WHEN DOES SECOND-ORDER OPTIMIZATION SPEED UP TRAINING?

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ABSTRACT

While numerous second-order optimization methods have been proposed to accelerate training in deep learning, they are seldom used in practice. This is partly due to a limited understanding of the conditions under which second-order optimization outperforms first-order optimization. This study aims to identify these conditions, particularly in terms of batch size and dataset size. We find empirically that second-order optimization outperforms first-order optimization when the batch size is large and the data set size is not too large.

1 INTRODUCTION

Second-order optimization utilizes gradients preconditioned by a second-order information matrix(Pascanu & Bengio, 2013). Various Second-order optimization methods have been proposed, differing in the type of second-order information matrix and the method of matrix approximation.

K-FAC is a major second-order optimization method proposed in Martens & Grosse (2015) as an approximation of natural gradient descent(Amari, 1998). K-FAC has been studied in numerous papers because of its effectiveness in many deep learning optimizations(Grosse & Martens, 2016; Martens et al., 2018; Izadi et al., 2020; Eschenhagen et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). Inspired by the fast convergence of K-FAC, Benzing (2022) proposed FOOF, hypothesizing that the fast convergence of K-FAC might stem from local learning rather than from natural gradient descent. Shampoo represents another notable advancement in second-order optimization(Gupta et al., 2018). It serves as an approximation to adaptive gradient descent (Duchi et al., 2011). Other second-order optimization methods, such as K-BFGS (Goldfarb et al., 2020) and PSGD (Li, 2017; 2018), estimate the curvature matrix through iterative processes. Additionally, second-order optimization methods like SENG (Yang et al., 2020) employ the Sherman-Morrison-Woodbury (SMW) formulas in inverse matrix computations to facilitate second-order optimization.

In this study, we initially examine the batch size characteristics of second-order optimization methods across various existing approaches. Some studies suggest that the large batch problem, where accuracy deteriorates when training with larger batch sizes, is less likely to occur with second-order optimization methods (Zhang et al., 2019), and numerous studies have applied second-order optimization to large-batch learning (Osawa et al., 2019; Ueno et al., 2020; Anil et al., 2021). However, comprehensive research comparing different methods is still lacking. Additionally, in the Appendix.A.2, we investigate the relationship between batch size and hyperparameters and find some interesting proportional relationships. Next, we observe the behavior when the dataset size is increased while keeping the batch size constant. Surprisingly, we find that in training with larger dataset sizes, such as in language modeling, the advantage of second-order optimization over first-order optimization becomes less evident. This indicates that not only the batch size but also the dataset size is an important factor in determining the superiority of second-order optimization.

2 SECOND ORDER OPTIMIZATION IS GOOD FOR LARGE BATCH SIZES

Second-order optimization is known to be more advantageous than first-order optimization when the size of the mini-batch is large and the specific mini-batch closely resembles the entire dataset(Zhang et al., 2019; Osawa et al., 2019; Anil et al., 2021). Fig.1 shows that for various architectures, second-order optimization methods, including K-FAC and Shampoo, outperform first-order optimization

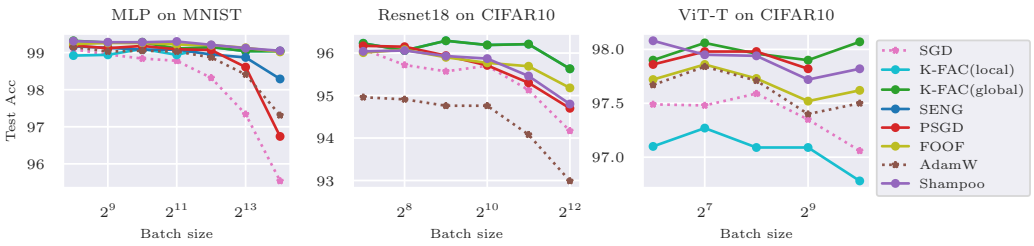

Figure 1: **Second-order optimization performs better than first-order optimization for large batch training** Second-order optimization methods perform better with larger mini-batch sizes. However, for PSGD, test accuracy decreases similarly to SGD as batch size increases.

methods for larger batch sizes. Note that the accuracy of PSGD decreases rapidly as the batch size increases. This may occur because PSGD computes the curvature matrix iteratively. See Appendix A.1 for more details. In addition, when the mini-batch size is small, K-FAC(local) without an exponential moving average does not perform as well as K-FAC(global) with an exponential moving average. The relationship between batch size and appropriate hyperparameter settings is described in detail in Appendix A.2.

