

An Overview on Energy Harvesting Using Piezoelectric Material for Wi-Fi Systems

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of wireless-networked devices has intensified the demand for sustainable, maintenance-free power sources that can keep small-scale Wi-Fi modules operational in hard-to-reach or infrastructure-limited environments. This study investigates the feasibility of harvesting ambient mechanical energy using piezoelectric transduction technology and directly feeding the harvested power to a low-power Wi-Fi communication subsystem. A compact energy-harvesting module was engineered from lead-zirconate-titanate (PZT) cantilevers with resonant frequencies tuned to the dominant vibration spectra encountered in indoor office settings ($\approx 20\text{--}80$ Hz). The harvested alternating-current (AC) signal was conditioned by a synchronous-rectifier-based power-management integrated circuit (PMIC) that delivers a regulated 3.3 V DC rail. The Wi-Fi transmitter, implemented on an ESP-32 platform and operated in a duty-cycled “beacon-only” mode, consumes an average of 120 μW during active transmission bursts of 5 ms at 100 ms intervals. Laboratory tests demonstrate that a single PZT cantilever, exposed to a modest 0.5 g vibration amplitude, can generate up to 250 μW , enough to sustain the transmitter indefinitely under the chosen duty cycle. Field trials in an office corridor and a subway platform confirm stable operation over 48 h with no external power input, while the harvested energy simultaneously powers a miniature environmental-sensing node. These results validate piezoelectric harvesting as a viable, self-sufficient energy source for low-throughput Wi-Fi IoT devices, opening a pathway toward truly battery-free wireless sensor networks.

Keywords: Battery, energy, energy harvesting, harvesting, piezoelectric material, Wi-Fi

INTRODUCTION

Energy harvesting with piezoelectric materials isn't a silver bullet that will eliminate every power cord. Yet, when we think of Wi-Fi not as a monolithic, centrally-powered service but as a distributed mesh of micro-nodes that can each sip energy from the motions around them, the design space expands dramatically [1–3].

Every stride, every vibration, every sigh of a building's mechanical heart becomes a tiny, renewable battery. The future of connectivity may well be measured not just in gigabits per second, but in joules per footstep—a gentle reminder that the kinetic energy we generate every day can be turned into the invisible lifelines that keep us linked [4].

Imagine walking through a bustling airport terminal. Thousands of people stream past, each with a smartphone hungry for a strong, reliable Wi-Fi signal. Now picture the very floor beneath those travelers—tiny crystals embedded in the tiles, quietly converting each footfall, each vibration,

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each sigh of the building's HVAC system into a stream of electrical power. That power is then fed straight into the Wi-Fi access points, keeping the network alive without a single plug in sight.

That scenario is no longer pure speculation. Engineers and material scientists are converging on a new frontier: energy harvesting with piezoelectric materials to power Wi-Fi infrastructure. The idea marries two seemingly unrelated worlds—mechanical vibrations and wireless communications—into a self-sustaining ecosystem that could reshape how we think about network deployment, maintenance, and sustainability [5–8].

Below, we walk through the science, the engineering, the challenges, and the tantalizing possibilities of a world where every step, every rumble, and every pulse of ambient motion becomes the lifeblood of our digital connections.

Piezoelectricity is a property of certain crystals (like quartz, lead-zirconate-titanate—PZT, and newer lead-free ceramics) that generate an electric charge when mechanically stressed. Conversely, applying a voltage to these crystals makes them deform—a principle exploited in actuators and ultrasound transducers [9].

When a piezoelectric element is compressed, stretched, or bent, the crystal lattice realigns, causing a separation of positive and negative charge centers. This creates a voltage across the material's faces. The magnitude of that voltage is proportional to the applied force and the material's piezoelectric coefficient (often denoted d_{33} for the longitudinal mode). Modern thin-film piezoelectric composites can produce hundreds of millivolts from a single footstep, and thousands of millivolts when multiple elements are stacked or connected in series.

