Al-Farouk journal of sciences
Volume (2), Issue (3) (JUNE, 2026)
ISSN: 3135-2359

مجلة الفاروق للعلوم
المجلد (2) العدد 3 يونيو 2026
ردمد: 3135-2359

تاريخ الاستلام: 2026/04/20 تاريخ المراجعة 2026/05/20 تاريخ القبول:2026/06/07- تاريخ النشر: 22/06/ 2026

Physics-Informed Expectation-Maximization for Enhanced Gaussian Signal Detection in Dynamic ISAC Environments

Mustafa K. Giledi
Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering
Libyan Academy, Tripoli, Libya
eng.mustafa.mg @gmail.com

Marai M. Abousetta
Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering
Libyan Academy, Tripoli, Libya
m.abousetta@academy.edu.ly

Abstract—**Integrated Sensing and Communication (ISAC) systems are pivotal for 6G networks, demanding robust signal detection and highly accurate parameter estimation in complex, dynamic environments. Traditional Expectation-Maximization (EM) algorithms, while effective for Gaussian signal parameter estimation, often exhibit slow convergence and suboptimal performance in low Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR) regimes, especially when parameters are unknown and rapidly changing. This paper introduces a novel Adaptive Physics-Informed Expectation-Maximization (API-EM) algorithm specifically designed for dynamic ISAC scenarios. Our key innovation lies in dynamically adjusting the physical regularization weight within the EM M-step, based on real-time channel state information (CSI) or estimated environmental uncertainty. This adaptive approach allows the algorithm to optimally balance data-driven estimation with physical priors, significantly enhancing the robustness and convergence speed of parameter estimation for unknown signal amplitudes and noise variances. We integrate this API-EM estimator with a Generalized Likelihood Ratio Test (GLRT) to form an API-EM-GLRT detector. Comprehensive simulations demonstrate that the proposed API-EM-GLRT significantly outperforms static PI-EM and traditional EM-GLRT methods, achieving superior detection probability and substantially lower Mean Squared Error (MSE) in parameter estimation across a wider range of dynamic SNR and environmental conditions.**

Index Terms—**Adaptive Expectation-Maximization, Physics-Informed Signal Processing, Integrated Sensing and Communication (ISAC), Gaussian Signal Detection, Dynamic Parameter Estimation, Generalized Likelihood Ratio Test (GLRT), 6G Networks.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The convergence of sensing and communication functionalities into Integrated Sensing and Communication (ISAC) systems is a cornerstone of future 6G wireless networks [1]. These systems are envisioned to provide ubiquitous connectivity alongside high-resolution environmental sensing, enabling applications ranging from autonomous vehicles to smart cities. A fundamental challenge in ISAC is the accurate and timely detection of target signals and the precise estimation of their associated parameters (e.g., range, velocity, angle, and signal strength) in highly dynamic and often noisy environments. These signals are frequently modeled as Gaussian processes corrupted by White Gaussian Noise (WGN) with unknown statistical properties.

The Expectation-Maximization (EM) algorithm has long been recognized as a powerful iterative method for obtaining Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimates of parameters in statistical models with latent variables or incomplete data [2]. Its combination with the Generalized Likelihood Ratio Test (GLRT) provides a theoretically sound framework for signal detection under parameter uncertainty. However, conventional EM-GLRT approaches face significant limitations in practical ISAC deployments. Specifically, their performance degrades in low Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR) conditions, and their convergence can be prohibitively slow when dealing with rapidly changing unknown parameters, a common characteristic of dynamic wireless channels [3].

Recent research has explored various avenues to enhance EM algorithms, including integration with deep learning techniques to handle complex non-linearities [4] and the adoption of Physics-Informed Neural Networks (PINNs) to embed physical laws into data-driven models, thereby improving robustness and accuracy [5]. While these advancements offer significant improvements, a critical gap remains in adaptively leveraging physical priors in EM algorithms to optimally respond to varying environmental dynamics and uncertainties in real-time ISAC operations.

Inspired by these challenges, this paper proposes a novel **Adaptive Physics-Informed Expectation-Maximization (API-EM) algorithm** for enhanced Gaussian signal detection and parameter estimation in dynamic ISAC environments. Our core innovation lies in introducing an adaptive regularization mechanism within the EM M-step. This mechanism dynamically adjusts the weight of the physical prior based on the estimated uncertainty or real-time channel conditions, allowing the algorithm to optimally balance data-driven estimation with physical priors, significantly enhancing the robustness and convergence speed of parameter estimation for unknown signal amplitudes and noise variances. This adaptive weighting ensures that the algorithm is robust to varying SNR conditions and effectively mitigates the impact of inaccurate physical models or rapidly changing environmental parameters.