3 Second order optimization is good for small dataset size

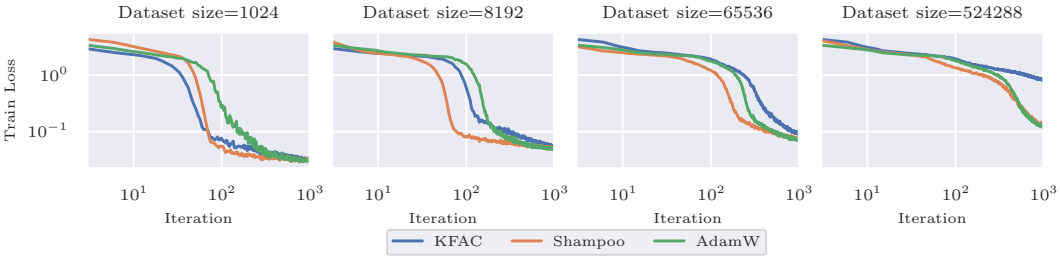

Figure 2: **Train Curve Comparison of optimizers for different dataset sizes in training character-level language modeling.** We trained minGPT on the BookCorpus dataset for character-level language modeling. When the dataset size is small, K-FAC and Shampoo converge faster than AdamW. However, as the dataset size increases, the convergence rate of K-FAC deteriorates.

In training language models, the dataset size is typically huge, and as a result, usually only about one epoch is trained. This implies that LLM is trained with relatively small mini-batch sizes, making it challenging to observe the advantages of second-order optimization compared to first-order optimization. As shown in Fig.2, when the dataset size is small, K-FAC and Shampoo achieve faster convergence than Adam. However, as the data set size increases, the final convergence destination of K-FAC becomes worse, and the speed of convergence of Shampoo and Adam coincides. This suggests that second-order optimization may not be a better method than first-order optimization when the data set size is too large.

4 Conclusion and Discussion

We investigated the convergence properties of second-order optimization methods concerning batch size and dataset size. Our findings indicate that, with few exceptions, second-order optimization generally surpasses first-order optimization when dealing with larger batch sizes. However, as the size of the dataset becomes excessively large, the convergence rate of second-order optimization becomes comparable to, or may even be less effective than, that of first-order optimization. These findings suggest that the advantages of second-order optimization over first-order optimization might not be as significant in language model optimization. This is because language modeling frequently involves very large datasets and relatively small batch sizes in comparison to the size of the dataset.

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URM STATEMENT

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A APPENDIX

A.1 PSGD ON LARGE BATCH TRAINING

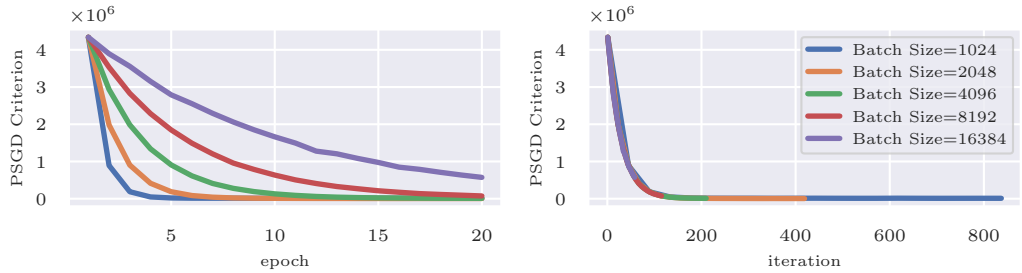

Figure 3: **The quality of curvature is determined by the number of Iterations** According to the criterion, the quality of PSGD's curvature matrix improves as iteration increases. Therefore, the quality of PSGD curvature in iterations is independent of the mini-batch size, but in epochs, the quality of PSGD curvature depends on the mini-batch size.

