Metrics for Holistic Evaluation of LLM Reasoning about Action, Change, and Planning

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Abstract

Planning, reasoning, and sequential decision-making have played a pivotal role in the development of AI systems. While Large Language Models (LLMs) have demonstrated impressive capabilities, their evaluation for planning and Reasoning about Action and Change (RAC) problems is performed using strict binary success criteria, which limits information for further analysis and development. Given the probabilistic and autoregressive nature of LLMs, this work proposes the use of simple non-binary task-specific metrics for the evaluation of LLM responses for planning and reasoning tasks that go beyond perfect matching with ground truth, by utilizing set comparison methods, while still maintaining rigid and non-malleable evaluation criteria. We demonstrate the utility and usefulness of this type of metric in obtaining richer data fidelity and information about the quality, precision, nature of LLMs' responses, and their closeness to the ground truth through evaluations on six different tasks across two domains. With two case study examples, we additionally demonstrate the feasibility of comparative analysis of different task-specific data distributions obtained through this metric.

1 Introduction

The ability to plan, perform sequential decision-making, and reason about action and change is one of the fundamental tenets of human intelligence, and has been one of the cornerstones of AI. Today, modern generative AI and Large Language Models (LLMs) are useful for a plethora of applications, from question answering and document summarization to code generation [5]. Despite their impressive capabilities, LLMs have shown significant limitations in planning, reasoning, and decision-making, particularly in autonomous applications [9, 20, 8, 6]. Such limitations in LLMs' performance are noted through task evaluations that utilize binary success criteria metrics that involve comparison with ground truth answers obtained by automated solvers, planners, or validators. However, there could exist useful information about the quality and precision of the models' responses for these task evaluations, which is not necessarily captured by standard binary metrics.

As LLMs are probabilistic models and generate tokens in an autoregressive manner, it is perhaps not surprising that they struggle to perform accurately on Reasoning about Action, Change (RAC), and planning problems. However, by considering intersection over union (IoU) metrics for task evaluations, we find a more nuanced picture of these models' task performance than is elicited by standard binary success metrics. Specifically, our proposed metrics elicit more information about LLMs' task performance, related to precision and quality, that is missed when applying standard binary success criteria as overviewed in Figure 3. Having information about how close a model is to optimal or expected task performance can be extremely useful for failure analysis, causal analysis, and to make decisions about how best to utilize the model in architectural frameworks such as Auto-ToS[2], LLM-Modulo [8], and other finetuning or prompting setups to enhance performance.

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In the next section, we review benchmarks and related works that evaluate LLMs on Planning and RAC tasks, briefly detailing the tasks and metrics used. Then, we outline our evaluation domains, proposed metrics, and tasks. Finally, we discuss the results, utility, and usefulness of our metrics for RAC and Planning tasks through two examples.

2 Background & Related Works

2.1 Related Works

Recognizing the importance of benchmarking and evaluating the planning, decision-making, and reasoning abilities of LLMs, various benchmarks have been proposed in the literature [19, 6, 7, 9]. He et al. propose the Textual Reasoning about Action and Change (TRAC) benchmark, with 4 Reasoning about Action and Change (RAC) tasks such as projection, action executability, plan verification, and goal recognition, evaluated in the Planning Domain Definition Language (PDDL) based Blocksworld planning domain [7]. They pre-train and evaluate transformer models such as GPT-2 [14] on TRAC, and find that they struggle to generalize to scaling of objects, action sequence lengths, and composite tasks. The evaluations are conducted in a standard binary (true/false) manner and the overall accuracies are computed. However, it is unclear if the task design maintains structural validity (measurement reflecting the internal structure of the construct) [17].

Valmeekam et al. developed PlanBench, a PDDL-based planning benchmark suite with 8 planning-related tasks, such as plan generation, cost-optimal planning, plan verification, goal recognition, replanning, plan reuse, reasoning about actions and effects, and plan generalization [19]. the PlanBench work evaluates LLMs like GPT-4 [1] and Instruct-GPT-3 [13] on their generated plans across Blocksworld and Logistics domains, with a primary focus on variants of planning tasks and a limited focus on RAC tasks. The evaluations are performed based on the standard binary plan success criteria, as has been used in automated planning [16, 4].

