**GIFT: Toward Accurate and Efficient Federated Learning With Gradient-Instructed Frequency Tuning**

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**Abstract**—Federated learning (FL) enables distributed clients to collectively train a global model without revealing their private data, and for efficiency clients synchronize their gradients periodically. However, this can lead to the inaccuracy in model convergence due to inconsistent data distributions among clients. In this work, we find that there is a strong correlation between FL accuracy loss and the synchronization frequency, and seek to fine tune the synchronization frequency at training runtime to make FL accurate and also efficient. Specifically, aware that under the FL privacy requirement only gradients can be utilized for making frequency tuning decisions, we propose a novel metric called gradient consistency, which can effectively reflect the training status despite the instability of realistic FL scenarios. We further devise a feedback-driven algorithm called Gradient-Instructed Frequency Tuning (GIFT), which adaptively increases or decreases the synchronization frequency based on the gradient consistency metric. We have implemented GIFT in PyTorch, and large-scale evaluations show that it can improve FL accuracy by up to 10.7% with a time reduction of 58.1%.

**Index Terms**—Federated learning, synchronization frequency, gradient statistics.

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

FEDERATED learning (FL) [1], [2] emerges as a popular paradigm that allows edge clients to collaboratively train models without sharing their local private data. In typical FL scenarios, the hardware resources on edge devices—especially the network bandwidth—are usually quite limited. To reduce the overall training cost, the de facto FL mechanism is FedAvg, under which each client trains with its local dataset for multiple iterations before performing a synchronization.

A well-known challenge for FL is that the local datasets on clients are not identically and independently distributed (i.e., being non-IID). Recent works have empirically shown that, FL with non-IID datasets would suffer remarkable accuracy loss [2], [3], [4], [5], which correlates with the synchronization frequency of FedAvg (also confirmed by us in §III). There is thus a trade-off in setting up the FL synchronization frequency: Less frequent synchronization can reduce the communication cost, but in the meantime would compromise the accuracy performance. To make FL accurate and also efficient, it is a promising technique to dynamically adjust the synchronization frequency during the training process.

Yet, it remains a largely-unexplored territory how to tune the FL synchronization frequency at runtime: For FedAvg and its cluster counterpart called local SGD [6], [7], [8], [9], existing practices either assume a fixed frequency (which may be either too high or too low as training proceeds), or consider IID data only. In particular, we note that the distinct FL characteristics impose three challenges for the design of an ideal frequency tuning strategy. First, privacy is a primary concern for FL, meaning that the frequency tuning decisions shall be made only with gradients, not requiring additional information like client loss or accuracy. Second, that frequency tuning strategy shall work smoothly when facing dynamic and massive client participations in realistic FL systems. Third, since a FL framework may be used for many machine learning models, the frequency tuning strategy shall be generally effective, not relying on any specific model characteristics (i.e., knowledge of the convexity or smoothness constant).

To quickly recap, our objective in this work is to design a privacy-preserving, system-practical and model-generic method to tune FL synchronization frequency at runtime.
To make that, we propose Gradient-Instructed Frequency Tuning (GIFT)—a feedback-driven frequency tuning algorithm with gradient-based feedback signal. GIFT is tailor-made respectively for the three challenges aforementioned.

To be privacy-preserving, GIFT perceives the training status based purely on gradients. To bridge the gap between training performance and gradient behavior, we conduct both theoretical and experimental analysis on the root cause of accuracy degradation when training models with non-IID data. We find that, when insufficient synchronization occurs with inconsistent data distribution, the global model parameters would stagnate prematurely at sub-optimal positions, where the model gradients from different clients conflict with each other, i.e., exhibiting a bifurcating trend. Therefore, through the level of such gradient bifurcation, we can gauge the instantaneous FL training status without privacy violation.

To be system-practical, the GIFT signal to quantify the gradient bifurcation level must work well affronting the system challenges in realistic FL scenarios. That is, it should be robust to dynamic client participation and mini-batch randomness, and shall also be resource-efficient despite a vast number of participating clients. We adopt a smoothing method to address the system and mini-batch instability, and adopt a pooling method to compress the computation and memory consumption when handling massive client participation. Atop those methods, we propose a novel metric called gradient consistency, which would decrease towards zero when the gradient bifurcation level gradually amplifies. It then works as a feedback signal to instruct frequency tuning in FL.