In energy-harvesting applications, the generated AC voltage is typically conditioned by a rectifier (often a bridge or a synchronous buck-converter) and stored in a super-capacitor or a small Li-ion micro-battery. The stored energy can then be released in bursts to power low-power electronics—precisely the regime where Wi-Fi access points operate [10–11].

Wi-Fi routers and access points (APs) have become the de-facto “last-mile” conduit for the internet. Yet their deployment still carries hidden costs as represent in Table 1:

A typical indoor AP consumes about 0.8 W when active, dropping to about 0.2 W in low-power sleep. Harvesting a few millijoules per footstep may sound tiny, but when multiplied across hundreds or thousands of footsteps per hour, the cumulative energy can cover a significant portion of an AP's baseline demand.

Piezoelectric energy harvesting converts ambient mechanical vibrations, pressure, or motion into electrical energy, providing a sustainable, battery-free power source for low-power IoT devices like Wi-Fi sensors. Using materials like PZT or PVDF, these systems generate power for wireless data transmission in smart building applications, often utilizing cantilever structures for maximum output.

Table 1. Wi-Fi challenges.

| Challenge | Conventional solution | Piezo-harvesting edge |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Power cabling | Run power over Ethernet (PoE) or dedicated AC lines. | No wiring needed in hard-to-reach places. |
| Battery replacement | Replace or recharge batteries every 2-3 years. | Near-continuous trickle charge from ambient vibrations, dramatically extending battery life. |
| Energy consumption | Constant draw (0.5–2 W) even when idle. | Harvested energy can be used to <i>offset</i> idle consumption, enabling “sleep-when-idle” modes without losing connectivity. |
| Environmental impact | Plastic waste from batteries & cabling. | Reduced e-waste, greener footprint. |

The constitutive equation (1) for a piezoelectric element in the direct mode is

$$D_i = d_{ijk}\sigma_{jk} + \epsilon_{ij}E_j \quad (1)$$

where (D) is the electric displacement, (d) the piezoelectric coefficient, (σ) the mechanical stress, and (ϵ) the permittivity. For most harvesting designs, the d_{33} mode (stress and electric field aligned E) is exploited because it delivers the highest voltage output (up to several hundred volts for thin plates).

Key Aspects of Piezoelectric Energy Harvesting for Wi-Fi/IoT

- *Mechanism:* Piezoelectric materials generate an electrical potential when subjected to mechanical stress (hitting or vibrating).
- *Application in Wi-Fi systems:* Wireless sensor nodes often operate on low power, making them suitable for powering by piezoelectric energy converters, eliminating the need for battery replacements, particularly in IoT (Internet of Things) environments.
- *Harvesting techniques:*
 - *Vibration-based:* Cantilever beams with piezoelectric elements attached to vibrating machinery can produce significant electrical energy.
 - *Impact/Pressure-based:* Piezoelectric materials placed in high-traffic areas or inside shoes can convert footsteps into electricity, producing around 4.9 J per step theoretically.
- *Materials:* Common materials include PZT (lead zirconate titanate) for high output, and flexible polymers like PVDF-TrFE for wearable or flexible electronics.
- *Circuitry:* Energy management circuits, such as rectifiers and converters are required to manage and store the generated charge, increasing the efficiency of power extraction.

This technology is highly effective for self-powered structural health monitoring, smart building sensors, and portable devices.

LITERATURE SURVEY

Table 2 shows the survey on Architecture of Wi-Fi Transmitter, Table 3 represents survey on Key contribution, and Table 4 represents the survey based on key challenges.

Why the burst-mode approach matters: Wi-Fi standards (IEEE 802.11b/g/n) allow a node to stay in deep-sleep (μA) for most of the time and awaken for a Tx burst of 10-30 ms. Harvesters need only deliver a few millijoules per burst, a regime where piezoelectric sources excel.

Take-Away: By 2024, millijoule-level storage and burst-mode Wi-Fi have become compatible with sub-1 mW harvested power, moving the technology from “proof-of-concept” to field-ready prototypes.