Another notable benchmark is ActionReasoningBench, which evaluates multiple LLMs on RAC tasks such as state tracking, fluent tracking, action executability, and composite question combinations, on 8 different classical planning competition domains [3] like Blocksworld [6]. The evaluation is performed on binary and free-response answers of LLMs, for a few fixed sequence lengths of actions. However, it is important to note here that the free response questions were evaluated using a Llama-70B model in an LLM-as-a-judge framework in order to make the evaluation scalable, potentially leading to inaccurate reporting of performance statistics [21].

More recently, Kokel et al. proposed ACP Bench that consists of binary and multiple-choice questions on 7 different atomic reasoning and planning tasks, such as reasoning about applicable actions, atom reachability, action reachability, plan verification, progression, landmarks, and plan justification. They perform comprehensive evaluations on various LLMs on multiple classical planning domains, including the Alfworld household domain [18] and a novel 'swap' planning domain [9]. Following this work, Kokel et al. performs evaluations on the generative response version of this dataset, where task-specific evaluations use binary success metrics with perfect matching criteria against stored ground truth answers [10], which may lead to low or unclear construct validity [17].

2.2 Domains

To demonstrate the utility of our proposed benchmarks, we utilize standard IPC planning domains [3] such as Blocksworld and Depots for our experiments to evaluate the planning and action reasoning abilities of LLMs. For each of the 500 problems in the two domains, we create natural language templates for the initial and goal states, and questions for each of the 6 tasks, resulting in approximately 6000 questions that we use to evaluate the Llama 8B and Llama 70B models. For each problem, all the 6 task questions have the same object complexity, initial state, and goal state, only differing in the question prompt. A common natural language context containing the domain description, initial state description and goal state description (if necessary) is utilized for evaluating the LLMs, to ensure as holistic an evaluation as possible.

Blocksworld: Blocksworld is a domain where blocks can be placed on top of each other or on the table. There is one robotic arm that can move the blocks. The goal is to rearrange the blocks from an initial configuration to a goal configuration. This can be challenging as there may be interactions between subgoals. For our evaluation, we design a challenging dataset of 500 problems with 3-12

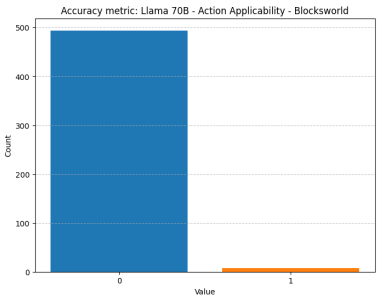

Figure 1: Llama 70B Performance with Standard binary success metric on Action Applicability in Blocksworld; Accuracy = 0.014%; Model's Responses are correct on only 7/501 problems.

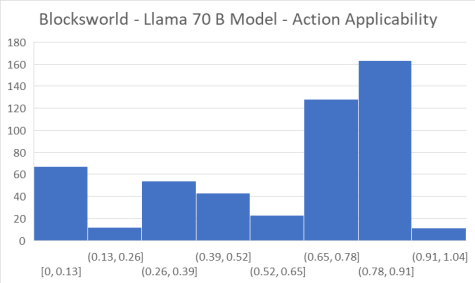

Figure 2: Llama 70B Performance with IoU metric on Action Applicability Task in Blocksworld; This right-skewed distribution provides information on the precision of the model's responses. We can see that the model is close to correctness on around $200/501$ problems.

Figure 3: Comparison of IoU Metric vs Standard Binary Success metric. We get a lot more data fidelity and information about precision and quality of responses from the IoU metric compared to the binary success metric.

blocks, that have non-neutral initial states (A subset of blocks are in a stack, and the problems require unstacking and re-stacking), with an average optimal plan length of 18.7 actions.

Depots: The Depots domain is a combination of the blocksworld and logistics domains. In this domain, trucks can transport crates between places, the crates can be stacked onto pallets using hoists, and crates can be loaded into and unloaded from trucks using hoists. This domain inherits the challenges of subgoal interactions from Blocksworld, and reasoning about unreachable actions and states from Logistics. In this domain, we maintain the same object complexity (18) across all problems of the dataset, with an average optimal plan length 12 actions.