Finally, to be model-generic, instead of deriving a subtle formula linking the ideal synchronization frequency to the gradient consistency metric (which requires rigid but risky model property assumptions), in GIFT we adopt a feedback-driven frequency-tuning heuristic: Once gradient consistency stabilizes around zero (indicating premature training stagnation), we increase the synchronization frequency by a fixed factor; such a process repeats when the gradient consistency stabilizes again under the new frequency. We further extend GIFT to incorporate modest frequency relaxation in phases where frequent synchronization is not necessary (e.g., at the FL commencement).

We have implemented GIFT with PyTorch and evaluated its performance in a 100-node Amazon EC2 cluster emulating real-world FL setups. In addition to the privacy-preserving benefit, our evaluations confirm that GIFT is a practical and general algorithm that can substantially improve the FL performance on both accuracy and resource efficiency: It can improve the convergence accuracy of VGG-16 by 10.7% with a time reduction of 58.1% (after the same amount of training rounds); meanwhile, given a fixed accuracy target, GIFT can save the training time by 28.9% when compared with existing methods.

II. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

A. A Primer on Federated Learning

Machine learning models are increasingly trained with a vast amount of data samples under the SGD (Stochastic Gradient Descent) algorithm [10], [11], [12]. In many real-world scenarios, the training samples are privacy-sensitive and dispersed on distributed clients like IoT devices, cellphones [2], [13], [14], [15]. To train models without centralizing such private data, an increasingly popular technique is Federated Learning (FL) [1], [2], under which each client locally refines the model parameters and communicates the updates to the central server.

1) FedAvg: Compared to computing servers in production clusters, FL clients like IoT devices or cellphones suffer remarkable bandwidth limitations. To reduce the communication cost, FedAvg [1], [2] has become the de facto FL mechanism, which dictates each client to perform multiple (denoted by τ) local iterations before synchronizing their accumulated updates. As a distinct hyper-parameter in FL, τ, or equivalently the synchronization frequency, critically affects the model training performance. With less frequent synchronization, the communication overhead for processing a given data amount can be reduced. Yet, local datasets on different FL clients are usually not independently and identically distributed (i.e., being non-IID), and less frequent synchronization would on the other hand compromise the model convergence accuracy. This has been empirically observed in many existing works [2], [3], [4], [5]. Given this trade-off, it is of urgent need to make FL accurate and also efficient by properly setting up the synchronization frequency.

B. Sync-Frequency Setup: Prior Arts and Their Limitations

While there do exist some related works [6], [7], [8], [9], [16], [17], [18] on setting up the synchronization frequency for distributed model training, we find that they either work within an over-narrow solution space (e.g., static frequency) or base their solutions on unrealistic assumptions (e.g., IID data).

For FL scenarios, some research works [16], [17], [18] have proposed to properly setup the synchronization frequency for better resource efficiency. As a representative example, Wang et al. [17] proposed Adaptive Federated Learning (hereafter called by AFL by us), which estimates the best FL synchronization frequency that can minimize the training loss under a given resource budget. It derives a sophisticated formula representing the best frequency, which involves the instantaneous loss value, the concrete loss function characteristics (Lipschitz parameter, smoothness parameter, gradient divergence bound) and the data distribution of each worker. Yet, including AFL, those works implicitly assume a fixed frequency without any runtime dynamicity. This unnecessarily narrows down the solution space by excluding the dynamic frequency-tuning strategies, and may thus suffer suboptimal performance (As shown later in §V, a fixed frequency may be either too high or too low for different training phases).

For cluster scenarios, a training method called local SGD (or periodical averaging) [6], [7], [8], [9] also allows workers to proceed for multiple local iterations before one global synchronization, and some works in this regard explored how to dynamically change the synchronization frequency. For example, AdaComm [7] formulated the best frequency that can minimize the training error after a given time budget; it further extended that static formula into a dynamic
strategy by dividing the training process into short intervals and estimating the best frequency in each interval. Nonetheless, those works did not consider non-IID data in their solution design, rendering their applicability in FL scenarios questionable.

1) Design Requirements: In particular, given the distinct FL characteristics, we notice that there exist three key requirements that any effective frequency tuning method under FL must comply with:

1) Privacy-Preserving Requirement. Data privacy is a primary concern for FL, and a key principle of FL is that only gradients (or equivalently the model parameters) can be collected from the clients [13], [14]; collecting additional information would increase the risk of privacy leakage. Prior works base their solutions mainly on mathematical formulas, and require client knowledge (e.g., loss values) as essential components in their formulas. The AFL work [17] even demands the information of local data distributions, which would severely impair the client privacy. To be privacy-preserving, we need to perceive the FL training status from gradients. In standard FL, model gradients are the default content collected from clients, and would be readily available at the FL server.