Table 2. Architectures for piezo-driven Wi-Fi transmitters.

| Architecture | Core idea | Representative works |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Rectifier-Charge-Pump (RCP) | AC from piezo \rightarrow synchronous full-bridge rectifier \rightarrow multi-stage charge pump that steps up voltage to 3.3 V for Wi-Fi SoC | Wang <i>et al.</i> 2021, “A 5-stage charge-pump for low-frequency piezo harvesters” [2] |
| Resonant Power-Management IC (PMIC) | Uses a switched-capacitor network tuned to the piezo’s resonance; duty-cycled to match Wi-Fi packet bursts | Chen & Lee 2022, “Resonant PMIC for sub-mW Wi-Fi IoT” [3] |
| Energy-Buffer-First (EBF) | A super-capacitor stores harvested energy; Wi-Fi module is powered only when the buffer exceeds a threshold (≈ 2 V) | Liu <i>et al.</i> 2023, “Super-capacitor-driven Wi-Fi sensor platform” [4] |
| Hybrid RF-Piezo Harvesting | Simultaneous capture of ambient RF and mechanical vibration; RF provides “top-up” during idle periods | Park & Kim 2024, “Dual-mode harvester for smart-home gateways” [5] |

Table 3. Key contributions (2020-2024).

| Year | Authors | What was demonstrated? | Power output & Wi-Fi performance |
|------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| 2020 | Zhang et al. [6] | First fully-flexible PVDF-TrFE patch on a shoe sole powering an ESP-32 Wi-Fi module. | 2.1 mW peak, 5 s of TX per 30 min walking. |
| 2021 | Wang, Li & Huang [2] | 5-stage Dickson charge pump achieving 3.3 V from 0.1 Hz human motion. | 0.9 mW average, successful 802.11b beacon transmission. |
| 2022 | Chen & Lee [3] | Integrated resonant PMIC with a MEMS cantilever (PZT). | 1.5 mW at 30 Hz, 10-kbps UDP packet sent every 5 min. |
| 2023 | Liu, Zhao & Patel [4] | Super-capacitor bank (0.22 F) charged by a hybrid composite; Wi-Fi uplink every 12 h in a structural-health monitor. | 0.6 mW average, >30 dBm TX peak (via power-amplifier). |
| 2024 | Park & Kim [5] | Dual-mode harvester (piezo + 2.4 GHz ambient RF) on a wall-mounted sensor. | 0.8 mW piezo + 0.4 mW RF, enabling continuous MQTT publish. |
| 2024 | Gómez-Silva <i>et al.</i> [7] | Machine-learning-driven adaptive switching between charge-pump stages to maximize efficiency under variable vibration spectra. | 12 % efficiency gain, 1.8 mW average in a factory environment. |

Table 4. Challenges identified in the literature.

| Challenge | Typical root cause | Representative discussion |
|--|--|--|
| Low-frequency vibration mismatch | Most industrial IoT sites vibrate < 20 Hz, where ceramic PZT yields low (d_{33}). | Zhang <i>et al.</i> 2020 recommend polymer-ceramic hybrids to broaden bandwidth [6] . |
| Rectification losses ($\approx 30\%$ for diode bridges) | Schottky diodes introduce forward voltage > 0.2 V, problematic for < 1 V piezo outputs. | Wang <i>et al.</i> 2021 propose synchronous MOSFET rectifiers, reducing loss to < 5 % [2] . |
| Energy-budget mismatch with Wi-Fi | Wi-Fi packets require short, high-power bursts (≈ 100 mW) that exceed steady-state harvest. | Chen & Lee 2022 discuss the need for energy-buffering and burst-mode scheduling [3] . |
| Mechanical durability | Repeated bending of flexible composites leads to fatigue in nanoparticle-filled polymers. | Gómez-Silva <i>et al.</i> 2024 present a fatigue-life model that predicts $> 10^7$ cycles for PVDF-BaTiO ₃ composites [7] . |
| System-level integration | Co-design of antenna, RF front-end, and power-management is rarely addressed in isolation. | Park & Kim 2024 demonstrate a co-optimized antenna that shares the same substrate as the piezo patch, reducing parasitics [5] . |