3 Tasks: Reasoning about Action, Change, and Planning

Drawing from the above benchmarks in Section 2, we select a set of key atomic tasks, such as action applicability, state tracking, progression of effects, and optimal plan generation, along with a new atomic task called State Comprehension (each task is detailed below). We focus on evaluating LLMs on free-response answers to task questions, instead of multiple-choice and binary responses, in order to obtain better construct validity and avoid construct confounds [15, 17].

Additionally, we formulate a simple non-binary task-specific metric for evaluation of RAC and planning tasks: we compute the Intersection over Union (IoU) of LLM answers and ground truth answers as shown in equation 1, resulting in task-specific metrics as shown in Table 1. Unlike binary evaluation metrics that have a success/ failure criterion based on perfect matching with ground truth answers, this metric allows us to obtain information about the quality of LLMs' performance for each task.

$$\text{Task Metric} = \frac{\text{LLM Answers} \cap \text{Ground Truth Answers}}{\text{LLM Answers} \cup \text{Ground Truth Answers}} \tag{1}$$

The tasks are detailed as follows (with extended descriptions available in Appendix B):

Action Applicability: One of the fundamental atomic RAC tasks is the ability to reason about applicable actions at a given state. We evaluate the generative free responses of LLMs by asking the LLM to list the applicable actions in a given state, provided the common context, as mentioned in section 2.2, using the IoU evaluation metric shown in equation 1 and table 1.

State Comprehension: This task is on simply understanding the given state, such as all the objects, predicates associated with their properties, and the environment properties. Thus, this requires the LLM to provide all the predicates associated with a given state, given the common context 2.2.

Table 1: IoU Task Evaluation Metrics Summary. (GT: Ground Truth)

Task	Resulting Evaluated Formula
Action Applicability	$\frac{\text{\# Correct LLM Answered Actions}}{\text{\# LLM Answered Actions} \cup \text{\# GT Applicable Actions}}$
State Comprehension	$\frac{\text{\# Correct LLM Answered Predicates}}{\text{Total LLM Answered Predicates} \cup \text{GT Predicates}}$
Progression (Positive/ Negative)	$\frac{\text{\# Correct LLM Answered Effects}}{\text{Total LLM Answered Effects} \cup \text{GT Effects}}$
State Tracking	$\frac{\text{\# Correct LLM Answered Predicates}}{\text{Total LLM Answered Predicates} \cup \text{GT Predicates}}$
Optimal Plan Generation	$1 - \frac{\text{\# Overlapping Unique Actions}}{\text{All Unique LLM Actions} \cup \text{Unique Actions from GT Plan}}$

Progression: This task evaluates the LLMs' ability to understand the effects of an action on the state. We design two separate atomic tasks asking the LLM for the positive and negative effects of a single action, respectively, given the common context.

State Tracking: State tracking is the ability to track entire states across multiple time steps after executing a sequence of actions. We design an atomic version of this task by asking LLMs to provide the complete set of predicates that represent the final state after performing a sequence of two actions.

Optimal Plan Generation: Plan generation is a classical planning task where the task is to provide a valid sequence of actions that can be executed consecutively from a given state to reach the goal state. If actions have costs, then an optimal plan is one that has the minimum cost. We prompt the LLMs to provide optimal plans given the domain, state, and goal context. Evaluation is performed using the well-known Action Distance metric [12], as shown in Table 1 and detailed in Section B.5.

4 Results and Discussion

In this work, we perform evaluations with 6 tasks (considering progression effects as two tasks) across two domains of 500 problems each, on two instruction-tuned pretrained LLMs, using informative task-specific IoU metrics. In Figure 2, we can see that the data distribution obtained through the IoU metric provides us with information on the precision, quality, and nature of models' responses that are entirely missed by binary success metrics, as shown in Figure 1. The right-skewness of the distribution demonstrates that the model is much closer to being correct than the 0 values for 494 samples imply. This information is extremely beneficial for compute-intensive and cost-incurring decisions such as finetuning procedures, and the design of future experiments to understand and improve specific atomic reasoning constructs such as action applicability.