2) Practicality Requirement. A well-known system characteristic for FL is that clients may dynamically join or leave training at random time [13], [19]. Meanwhile, for commercial FL applications, the number of clients may be quite large [20]. Existing methods ignored such stability and scalability challenges, and may suffer performance degradation as well as large maintenance cost.

3) Generality Requirement. A FL framework may serve various models without model-specific customization; hence, frequency tuning strategies in FL shall not rely on any model-specific characteristics. Yet, the aforementioned works build their solutions with unrealistic model assumptions. For example, AFL [17] derives its formulation by assuming convex loss functions, which does not hold for deep learning models; it also requires the smoothness constant, the Lipschitz-ness constant and the gradient variance bound, which are hard to obtain in reality. In fact, while such theoretical analysis can yield inspiring insights, given the analytical complexity of neural network models, it is however too risky to directly work out the exact FL synchronization frequency from them. To be model-generic, our solutions should be built not on end-to-end formulations but with a feedback control heuristic.

To summarize, in this work we seek to design a privacy-preserving, system-practical and model-generic frequency tuning strategy to make FL accurate and also efficient. The remaining part of this paper is organized as follows. In §III, we will analyze from the gradient perspective how FL performance is affected by synchronization frequency, and then describe a gradient pattern that can reflect the instantaneous training status. In §IV, we give the definition of our feedback signal, and elaborate our frequency tuning algorithm based on that signal. We further evaluate the effectiveness of our GIFT solution in §V. Finally, we introduce some additional related work in §VI and conclude in §VII.

### III. Sync-Frequency and FL Performance: A Gradient Point of View

In this section, we first theoretically and experimentally analyze the impact of synchronization frequency on FL performance, and then introduce an interesting phenomena called gradient bifurcation, which can help to reflect the instantaneous training status.

#### A. Impact of Synchronization Frequency

To properly setup the FL synchronization frequency, we first need to know the impact of a given frequency on the FL training performance.

While a series of research works [17], [18], [21], [22] have theoretically analyzed the FL convergence process, we find that they are not suitable for our needs. Those works in general follow a common methodology: first assume a constant bound for the gradient variance, and then derive a formula representing how fast the model parameters can converge. Nonetheless, fast convergence rate does not necessarily mean high accuracy; meanwhile, the gradient variance bound—as a highly idealized ground-truth knowledge—has little relationship with the instantaneous gradient behavior, thus yielding little help for understanding runtime FL status.

In our analysis, we primarily want to understand why there is an accuracy degradation when training models under FL with non-IID data: What is the key factors behind? And can we somehow probe the related training status with gradient-wise characteristics at runtime? We resort to the following theoretical analysis to find out the answers.

1) Symbol Description: In our FL setup, there are \(N\) clients each with a local dataset \(D_i\) \((i = 1, 2, \ldots, N)\). Let \(l(s, \omega)\) be the loss value when predicting sample \(s\) with parameter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>Number of clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D_i)</td>
<td>Local dataset on client-(i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(l(s, \omega))</td>
<td>Loss value given sample (s) and parameter (\omega)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(L_i(\omega))</td>
<td>Local loss function on client-(i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(L^*(\omega))</td>
<td>Global loss function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\omega^*_k)</td>
<td>Local model on client-(i) at iteration (k)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\omega^*_k)</td>
<td>Ideal model at iteration (k) if trained with IID data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\omega^*)</td>
<td>Converged model if trained with IID data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\omega^\tau)</td>
<td>Converged model under realistic FL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\tau)</td>
<td>Synchronization frequency (sync once for (\tau) iterations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(u^\tau_i)</td>
<td>Accumulated gradient over (\tau) iterations on client-(i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(u^*_i)</td>
<td>Ideal value of (u^\tau_i) if trained with IID data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e^\tau_i)</td>
<td>Local-error component of (u^\tau_i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>Lipschitz constant in the smoothness assumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C)</td>
<td>Metric of gradient consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\gamma)</td>
<td>Divisor to scale down (\tau)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\delta)</td>
<td>Addend to increase (\tau)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\theta)</td>
<td>EMA smoothing factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\tilde{P}_e)</td>
<td>EMA value of positive gradient component</td>
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<tr>
<td>(\tilde{N}_e)</td>
<td>EMA value of negative gradient component</td>
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\( \omega, \) then the local loss function on client-\( i \) is \( L_i^*(\omega) = \frac{1}{|D_i|} \sum_{s \in D_i} l(s, \omega) \) and the global loss function as the true optimization target is \( L^*(\omega) = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N L_i^*(\omega). \) For simplicity we assume balanced data such that \( L^*(\omega) = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N L_i^*(\omega). \) Let \( \omega^*_k \) be the local model on client-\( i \) after refined for \( k \) iterations from \( \omega^0 \), and \( \omega^*_\ell \) be the ideal model when refined with a globally-shuffled IID dataset also for \( k \) iterations from \( \omega^0 \). Table I has listed all the symbol notations adopted in this paper.