The accuracy of PSGD may decrease rapidly as the batch size increases. This may occur because PSGD computes the curvature matrix iteratively. To investigate the cause of this deterioration, we use the following criterion, which measures the quality of the Preconditioner matrix $\boldsymbol{P}$ as employed in the PSGD paper(Li, 2017; 2018).

$$c(\boldsymbol{P}) = \mathbb{E}_{\delta\boldsymbol{\theta}}\left[\delta\hat{\boldsymbol{g}}^\top \boldsymbol{P}\delta\hat{\boldsymbol{g}} + \delta\boldsymbol{\theta}^\top \boldsymbol{P}^{-1}\delta\boldsymbol{\theta}\right] \tag{1}$$

where $\delta\boldsymbol{\theta}$ represents the perturbation of parameters and $\delta\hat{\boldsymbol{g}}$ represents the perturbation of gradients. A smaller PSGD criterion value indicates a higher quality of the curvature matrix. Figure.3 illustrates the PSGD criterion as the batch size changes. When the horizontal axis represents epochs, the PSGD criterion increases with the batch size. However, when the horizontal axis represents iterations, the decrease in the criterion appears to be independent of the batch size. This suggests that the quality of the curvature matrix may not improve sufficiently with larger batch sizes due to the reduced number of iterations compared to the same number of epochs.

A.2 EFFECT OF BATCH SIZE ON OTHER HYPERPARAMETERS

In first-order optimization methods, an increase in batch size requires a proportional increase in the learning rate (Hinton, 2012; Krizhevsky, 2014; Goyal et al., 2017). This trend is also observed in second-order optimization. Fig.4 illustrates that second-order optimization methods, including K-FAC, FOOF, and Shampoo, demand proportionally larger damping as the batch size increases.

In addition to the learning rate, second-order optimization methods incorporate a hyperparameter known as the damping term, which is also contingent on the batch size. Specifically, it is observed in Fig.4 that the damping should be reduced as the batch size increases. This may be attributed to the fact that in second-order optimization, the ratio of learning rate to damping effectively represents the actual learning rate. When both the learning rate and damping are concurrently adjusted for specific batch size, higher accuracies are achieved when the learning rate-to-damping ratio remains constant.

A.3 TRAIN ACCURACY IN LARGE BATCH LEARNING OF SECOND ORDER OPTIMIZATION

Fig. 5 shows that second-order optimization methods performs better than first-order optimization methods even in the Training accuracy. In terms of Training Accuracy, AdamW shows almost the same accuracy as other methods in small batch training of Resnet18 on CIFAR10. However, given its poor performance in Test Accuracy, we can say that in this setting AdamW does not generalize as well as other optimization methods.