In figure 6, we compare the IoU metric performance graphs of action applicability and state comprehension tasks of Llama 8B model from the Depots domain. From the stark contrast in the skewness of the distributions, it is pretty clear that the quality and precision of the model's responses for state comprehension are much better than its ability for reasoning about applicable actions. Also, the spread of the distribution for the Action applicability task, according to figure 7, indicates that the model's responses are less precise and more fuzzy compared to those of State comprehension in the Depots domain. Thus, the IoU metric can potentially provide discriminant validity [17], where the evaluation helps differentiate between constructs that should be distinct. These distributions can be compared with those of State Tracking over 2 actions, shown in Figure 11, which has a slightly lesser height, but a more chaotic spread, which can provide information about the model's reasoning ability with reference to the domain-specific state properties.

Thus, the IoU metric is beneficial in reasoning and planning tasks, to obtain information on the precision, quality, nature of models' responses, and their closeness to ground truth. We have demonstrated the utility of the metric through evaluations and comparative examples across two domains. A more in-depth correlational analysis across tasks and domain-specific investigations that are beyond the scope of this project is left for future work.

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A Task Evaluation Comparison Example

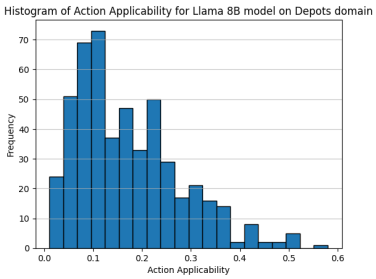

Figure 4: Llama 8B Performance with IoU metric on Action Applicability in Depots domain;

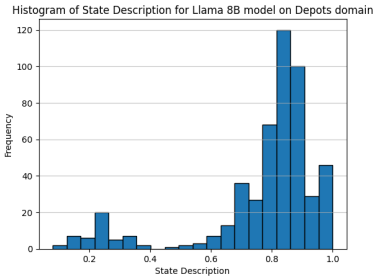

Figure 5: Llama 8B Performance with IoU metric on State Comprehension/ Description Task in Depots domain

Figure 6: Comparison of IoU Metric evaluation of Action Applicability and State Comprehension tasks. It is evident from the left-skewed distribution of Figure 4 and the right-skewed distribution of Figure 5 that Llama 8B model's responses and performance is more precise and of higher quality for state comprehension than for reasoning about applicable actions.

B Extended Task Descriptions

B.1 Action Applicability

One of the fundamental atomic RAC tasks is the ability to reason about applicable actions at a given state. Previous works have shown that LLMs fall short of this ability and tend to provide invalid or hallucinated actions [22, 9, 6]. For actions to be valid in a given state, specific preconditions required by those actions must hold. We evaluate the generative free responses of LLMs by asking the LLM to list the applicable actions in a given state, provided the common context, as mentioned in section 2.2, using the IoU evaluation metric shown in equation 1 and table 1.

B.2 State Comprehension

A fundamental requirement of reasoning about actions, change, and planning is to simply understand the given state, such as all the objects, predicates associated with their properties, and the environment properties. It is impossible to accurately perform any higher-level reasoning task, such as state tracking, action applicability, or planning, without fully comprehending the properties of the current state. We ask the LLM to provide the list of predicates that represent the current state, giving the domain and state description, and available predicate information as context. Note that the task still involves some basic inferences about state properties from the generic domain description.

B.3 Progression

This task evaluates the LLMs' ability to understand the effects of an action on the state. Keeping track of effects and changes through multiple states and action sequences is an important aspect of sequential decision-making and planning. LLMs have been shown to struggle with tracking changes across sequences of actions and states [6, 9, 20]. Also, prior works have found that LLMs' performance differs with positive and negative predicates [6]. We design two atomic tasks for tracking the positive and negative effects of a single action, given the domain description, current state description, and the available predicates (that can be used to represent effects on states).