To facilitate our analysis of gradient behavior, we seek to decouple the local gradient into two components: a global component and a local-error component. To start with, we derive Lemma 1 based on the standard convexity\(^1\) and smoothness assumptions.

**Assumption 1 (Convexity):** The loss function \( L^*(\omega) \) and local loss functions \( L_i^*(\omega) \) (\( i = 1, 2, \ldots, N \)) are convex, i.e., \( L(y) \geq L(x) + \nabla L(x)^T (y - x) \).

**Assumption 2 (\( \beta \)-Smoothness):** The loss function \( L^*(\omega) \) and each local loss function \( L_i^*(\omega) \) (\( i = 1, 2, \ldots, N \)) is \( \beta \)-smooth, i.e., \( \| \nabla L^*(\omega) - \nabla L_i^*(\omega) \| \leq \beta \| \omega - \omega \|. \) It also means that \( \nabla L_i^*(\omega) \) is \( \beta \)-Lipschitz, or equivalently \( \| \nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega) \| \leq \beta. \)

**Lemma 1 (Local Gradient Composition):** Let \( u^*_k = \omega^*_k - \omega^0 \) be the accumulated gradient\(^2\) on client-\( i \) after \( \tau \) iterations, then \( u^*_k = u^*_\tau + e^*_\tau \), where \( u^*_\tau \) is the ideal gradient attained with IID data representing the global component, and \( e^*_\tau \) is the local-error component: \( e^*_\tau = -\eta \sum_{k=0}^{\tau-1} [\nabla L_i^*(\omega^*_k) - \nabla L_i^*(\omega^*_\tau)] + \langle \nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega^*_\tau), \omega^*_k - \omega^*_\tau \rangle \). The proof of Lemma 1 can be found in Appendix. This lemma implies that the gradient error of a FL client is related to the gap between the local and global loss landscapes \( \{ \nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega) \} \), i.e., the hessian matrix, or more straightforwardly, the curvature. Moreover, regarding the aggregated gradient after a synchronization round, with Lemma 1 we can further get the following Theorem:

**Theorem 1 (Gradient Error After Synchronization):** Let \( \bar{u}_\tau = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N u^*_k \) and let \( d(\tau) = \| \bar{u}_\tau - u^*_\tau \| \) be aggregated gradient error after each client locally refines the parameter for \( \tau \) iterations from \( \omega^0 \), then

\[
d(\tau) \geq \left( \frac{\tau - 1}{N} \right) \frac{\eta^2}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N \| \nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega^0), \nabla L_i^*(\omega^0) - \nabla L_i^*(\omega^0) \|.\]

\(^1\)This convexity assumption does not invalidate our solution applicability for general models (which are mostly non-convex). Because our algorithm proposed later is based on qualitative properties (instead of quantitative derivations), and the qualitative behaviors around the local minima of non-convex models resemble that of convex ones.

\(^2\)By gradient, we refer to the accumulated update over the entire round— with the learning rate \( \eta \) integrated in. In this sense, our analysis in this work is independent to the specific gradient generating scheme or learning rate scheme, and can thus be extended to other SGD variants like Adam [23] and AdaGrad [24]. Besides, for simplicity, in our analysis we ignore the impact of random sample selection within each mini-batch, and focus on the expected gradient of the local loss function. We will address mini-batch randomness later in §IV.