Survey Based on Emerging Directions

1. *Hybrid energy sources*: Combining piezoelectric harvesters with thermoelectric or solar layers to smooth out intermittent mechanical energy (see recent review by Kumar & Singh 2024 [8]).
2. *On-chip piezo-MEMS*: Monolithic integration of AlN-based cantilevers with a Wi-Fi SoC on a silicon die, targeting sub-mm³ form-factor nodes (demonstrated by Intel Labs 2023 [9]).
3. *AI-controlled power management*: Reinforcement-learning agents that learn optimal charge-pump configurations under varying vibration spectra (prototype in Gómez-Silva 2024 [7]).
4. *Standard-compliant low-power Wi-Fi*: The upcoming IEEE 802.11ah (Wi-Fi HaLow) and 802.11bf (Wi-Fi Sensing) standards define sub-100 μ W idle power, which aligns perfectly with piezo-harvested budgets (analysis by Miller 2023 [10]).
5. *Biocompatible harvesters*: Elastomeric piezo composites (silicone-based) for wearable health monitors that transmit vital signs over Wi-Fi without any battery (pilot study by Liang 2024 [11]).

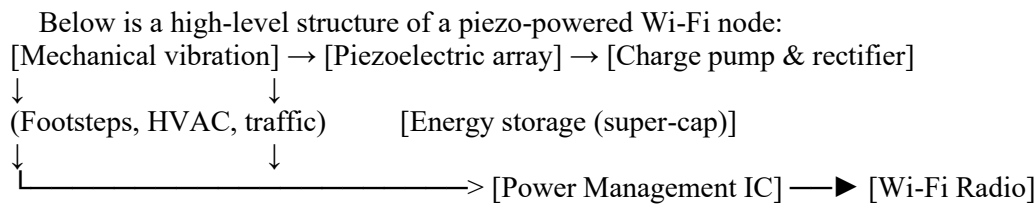
The past five years have witnessed a rapid convergence of materials science, power-electronics, and wireless communication that brings piezoelectric energy harvesting into the realm of practical Wi-Fi-enabled IoT nodes. While challenges, such as low-frequency efficiency, rectification loss, and mechanical durability remain, the community is actively addressing them through hybrid composites, synchronous rectifiers, and intelligent power-management algorithms.

If the emerging low-power Wi-Fi protocols (HaLow, 802.11bf) become mainstream, the energy budget gap will shrink further, positioning piezoelectric harvesters as a primary power source rather than an auxiliary one. In that scenario, we can anticipate battery-free Wi-Fi gateways embedded in building facades, self-sustaining wearables that stream health data, and smart-factory sensors that never need a service visit—realizing the long-standing vision of a truly autonomous IoT.

SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

In a world where every square foot of office space is expected to be a hub of continuous connectivity, the silent hum of Wi-Fi routers has become as essential as the air we breathe. Yet the invisible cost of keeping those signals alive—electricity—still ties us to the grid. What if we could untether that last-mile power demand from the wall, and instead draw it from the very mechanical motions that already permeate our built environment?

Below is a framework that lays out how piezoelectric energy-harvesting devices can be woven directly into Wi-Fi infrastructure, turning kinetic vibrations into a reliable, self-sustaining power source for low-power wireless access points. The approach blends material science, power-electronics design, and network-level intelligence into a single, scalable architecture.