Positive Effects Positive effects are those that are not true in the current state and become true in the following state after the action is performed. These are also called add effects. Identifying positive effects is important as emerging effects can be preconditions to future actions along a plan.

Negative Effects Negative effects are those that are true in the current state and become false in the following state after the action is performed. These are also called delete effects. Identifying negative effects is extremely important to avoid dead loops, inconsistent states, and ruling out invalid actions.

B.4 State Tracking

State tracking is the ability to track entire states across multiple time steps after executing a sequence of actions. State tracking is a fundamental ability required for planning, as it involves generating valid successor states and actions at every visited state. Similar to Handa et al.'s ActionReasoningBench, we design an atomic version of this task by asking LLMs to provide the complete set of predicates that represent the final state after performing an action or sequence of actions.

B.5 Optimal Plan Generation

Plan generation is a classical planning task where the task is to provide a valid sequence of actions that can be executed consecutively from a given initial state to reach the goal state. If actions have costs, then an optimal plan is one that has the minimum cost. Unlike the other RAC tasks, the expected answer here is an ordered and optimal set of actions. This inherently implies a stricter evaluation criterion and, hence, is also more complex, as it requires coming up with optimal, goal-reaching actions, in addition to generating valid plans.

Evaluation Unlike for previous tasks, there are already various proposed metrics in the planning literature to measure plan quality, such as Action Distance, Causal-Link Distance, and State Sequence Distance [12, 11]. These metrics have been used to measure the quality of plans compared to an optimal plan. As LLMs are probabilistic models and fare poorly at generating valid plans [8], utilizing such metrics can shed some light on their performance at generating plans that would not be available with perfect accuracy measures. Hence, we utilize the action distance metric for our evaluation. However, it is important to note that action distance is a set comparison metric between unique action sets and does not account for the ordering of actions.