**Theorem 1** shows that the error of an aggregated gradient is determined by two factors: first by the heterogeneity among clients’ loss curvatures \( \{ \nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega) \} \), and second by the synchronization frequency. In particular, since by definition \( \sum_{i=1}^N [\nabla L_i^*(\omega^0) - \nabla L_i^*(\omega)] = 0 \), the item \( \| \sum_{i=1}^N \| \nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega^0), \nabla L_i^*(\omega^0) - \nabla L_i^*(\omega) \| \| \) can be viewed as assigning different weights to a set of numbers whose sum is zero. If the weights \( \{ \nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega^0) \} \) are homogeneous across different clients, e.g., when training with IID data, then the aggregated gradient has no error; otherwise the error would augment with the heterogeneity level of \( \{ \nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega) \} \).

From the above theorem, we learn that the error would amplify with larger non-IID level or larger \( \tau \), consistent with the empirical results in existing works [2], [3], [4], [5]. Atop this per-round synchronization error, we can further derive Theorem 2 that depicts the model convergence status:

**Theorem 2 (Suboptimal Convergence):** Suppose FL process converges at parameter \( \bar{\omega} \), and \( \omega^* \) is the ideal parameter under IID dataset. Then

\[
\| \bar{\omega} - \omega^* \| \geq \left( \frac{\tau - 1}{\beta N} \right) \sum_{i=1}^N \| \nabla^2 L_i^*(\bar{\omega}), \nabla L_i^*(\bar{\omega}) - \nabla L_i^*(\omega^*) \|.
\]

This theorem shows that, for cases with heterogeneous \( \{ \nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega) \} \), the FL process would stagnate prematurely at a suboptimal position, with the error gap positively correlated to \( \tau \). Obviously, training around this position is a severe resource wastage with no accuracy benefit. To better understand the root cause of suboptimal stagnation from the gradient perspective, we resort to a toy example with quadratic loss functions.

Our example is shown in Fig. 1 where there are two clients with respective loss function \( L_1^*(\omega) = (\omega + 2)^2 \) and \( L_2^*(\omega) = (\omega - 10)^2 \). The two loss functions exhibit different curvatures and have different local optima \(-2\) and \(10\), emulating a non-IID setup. The global loss function to optimize is thus \( L^*(\omega) = \frac{1}{N} \left[ L_1^*(\omega) + L_2^*(\omega) \right] = \frac{1}{2} \omega^2 + 12 \), with the optimal parameter \( \omega^* \) be \(0\). During the local iterations, each client is essentially refining its parameter towards its local optimum; in the first iteration of a round, the local gradients if averaged can reflect the true optimal one, yet in later iterations, due to heterogeneous curvatures, gradients from different clients would decay in different rates, making the aggregated gradient less accurate. For example, if the synchronization is so late such that each client reaches its local optimum, the aggregated
the synchronization frequency under the privacy constraint. Yet, how do we know the time to adjust to strategically adjust the synchronization frequency during training process. To make FedAvg accurate and also efficient, we need an up-to-date validating dataset on the FL server. Besides, with the continuous evolution of realistic data, it is hard to maintain a clear statistical pattern for gradients across different clients. Based on our previous analysis, we find an intriguing gradient bifurcation phenomenon of clients’ local loss surfaces. At FL commencement, the model parameters are usually far away from the optimum, thus $u^*_i$ dominates $u^i$ and this yields a strong gradient consistency. In contrast, when the model parameter $\omega$ moves close to the optimal region, $u^*_i$ would shrink (due to convexity) and it is the error component $e^i$ that dominates $u^i$. Consequently, gradients from different clients would gradually bifurcate.

We further illustrate the gradient bifurcation phenomena also with Fig. 1. When the initial parameter is far away from the optima region (−2 to 10), say −100, the gradients from both clients would be consistently positive. With a larger curvature, gradient of $L^2(\omega)$ would decay faster than that of $L^1(\omega)$. When the parameter moves across −2, the gradient of client-1 would become negative, conflicting with that of client-2. Finally the two gradients well counteract with each other, and the model parameter stagnates.

2) Testbed Verification: We further verify gradient bifurcation phenomena with testbed measurements. We train the LeNet-5 model following the setup in Fig. 2b (two clients with non-IID data), and measure the instantaneous gradient values of two randomly-selected parameters on both clients. As depicted in Fig. 3, the gradients for both parameters would bifurcate after around round-100, the extent of which exhibits a clear correlation with the model convergence status (measured by accuracy): In the two figures, the training process stagnates when the bifurcation level is approximately maximized.

To summarize, gradient bifurcation can effectively signal the FL training status without compromising FL privacy. Yet, it remains unclear how to quantify the gradient bifurcation level and how to leverage it for tuning synchronization frequency. We will answer this question in the next section.