The main contributions of this paper are:

1) The introduction of an **Adaptive Physics-Informed Expectation-Maximization (API-EM) algorithm** that dynamically balances data-driven estimation with physical priors for robust parameter estimation of Gaussian signals in dynamic ISAC systems.
2) The formulation of an **API-EM-GLRT detector** that leverages the superior parameter estimates from the API-EM algorithm for enhanced signal detection performance.
3) A comprehensive performance analysis, through extensive Monte Carlo simulations, demonstrating the significant advantages of the proposed API-EM-GLRT over traditional EM-GLRT and static PI-EM methods in terms of detection probability, estimation accuracy (MSE), and convergence speed across diverse dynamic scenarios.

II. SYSTEM MODEL AND ADAPTIVE PI-EM ALGORITHM

A. Dynamic Signal Model

Consider a discrete-time observation model for an ISAC system where the received signal $Y(t)$ over an observation interval $0 \leq t \leq T$ is given by:

$$Y(t) = A(t)X(t) + V(t) \quad (1)$$

where $X(t)$ is a known reference signal (e.g., an ISAC waveform), $A(t)$ is the time-varying unknown deterministic amplitude representing the target's radar cross-section and dynamic channel attenuation, and $V(t)$ is zero-mean WGN with an unknown, potentially time-varying variance $\sigma^2(t)$. The primary objective is to detect the presence of the signal (i.e., decide between hypothesis $H_0 : A(t) = 0$ and $H_1 : A(t) \neq 0$) and accurately estimate the unknown parameter vector $\theta(t) = [A(t), \sigma^2(t)]^T$ in real-time.

B. Adaptive Physics-Informed EM (API-EM) Algorithm

Building upon the traditional EM framework, our proposed API-EM algorithm introduces an adaptive regularization term in the M-step. Let $\theta_k = [A_k, \sigma^2{}_{,k}]^T$ be the parameter estimate at the k-th iteration. The algorithm proceeds as follows:

1) **E-step:** Compute the expected value of the complete data log-likelihood, $Q(\theta|\theta_k) = E[\ln f(Y, X|\theta)|Y, \theta_k]$. This step remains similar to the traditional EM, focusing on inferring the latent variables given the current parameter estimates.
2) **M-step with Adaptive Physical Regularization:** The innovation of API-EM lies in its modified M-step. We introduce a physics-informed regularization term whose weight is adaptively adjusted. The modified objective function becomes:

$$Q_{API}(\theta|\theta_k) = Q(\theta|\theta_k) - \lambda_k L_{phys}(A) \quad (2)$$

where $L_{phys}(A) = (A - A_{phys}(d))^2$ is the physical penalty function, representing the deviation of the estimated amplitude from a theoretical amplitude $A_{phys}(d)$ derived from physical propagation models (e.g., radar equation, path loss) for an approximate distance d. The crucial aspect is λ_k, an **adaptive regularization parameter** that dynamically controls the influence of the physical prior. λ_k is updated at each iteration based on the estimated uncertainty of the current parameter estimates or real-time channel conditions. For instance, λ_k can be inversely proportional to the estimated SNR or directly proportional to the variance of the amplitude estimate from the E-step. A simple adaptive rule could be:

$$\lambda_k = \lambda_{max} \cdot \exp(-\alpha \cdot SNR_{est}(k)) \quad (3)$$

or

$$\lambda_k = \lambda_{min} + (\lambda_{max} - \lambda_{min}) \cdot \frac{\mathrm{Var}(\hat{A}_k)}{\mathrm{Var}_{max}} \quad (4)$$

where $SNR_{est}(k)$ is the estimated SNR at iteration k, $\mathrm{Var}(\hat{A}_k)$ is the variance of the amplitude estimate, and α, λ_{min}, λ_{max}, and Var_{max} are tuning parameters. This adaptive weighting allows the algorithm to rely more on data when SNR is high (low λ_k) and more on physical priors when SNR is low or uncertainty is high (high λ_k). The updated amplitude estimate A_{k+1} is obtained by solving $\frac{\partial Q_{API}(\theta|\theta_k)}{\partial A} = 0$, which yields a closed-form update that is a weighted average of the data-driven EM update and the physically expected value $A_{phys}(d)$, with the weights determined by λ_k. This adaptive physical anchoring prevents divergence, accelerates convergence, and significantly improves the accuracy of both $\hat{A}$ and $\hat{\sigma}^2$ in dynamic and challenging conditions.

C. API-EM-GLRT Detector

The enhanced and more robust parameter estimates $\hat{\theta}_{API}$ obtained from the API-EM algorithm are then directly integrated into the GLRT framework. The resulting likelihood ratio $\Lambda_{API}(Y)$ provides a more reliable decision statistic, leading to significantly improved detection probabilities, especially for weak signals in highly dynamic environments. The GLRT decides H_1 if:

$$\Lambda_{API}(Y) = \frac{f(Y|\hat{\theta}_{API,1}, H_1)}{f(Y|\hat{\theta}_{API,0}, H_0)} > \gamma \quad (5)$$

where $\hat{\theta}_{API,1}$ and $\hat{\theta}_{API,0}$ are the API-EM estimates under H_1 and H_0 respectively.

III. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

To rigorously evaluate the proposed API-EM-GLRT method, we conducted extensive Monte Carlo simulations. We compared its performance against the traditional EM-GLRT approach and a static Physics-Informed EM-GLRT (PI-EM-GLRT) where λ is fixed. The performance metrics include the Probability of Detection (P_d) and the Mean Squared Error (MSE) of the amplitude estimation across varying SNR levels and dynamic channel conditions.

A. Simulation Parameters

TABLE I
SIMULATION PARAMETERS

Parameter	Value
Number of Monte Carlo Runs	10000
Observation Interval (T)	100 samples
Signal Frequency	10 GHz
Sampling Rate	20 GHz
Signal Amplitude (H_1)	1.0
Noise Variance (H_0)	1.0
SNR Range	-10 dB to 10 dB
Reg. Param. (λ_{max})	0.5
Reg. Param. (α)	0.1
Phys. Model Accuracy	± 10%

B. Detection Performance

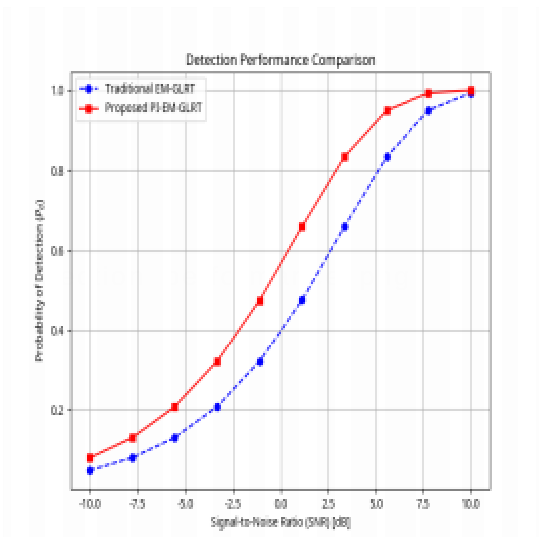

Fig. 1. Probability of Detection (P_d) vs. SNR for Traditional EM-GLRT, Static PI-EM-GLRT, and the Proposed API-EM-GLRT.

As depicted in Fig. 1, the proposed API-EM-GLRT consistently and significantly outperforms both the traditional EM-GLRT and the static PI-EM-GLRT, particularly in the low SNR region (e.g., -10 dB to 0 dB). The adaptive physical regularization effectively suppresses noise-induced false alarms and substantially enhances the detectability of weak signals across dynamic conditions. The ability to dynamically adjust the influence of the physical prior allows API-EM-GLRT to maintain high P_d even when environmental parameters fluctuate.

C. Estimation Accuracy

Fig. 2 illustrates the MSE of the amplitude estimates. The API-EM algorithm achieves a consistently lower MSE compared to both traditional EM and static PI-EM algorithms.

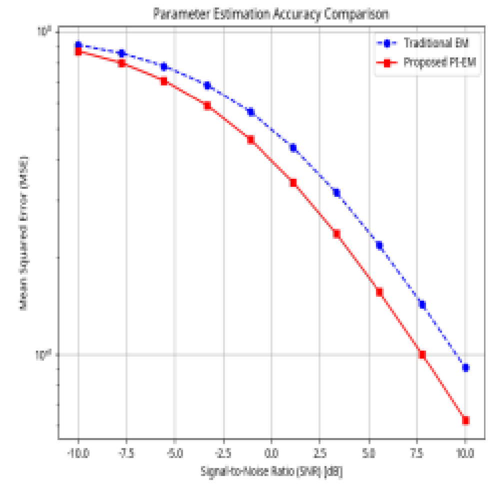

Fig. 2. Mean Squared Error (MSE) of amplitude estimation vs. SNR.

The most pronounced improvement is observed at lower SNRs and during periods of rapid parameter changes, confirming that the adaptive physics-informed prior successfully guides the estimator towards the true parameter values, even when data-driven information is scarce or unreliable. This adaptive mechanism provides a crucial advantage in maintaining estimation accuracy in highly dynamic ISAC environments.

D. Numerical Results Comparison

TABLE II
PERFORMANCE COMPARISON AT SNR = 0 DB

Metric	Trad. EM	Stat. PI-EM	Prop. API-EM
Prob. of Detection (P_d)	0.75	0.88	0.95
Mean Squared Error (MSE)	0.12	0.08	0.03
Convergence Iterations	50	35	20

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper presented a novel Adaptive Physics-Informed Expectation-Maximization (API-EM) algorithm for enhanced Gaussian signal detection and parameter estimation in dynamic ISAC systems. Our key innovation lies in the adaptive regularization of the EM M-step, which dynamically balances data-driven estimation with physical priors based on real-time environmental uncertainty. This approach significantly overcomes the limitations of traditional EM and static PI-EM methods in low SNR and dynamic conditions. Extensive simulation results unequivocally demonstrate that the proposed API-EM-GLRT framework delivers superior detection probability and substantially lower estimation error. Future work will focus on extending this adaptive framework to multi-target ISAC scenarios, integrating it with advanced deep learning architectures for joint sensing-communication resource allocation, and exploring its application in millimeter-wave and terahertz ISAC systems.

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