBs respectively as shown in figure 6.

Power(W)	$R_{wlb}^{av}$	$R_{rlb}^{av}$	$R_{glb}^{av}$	$R_{wlb}^m$	$R_{rlb}^m$	$R_{glb}^m$
27	21.16	28.78	39.05	14.87	14.85	-3.76
26	44.58	37.21	46.11	18.27	16.57	1.005
25	60.86	54.16	59.05	22.55	21.61	1.78
24	54.81	48.43	58.77	19.17	20.58	7.79
23	54.48	44.46	63.05	25.63	21.36	17.87

Table II: Value of  $R_{l_{bx}}^{av}$  and  $R_{l_{bx}}^m$  at different power values where wlb: Without LB, rlb: With Refine LB, glb: With Greedy LB.

The reduction in maximum idle time is as high as 25% in the presence of power aware LB (It is  $\approx 30\text{sec}$  in the absence of any load balancer and it comes down to  $\approx 23\text{sec}$ ) when



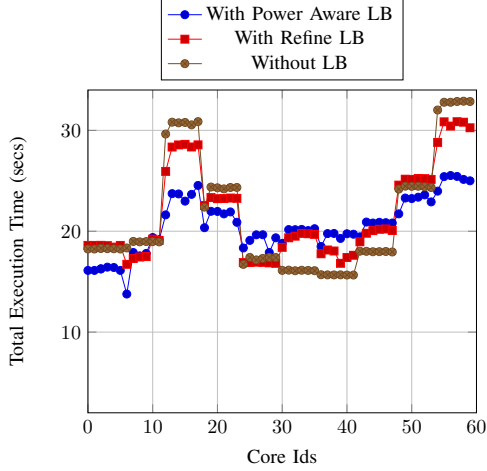


Figure 8: Heterogeneity comparison between LBs at 23W

run at a low power cap of 23W as shown in figure 7. We considered average idle time as a better metric to measure the performance of our load balancer than the max idle time since it is taking average of the idle times. Misbehavior by one node does not pull the average down unlike the max idle time metric.

Power aware LB performs equally well in cases of higher power caps when there is little or no heterogeneity among the nodes.

Another observation of the total execution time is done on a per core basis at 23W. Figure 8 depicts the amount of heterogeneity among the nodes. Further from the same figure we can note that there is a lot of difference in the total execution times by each node in the absence of any load balancer. The total execution time ranges from  $\approx 15 - 35$  sec for the run without any load balancer. RefineLB does not help in minimizing the heterogeneity by a large extent. The range of total execution times remains close to  $\approx 15 - 30$  sec. The power aware load balancer proves to redistribute the workload in a better manner compared to existing Load Balancers. As depicted in figure 8 the range of total execution time has decreased to  $\approx 15 - 25$  sec with most of the nodes closing to the average. The range could be further reduced by making use of node specific information or hard coding based on performance profiling of individual nodes. This profiling information is not incorporated as they make the load balancer usable only for specific applications running on known clusters.

## V. CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE WORK

We observed that the execution time increases with decrease in CPU power, but the rate at which it increases was seen to be different with some nodes performing better than others, leading to performance heterogeneity. This leads to some nodes exhibiting higher performance than others, and thus such nodes tend to have higher idle-times waiting for

other slower ones to complete their iteration, before the next iteration could be started. Heterogeneity is measured in terms of average idle times of the nodes in the cluster. This heterogeneity becomes significant when the power is pulled down to the allowed minimum. This load imbalance leads to more wait times among the nodes and thus there is scope to minimize the imbalance by having a power aware load balancer that gathers information of the initial few iterations and then based on the collected information about the frequency and workload of different nodes, tries to bring down the idle times.

To help mitigate this performance imbalance, we developed a power-aware load balancer that helps in minimizing the heterogeneity. Our load balancer performed better than the existing power-unaware load balancers in the Charm++ framework. It helped reduced the existing amount of heterogeneity and achieve a maximum speed up of 1.3x with respect to other load balancers when used with Jacobi2D application.

The current limitation with this load balancer is that it does not take into account the size of the workload on a particular node. This limits its usage in the applications where the object size varies with time. One such applications that we studied for heterogeneity at lower power regions was LeanMD[7], where there is particle migration happening as the application executes leading to different object sizes at different times.

Our future work aims at making our power-aware load balancer aware of the changing size of the workload, and thus incorporating this parameter while balancing the workload among the various nodes. This work also involves periodic invocation of the load balancer in order to keep the idle times minimized. This has to be done carefully, keeping the overall load balancing workload to the minimum.

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