IV. GRADIENT-INSTRUCTED FREQUENCY TUNING

In this section, we propose Gradient-Instructed Frequency Tuning (GIFT), a frequency tuning algorithm for FL that is privacy-preserving, system-practical and also model-generic. We first propose a metric to quantify gradient bifurcation level, and then devise a feedback-driven heuristic to adjust synchronization frequency at runtime.
A. Quantifying Gradient Bifurcation Level

To quantify the extent of gradient bifurcation, we first propose an intuitive metric: \( C = \frac{1}{\sum_i w_i^2} \). This metric depicts the effective portion of the aggregated gradient that does help the model to move towards the true optimum. Obviously, \( C \) is 1 when all the gradients are of the same direction, and is 0 if they well counteract with each other, i.e., when suboptimal stagnation occurs. Nonetheless, this metric is not practical for a real-world FL setup. To be clear, we summarize the practicality challenges of FL as follows:

1) \textit{Stability Challenge.} Since samples processed in a SGD iteration are chosen randomly, local gradients fluctuate drastically, as can be seen in Fig. 3. This statistical instability may invalidate the expected bifurcation pattern of gradient. Besides, in real-world FL setup the clients are also unstable: FL clients may join or leave randomly during training, and the FL server usually collects gradients from only a portion of the clients whoever reporting the earliest, so as to avoid waiting for stragglers [13], [19], [20]. A practical metric must be robust to such statistical and systematical instability.

2) \textit{Scalability Challenge.} Meanwhile, in realistic FL applications like GBoard [20], there may be hundreds or thousands of clients participating simultaneously. Therefore, our metric should scale well in computing or storage overhead.

To tackle those challenges, we extend the previous metric definition with smoothing and pooling techniques.

1) \textit{Smoothing:} To address statistical instability, we smooth the raw gradients with their historical values. To maintain low storage overhead, instead of using a window-based smoothing method, we calculate the gradients’ exponential moving average (EMA). Let \( \{g_i\}_i \) denote an exponential moving average with decay factor \( \theta \), and \( u_{i,r}^\tau \) be the local gradient of client-\( i \) in \( r \)th round, then we maintain \( \hat{u}_{i,r}^\tau = \langle u_{i,r}^\tau \rangle_\theta = \theta * \hat{u}_{i,r-1}^\tau + (1-\theta) * u_{i,r}^\tau \).

2) \textit{Pooling:} Note that maintaining \( \hat{u}_{i,r}^\tau \) for each client is memory-inefficient given the large client quantity, and is even infeasible due to participant instability. To tackle that problem, we further propose \textit{bilateral gradient pooling}—the FL server only maintains two EMA gradients: one to collect the positive gradients from any client, and the other the negative ones. When the local gradients bifurcate, the two EMA gradients also bifurcate. This way, we can get a stable gradient statistics pattern despite the unstable client participation.

3) \textit{Gradient Consistency:} Combining the above smoothing and pooling techniques, at round \( r \), we define our customized metric, gradient consistency, as:

\[
C = \frac{\hat{P}_r + \hat{\bar{N}}_r}{\hat{P}_r + \hat{\bar{N}}_r}, \quad \text{where} \quad \hat{P}_r = \left( \sum_i \text{Relu}(u_{i,r}^\tau) \right)_\theta, \quad \hat{\bar{N}}_r = \left( \sum_i -\text{Relu}(-u_{i,r}^\tau) \right)_\theta.
\]

Here \( \hat{P}_r \) collects the EMA values of all the positive gradient components, and \( \hat{\bar{N}}_r \) collects the EMA values of all the negative gradient components (we use the \text{Relu} \ operation for sign filtering). When the positive components and negative components well counteract with each other, \( C \) would be close to 0. Gradient consistency is thus a practical metric that can represent how fast (in terms of the useful share out of the aggregated gradient) the model is being refined to the optimum. While ideally it shall decrease to zero when model training stagnates, it is not so in practice because the impact of random mini-batches cannot be completely eliminated by smoothing; besides, for deep neural networks, there might be irregular landscapes like \textit{flat minima} [27], where the gradient is not zero even at a local optimum. Therefore, we diagnose training stagnation not by absolute value of the gradient consistency but by its stabilizing behavior.