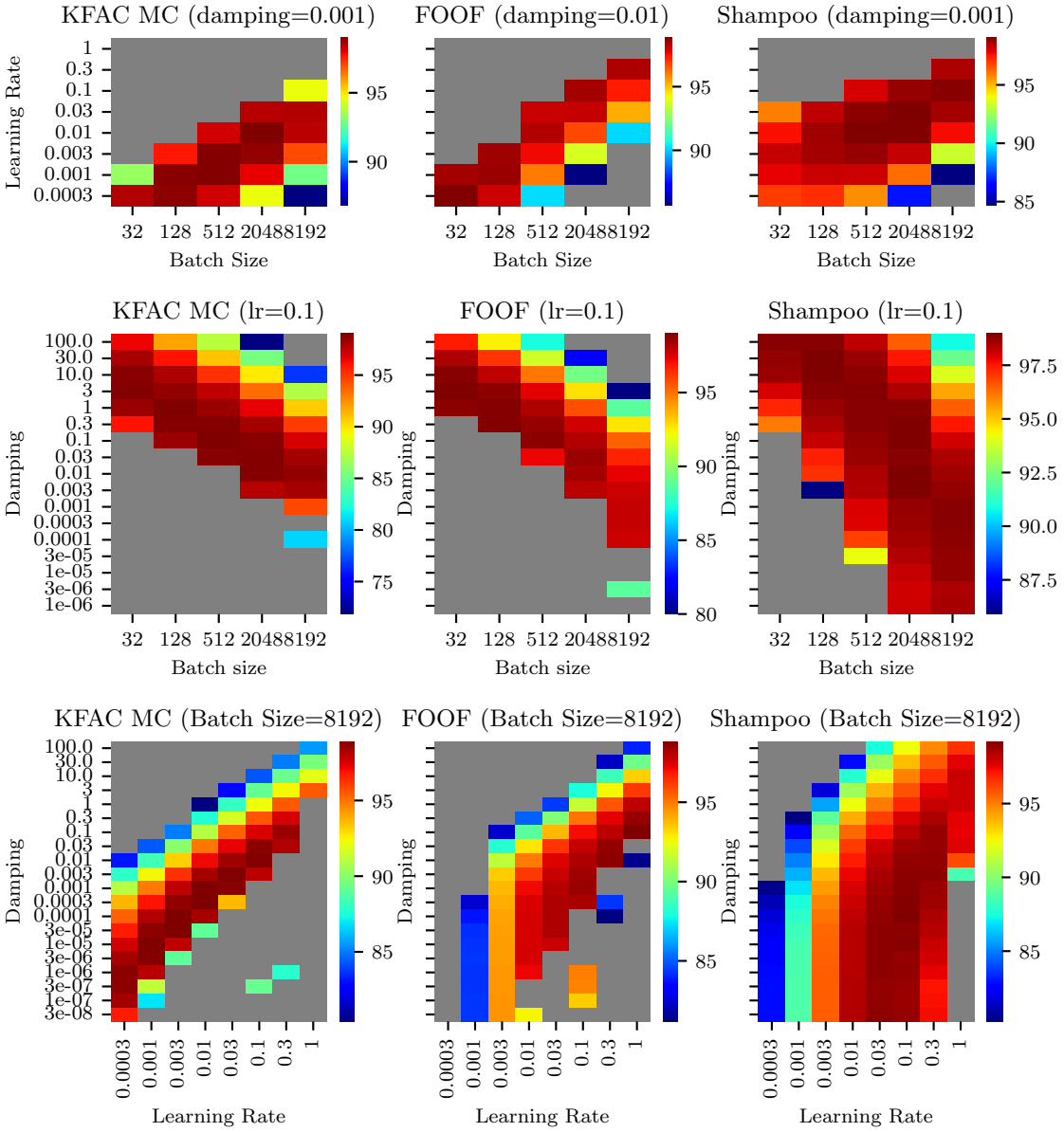

Figure 4: **Learning rate, damping, and batch size are interrelated** We trained a 3-layer MLP on MNIST. We see that the optimal learning rate and damping depend on the batch size.

A.4 Relationship between data set size and critical batch size

When dealing with large datasets, the mini-batch size is often small relative to the entire dataset. Consequently, the benefits of second-order optimization, which are more evident with larger batch sizes, can be minimal or negligible. Figure 6 illustrates how the performance of first-order versus second-order optimization varies with the batch-to-dataset size ratio. With a low ratio, the performance difference between the two optimization methods becomes negligible.

A.5 Large Batch Training in LLM

The results for large-batch learning of GPT2 are shown in Table. 1. The dataset is OpenWebText. Here, we are comparing by fixing the number of samples used for training at 4915200000. In cases of small batch sizes ($\leq$ 1152), AdamW reduces the validation loss more than the second-order

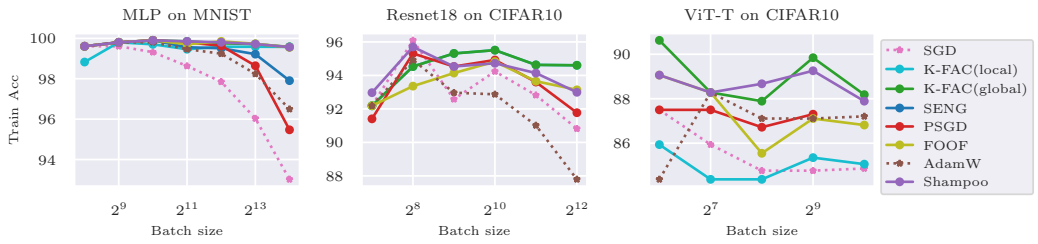

Figure 5: **Second-order optimization performs better than first-order optimization for large batch training even in the Training Accuracy.**

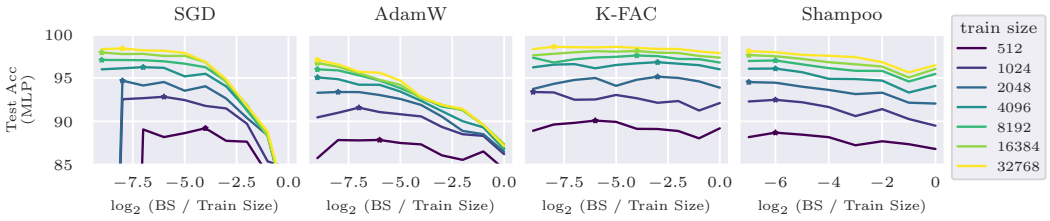

Figure 6: **If the ratio of Batch size to Train size is not sufficiently large, the benefits of second-order optimization are not apparent.** The second-order optimization achieves high accuracy even when the batch size / train size is large. The difference in performance between first-order optimization and second-order optimization depends on the batch size / train size, and its performance gap is negligible when the train size is large. We trained an MLP on MNIST.

optimization method, Shampoo. However, with larger batch sizes ($\geq$ 1536), Shampoo shows a greater reduction in validation loss compared to AdamW. This indicates that in Large Language Models (LLMs), Shampoo, a second-order optimization method, excels in large-batch learning. It is also observed that the batch sizes commonly used are very small, where Shampoo does not perform as effectively.