C Tasks Performance Graphs for IoU metric on Depots Domain

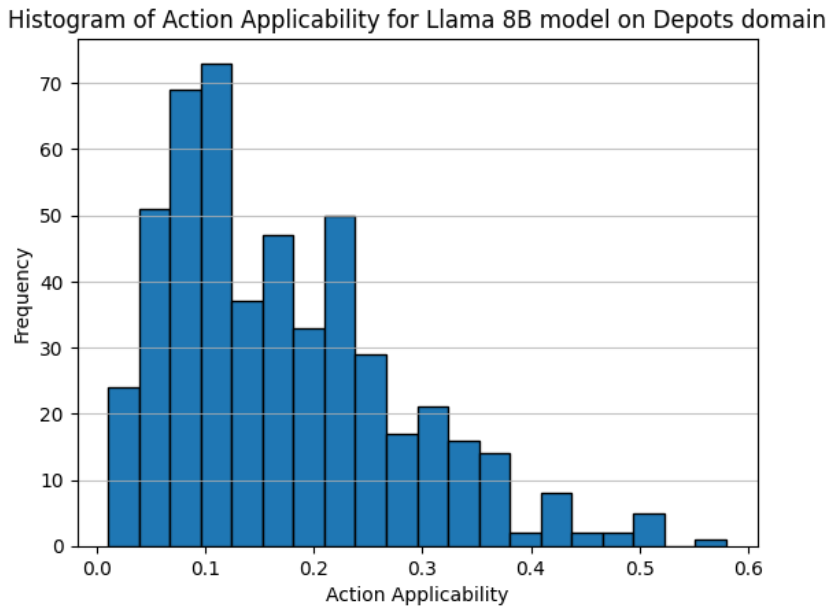

Figure 7: Llama 8B Performance on Action Applicability in Depots Domain

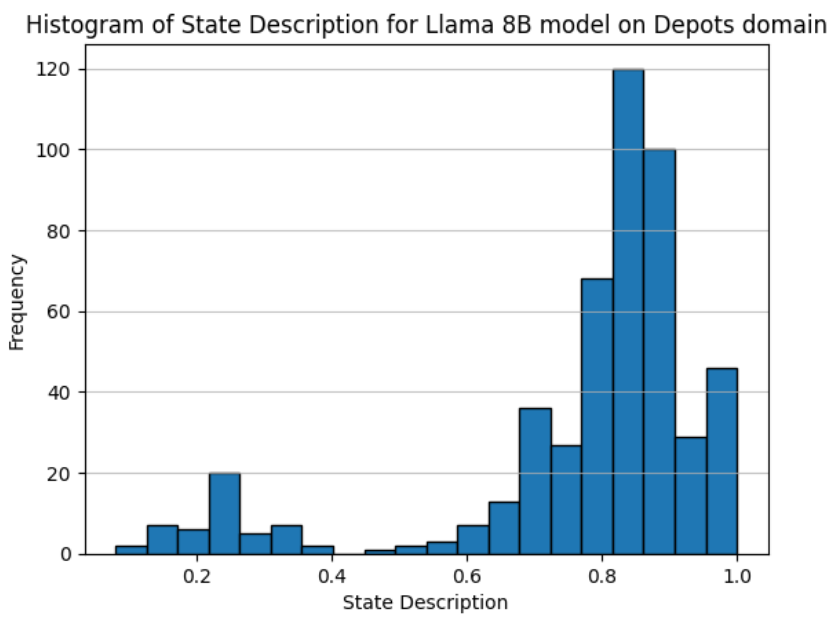

Figure 8: Llama 8B Performance on State Comprehension in Depots Domain

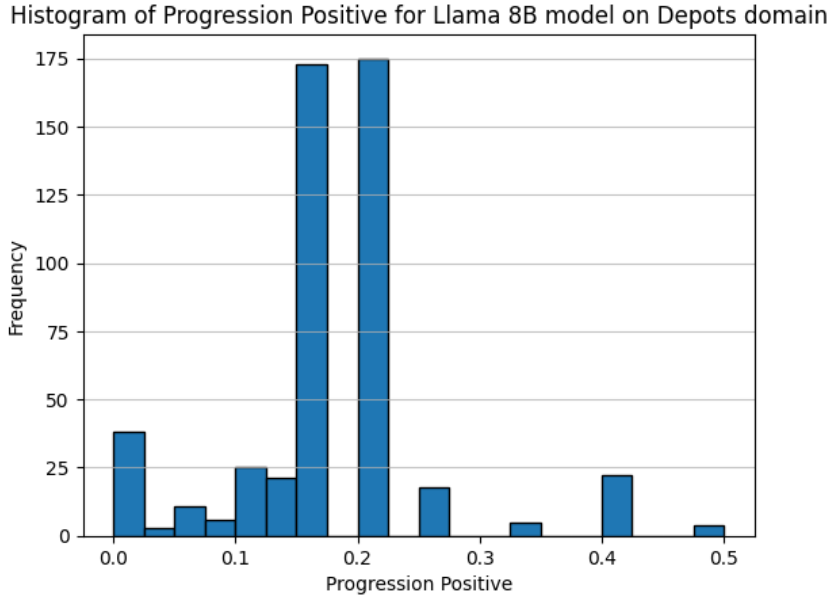

Figure 9: Llama 8B Performance on Identifying Positive Effects of Action progression in Depots Domain