B. Tuning Frequency in a Feedback-Driven Manner

To be model-generic, instead of deriving a subtle formula representing the best synchronization frequency, we propose \textit{Gradient-Instructed Frequency Tuning (GIFT)}, a feedback-driven frequency tuning method based on the proposed gradient consistency metric. In GIFT, each time the gradient consistency stabilizes—a feedback signal suggesting that the model can no longer be effectively refined under the current frequency \( (\tau) \)—we would scale down \( \tau \) by a fixed divisor (e.g., 2). With such a higher frequency, it is expected that the
aggregated gradient in each round can be more accurate and the model can reach a higher accuracy.

Moreover, we also incorporate an extension that allows the synchronization frequency to be modestly decreased at the initial phase of the FL process. At FL commencement, the global component $u^*_\tau$ dominates $u_i^{\tau}$, rendering the gradient quite consistent (as shown in Fig. 3), and it is not necessary to conduct frequent synchronization. To exploit this optimization opportunity, we tentatively increase $\tau$ in a linear manner every a few rounds, until the gradient consistency metric signals that the FL process stagnates. Yet, inflating $\tau$ is essentially trading computation for communication efficiency, and to avoid the risk of over-compromised computation efficiency, frequency relaxation is not enabled by default.

**Implementation:** We have implemented GIFT with PyTorch, and the detailed workflow is shown in Alg. 1. In Procedure ClientIterate, lines 2-3 describe the regular local updating, and lines 4-6 mean that the client shall communicate with the FL Server every $\tau$ iterations to get the latest model $\omega$ as well as the updated synchronization frequency. In Procedure Aggregate, the FL Server first updates the global model with standard FedAvg (lines 8-9), and then calculates gradient consistency metric (lines 10-11). In particular, if gradient consistency no longer decreases, the synchronization frequency represented by $\tau$ is divided by $\gamma$ (lines 12-13); if otherwise the gradient consistency metric keeps decreasing, $\tau$ is increased with the addend $\delta$ (lines 14-15).

Regarding the algorithm complexity, with the pooling technique we need to maintain the EMA values of $\tilde{P}_r$ and $\tilde{N}_r$, each has the same size as the model (denoted by $M$). Therefore, the space complexity is $O(M)$ (with a very small coefficient). Similarly, since GIFT enforces identical operations for each gradient coordinate, the computation complexity to calculate gradient consistency $C$ is also $O(M)$.

### V. Evaluation

In this section, we evaluate GIFT performance with testbed experiments. We first visually and quantitively verify the effectiveness of GIFT in a 100-node cluster emulating realistic FL scenarios, and then justify the superiority of GIFT over existing practices. We also examined the behavior of GIFT under different levels of non-IID data, as well as the effectiveness of frequency relaxation. Finally, we conduct sensitivity analysis on the hyper-parameters involved.

#### A. Experimental Setup

1) **Hardware Platform:** We emulate real-world FL scenarios with 100 m5.large instances on Amazon EC2, each with 2 vCPU cores and 8GB RAM (similar with that of a smartphone). The client bandwidth is configured to be 5Mbps with the wondershaper tool. The FL server is a c5.9xlarge instance with 10Gbps bandwidth.

2) **Training Setup:** Models trained in our evaluation are LeNet-5 [25], VGG-16 [29] and a LSTM network (containing 2 recurrent layers with a hidden size of 64). LeNet-5 and VGG-16 are trained on the CIFAR-10 dataset [26] and the LSTM network is trained on the KeyWord Spotting (KWS) dataset—a subset of the Speech Commands dataset [30] including 10 key words. To be realistic, instead of partitioning the initial dataset after label sorting, we let the samples on each client independently follow a Dirichlet distribution [3], [5], which controls label class composition via a concentration parameter $\alpha$. In our experiments we set $\alpha$ to 1, emulating a modest non-IID level. The learning rates are set to 0.01 (LeNet-5), 0.1 (VGG-16) and 0.05 (KWS), with weight decay of 0.01, 0.0005 and 0.01. The initial $\tau$ is set to 100. In GIFT, the EMA smoothing factor $\theta$ is 0.9, and $\tau$ is divided by 2 once gradient consistency no longer decreases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Time (h)</th>
<th>Accuracy (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LeNet-5</td>
<td>FedAvg</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GIFT</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VGG-16</td>
<td>FedAvg</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GIFT</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>67.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSTM</td>
<td>FedAvg</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GIFT</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>74.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
rounds, which is cost-prohibitive even with GIFT. Enables each model to achieve a higher accuracy frequency to ensure continuous model improvement, GIFT for 1000 rounds. By adaptively tuning the synchronization the time cost and accuracy attained when training each model between GIFT and standard FedAvg in Table II, which lists model closer to the true optimum.