	Batch Size				
	384	768	1152	1536	1920
AdamW	**3.29**	**3.62**	**3.85**	4.68	5.61
Shampoo	3.43	3.72	3.95	**4.62**	**5.43**

Table 1: **Shampoo reduces validation loss more effectively than AdamW in Large Batch LLM training.** We trained GPT2 on openwebtext with AdamW and Shampoo. Its block size is 1024 and hyperparameters (learning rate and β_2) are tuned using grid search.

A.6 Experimental Settings

We implemented a second-order optimization method based on the ASDL library(Osawa et al., 2023). We indicate the search range for grid search by curly braces {}.

Figure.1 (MLP) We trained a 3-layer MLP on MNIST. We considered a 3-layer multilayer perceptron (MLP) with ReLU activation. The MLP models do not include bias. The width of the middle layer is set to 2048. The hyperparameters are as follows. Grid search was used to find the optimal parameters. Table.2 shows its hyper parameters.

Figure.1 (ResNet18) We trained a ResNet18 on CIFAR10. We used the existing implementation[1] for training CIFAR10. The hyperparameters are as follows. Grid search was used to find the optimal parameters. Table.3 shows its hyper parameters.

[1] `https://github.com/uoguelph-mlrg/Cutout`

Parameter	Values
Learning Rate	{3e-1, 1e-1, 3e-2, 1e-2, 3e-3, 1e-3}
Momentum	0.9
Epochs	20
Curvature Update Interval for second-order optimization	1
Damping for second-order optimization	{1, 1e-3, 1e-6, 1e-9}
Gradient Clipping Norm	10
Weight Decay	1e-5
Label Smoothing	0.1

Table 2: **Hyper-parameters for MLP on MNIST in Figure.1**

Parameter	Values
Learning Rate	{3e-1, 1e-1, 3e-2, 1e-2, 3e-3, 1e-3}
Momentum	0.9
Epochs	100
Curvature Update Interval for second-order optimization	{10, 100}
Damping for second-order optimization	{1, 1e-3, 1e-6, 1e-9}
Gradient Clipping Norm	10
Weight Decay	5e-4
Label Smoothing	0.1

Table 3: **Hyper-parameters for ResNet18 on CIFAR10 in Figure.1**

Figure.1 (ViT-Tiny) We trained a ViT-Tiny pretrained by ImageNet on CIFAR10. We used models in Pytorch Image Models(Wightman, 2019). The hyperparameters are as follows. Grid search was used to find the optimal parameters. Table.4 shows its hyper parameters. Missing point (PSGD with batch size = 1024) is due to the memory consumption.

Parameter	Values
Learning Rate	{3e-1, 1e-1, 3e-2, 1e-2, 3e-3, 1e-3}
Momentum	0.9
Epochs	20
Curvature Update Interval for second-order optimization	{10, 100}
Damping for second-order optimization	{1, 1e-3, 1e-6, 1e-9}
Gradient Clipping Norm	10
Weight Decay	1e-5
Label Smoothing	0.1

Table 4: **Hyper-parameters for ViT-Tiny on CIFAR10 in Figure.1**

Figure.2 We trained minGPT[2] on the BookCorpus dataset for character-level language modeling. The hyperparameters for training are as follows. Grid search was used to find the optimal parameters. Table.5 shows its hyper parameters.

[2]We used this repository : `https://github.com/karpathy/minGPT`. And we used gpt-mini in this repository.

Parameter	**Values**
Learning Rate	{1, 3e-1, 3e-3, 1e-3}
Momentum	0.9
Batch Size	64
Iterations	1000
Curvature Update Interval (K-FAC, Shampoo)	1
Damping (K-FAC, Shampoo)	1e-3
Dropout	{0, 0.2}
Weight Decay	1e-5
Warmup Iterations	{1, 100}

Table 5: **Hyper-parameters for minGPT on Bookcorpus in Figure.2**