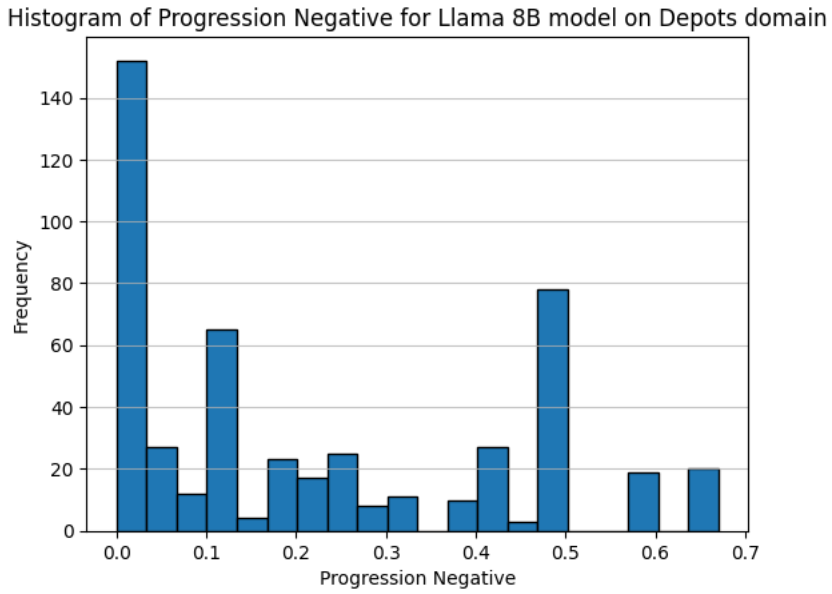

Figure 10: Llama 8B Performance on identifying Negative Effects of Action Progression in Depots Domain

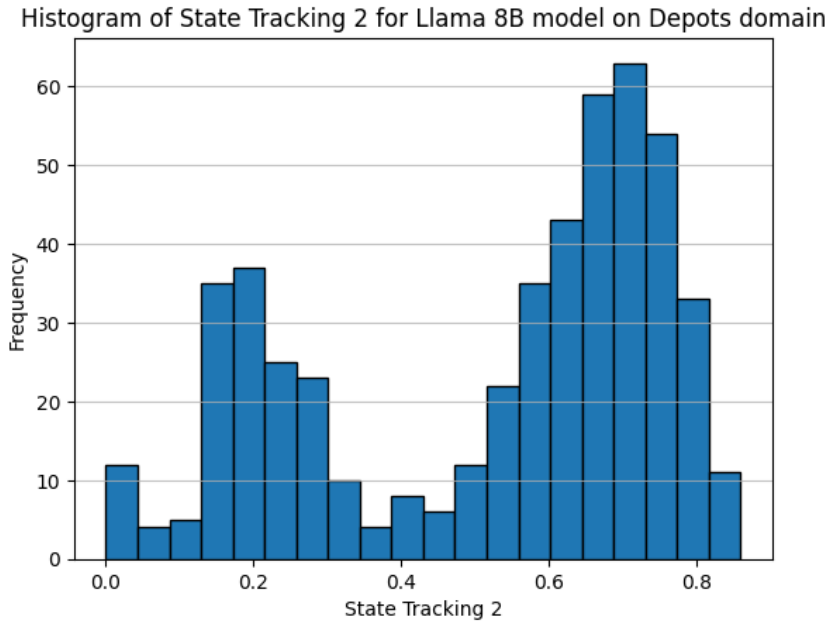

Figure 11: Llama 8B Performance on State tracking with 2 Actions in Depots Domain

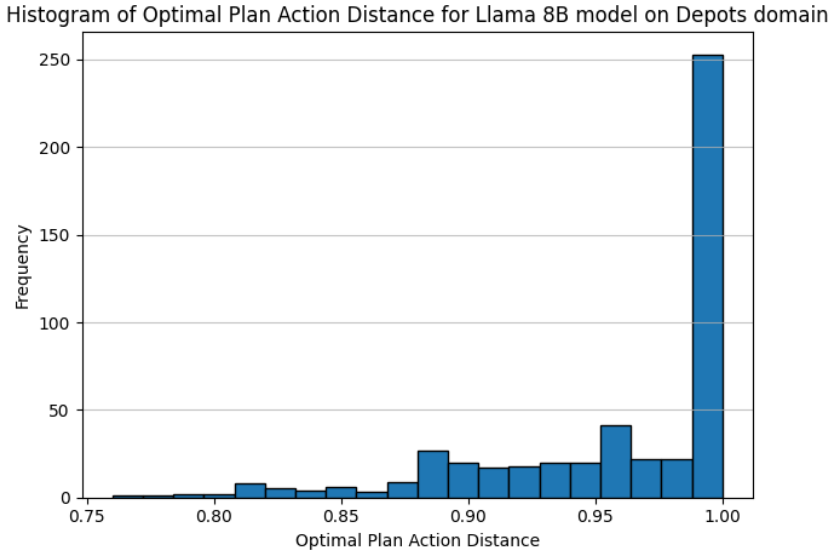

Figure 12: Llama 8B Optimal Plan Responses' Action Distance Histogram