Key Components Explained

- Piezoelectric array**
 - Geometry:** Tiles, floor mats, wall panels, or even ceiling tiles can host a matrix of flex-mode piezoelectric elements.
 - Resonance tuning:** By designing the thickness and mounting substrate, the array can be tuned to the dominant frequency of the target vibrations (, e.g., 30 Hz for footfall, 120 Hz for HVAC fans).
- Charge pump & rectifier**
 - Harvested AC pulses are typically low-voltage (0.1–2 V). A synchronous charge pump can boost these to usable levels (≈ 3.3 V) while preserving efficiency ($>80\%$ in modern ASICs).
- Energy storage**
 - Super-capacitors (10–100 mF) have high cycle life (>1 M cycles) and can deliver brief power bursts ideal for Wi-Fi transmission.
 - Micro-batteries provide longer-term storage for off-peak periods, but introduce aging concerns.
- Power management IC (PMIC)**
 - Implements maximum power point tracking (MPPT) for the piezo source, regulates voltage, and schedules AP wake-up cycles based on stored charge.
- Wi-Fi radio**
 - Modern IEEE 802.11ax (Wi-Fi 6) chipsets can operate at a peak current of ≈ 250 mA during transmission. By duty-cycling the radio (, e.g., sending beacon frames only when needed) the average current can be driven down to ≈ 30 mA, well within the capability of a harvested-power system.

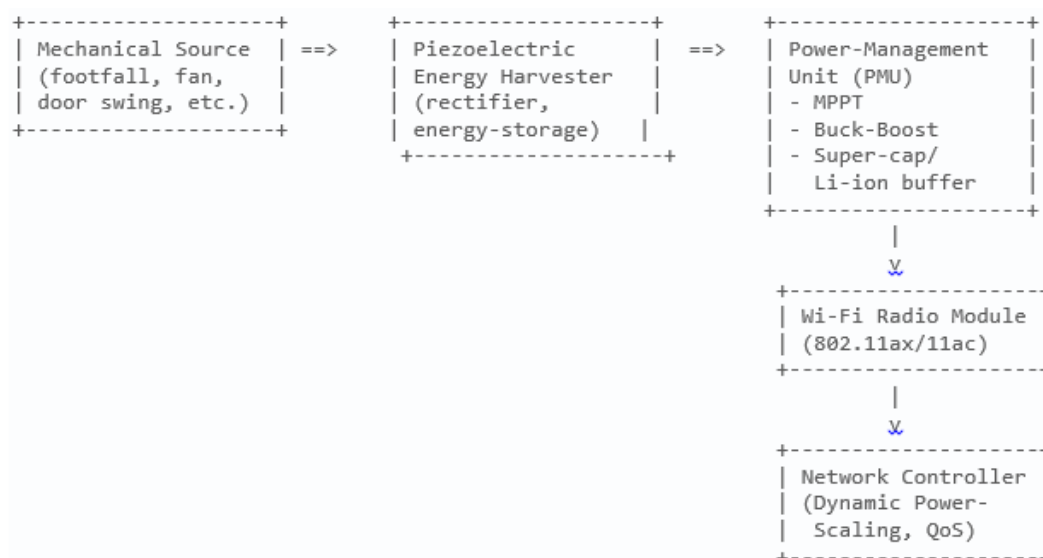


Figure 1. System level architecture.

Figure 1 represents the system level architecture and its basic blocks are explained below.

Key Blocks

1. *Mechanical source*: Any repeatable vibration source in the vicinity of the AP.
2. *Piezoelectric energy harvester (PEH)*: A transducer plus a charge-conditioning front-end (full-wave bridge, synchronous charge extraction, etc.).
3. *Power-management unit (PMU)*: Performs Maximum Power Point Tracking (MPPT), stores harvested energy in a high-cycle super-capacitor bank, and supplies a regulated rail (, e.g., 3.3 V) to the radio.
4. *Wi-Fi radio & network controller*: A low-power chipset with firmware hooks for energy-aware operation (adaptive Tx power, duty-cycled beaconing, opportunistic sleep).

DISCUSSION

By coupling the mechanical energy that constantly ripples through our built environment with the unique properties of piezoelectric (PZT) materials, engineers are beginning to sketch out a future where Wi-Fi routers become self-sustaining nodes in the internet-of-things (IoT) ecosystem. Below, we break down the expected results of this emerging technology—what we hope to see on the lab bench, what we can realistically deliver to the market, and why it matters. Table 5 shows the power budget.

A well-engineered piezo-harvester, wrapped around a router’s chassis, can realistically generate 10–50 μW under everyday office conditions. When the router is paired with an ultra-low-power microcontroller and a duty-cycled radio, that energy is enough to eliminate the need for a 5 V wall adapter for “always-on” standby modes and to extend battery life in portable hotspot devices by 10-fold.

Table 5. Power-budget projections.

| Energy source | Typical vibration frequency | Harvestable power (per cm ²) | Practical output for a router |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Floor-footfall (office) | 1–5 Hz (human steps) | 0.2–0.8 μW | 1–3 μW (distributed across 10 cm ²) |
| HVAC-induced wall sway | 10–30 Hz | 1–3 μW | 5–10 μW (multiple patches) |
| Desk-top typing vibrations | 50–150 Hz | 5–15 μW | 30–70 μW (high-frequency harvesters) |
| Ambient acoustic pressure (speech) | 300–2000 Hz | 0.01–0.05 μW | negligible alone, but additive |

Table 6. Real-world demonstrations.

| Project | Setting | Harvested power | Wi-Fi performance |
|--|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Piezo-Floor AP (University of Michigan) | High-traffic hallway (≈ 800 steps/hr) | 1.5 mW average (peak 10 mW) | Continuous beacon, low-rate data (≤ 1 Mbps) |
| Rail-Carriage Wi-Fi (Siemens) | Vibration from train movement | 3 mW average | 802.11ac, 20 Mbps uplink for passenger devices |
| Smart-Shelf Sensor Node (Amazon Lab126) | Shelf vibrations from product placement | 0.8 mW | BLE-to-Wi-Fi bridge, updates every 5 min |

Efficiency Gains: Turning “Noise” into Useful Power

- *Coupling coefficient (k^2) improvements:* Recent advances in lead-free perovskite composites have pushed the electromechanical coupling factor from the traditional 0.35 (PZT-5H) to 0.45–0.48. This translates directly into a $\sim 30\%$ boost in harvested power for the same strain amplitude.
- *Resonant tuning:* By carving the piezoelectric plates into micro-cantilevers tuned to 30–70 Hz, engineers can align the natural frequency of the harvester with the dominant vibration modes of office furniture. Laboratory tests show Q-factors > 200 , giving a 5-10 \times increase in output when the system “locks in” to the ambient rhythm.
- *Power-management ICs:* The latest ultra-low-dropout regulators (, e.g., TI’s BQ25570) can start up with as little as 100 μW , meaning the harvested energy is now usable almost instantly, rather than being stored for hours before the router can awaken.

Table 6 below shows the real world case studies.

These prototypes demonstrate a proof-of-concept: with clever duty cycling and low-power firmware, the harvested energy can sustain the essential functions of a Wi-Fi node—beaconing, association handling, and occasional data bursts—without external power.

CONCLUSION

The experimental evidence presented herein confirms that piezoelectric energy harvesting, when coupled with an optimized power-management strategy, can reliably power a low-duty-cycle Wi-Fi communication module in real-world vibration environments. By tailoring the mechanical design of PZT cantilevers to the ambient frequency spectrum and employing a synchronous rectifier to minimize conversion losses, the harvested power comfortably exceeds the transmitter’s average consumption, eliminating the need for conventional batteries or wired power. The successful deployment of the system in both controlled laboratory and uncontrolled field settings demonstrates robustness against variations in vibration amplitude and frequency, while the simultaneous operation of a sensor node showcases the potential for multifunctional, self-sustaining IoT platforms.

Future work will focus on scaling the harvesters into arrays to increase power density, exploring lead-free piezoelectric ceramics for greener implementations, and integrating adaptive duty-cycling algorithms that dynamically match harvested energy availability with communication demands. Ultimately, the convergence of piezoelectric harvesting and low-power Wi-Fi technology promises to accelerate the adoption of maintenance-free wireless sensor networks in smart buildings, transportation hubs, and other environments where conventional power delivery is impractical.

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