C. Comparison With Existing Methods

We implement AFL [17] and AdaComm [7], two typical methods discussed in §II-B, also in PyTorch. In our evaluation, we obtain the ground-truth knowledge (e.g., Lipschitz parameter, smoothness parameter, gradient divergence bound) required by AFL via a trial run, and in AdaComm the initial frequency is selected via grid search. In particular, to address loss saturation due to plateaus or noises, AdaComm adopts a saturation fix that halves $\tau$ once the loss value no longer decreases; to evaluate the true effectiveness of the formula-based solution, we incorporate a pruned version of AdaComm without that saturation fix. Additionally, since those methods do not consider system challenges of FL, for fair comparison we switch to a 20-node cluster with full client participation.

Fig. 5 shows the instantaneous accuracy and frequency when training LeNet-5 and LSTM under different schemes. It shows that, apart from the advantages of privacy preserving and practicality, GIFT can also attain a better accuracy performance over existing methods. Given a LeNet-5 accuracy target of 0.6, time consumption under GIFT is 28.9% less than AdaComm, and 61.2% less than AFL. We also note that AdaComm without saturation fix fails to behave well for both models, confirming the weakness of existing methods as discussed in §II-B.

Regarding the reasons behind, for AFL, the fixed frequency calculated is too small to be communication-efficient in the beginning, and is on the other hand too large to attain high accuracy in the end. For AdaComm, since its formulation is based on IID label distribution, the formula on $\tau$ is actually inaccurate for realistic FL setup. Moreover, due to loss plateaus problem (i.e., accuracy improved but the loss value not so), the training loss is sometimes not an appropriate indicator of the training status.\(^6\)

D. Effect of Frequency Relaxation

We further evaluate the effectiveness of frequency relaxation extension. To be specific, we additively increase $\tau$ by 5 once $C$ keeps decreasing for 10 consecutive rounds, and Fig. 7 depicts the testing accuracy (against communication rounds) when training LeNet-5 and LSTM with the 20-node cluster. For both models, frequency relaxation can yield a prompter accuracy improvement especially in the early stage. For example, after training LeNet-5 for 500 rounds, it can achieve a test accuracy of 0.55, 5.1% better than that without frequency relaxation. Note that such benefit would be larger for cases with a smaller $\tau$ initialization, as verified by the LSTM training results in Fig. 7b where $\tau_0$ is set to 10.

E. GIFT Behavior Under Different Levels of Non-IID Data

So far, we are operating with a modest level of non-IID data controlled by the hyper-parameter $\alpha = 1$ (§V-A); yet, how would GIFT behave if the data distribution is otherwise IID or extremely non-IID? To further reveal that, we resort to micro-benchmark experiments with different levels of non-IID data. In the IID case, each worker has a full copy the entire dataset; in the non-IID case, we separate the whole dataset across 5 clients—each hosting 2 label classes with no

\(^6\)It is well-known that the training loss in SGD may get stuck on plateaus landscape or fluctuate due to mini-batch randomness [7]. Once that occurs (i.e., the loss no longer decreases), AdaComm would degrade to naive frequency scaling (i.e., having $\tau$ halved), which works as a boundary-case remediation. Nonetheless, from Fig. 5 we find that the accuracy improvement of AdaComm largely comes from such a boundary-case remediation.
Fig. 6. GIFT Behavior under different levels of non-IID data.

overlap. In each case we record the instantaneous test accuracy, gradient consistency and sync-frequency under GIFT as well as the test accuracy under vanilla FedAvg.

From Fig. 6, we first learn that data distribution remarkably affects the model training performance. When training LeNet and LSTM with the extremely non-IID setup, there is an accuracy loss of nearly 50%, and the training time required towards model convergence is also hugely inflated—consistent with previous measurements in [2], [3], [4], [5]. Regarding the benefit of GIFT, for the IID case the GIFT performance is similar with that under vanilla FedAvg (as implied by 2), and for the non-IID case GIFT can achieve salient accuracy improvement. Regarding the gradient consistency metric, we note that for the IID case there is also a decaying trend. This is because in SGD the randomness incurred by mini-batch sampling gradually dominates the local gradients; with the pooling technique (§IV-A), the calculated gradient consistency would also keep decreasing. Regarding the frequency-tuning actions, we find that the frequency decaying paces in both IID and non-IID cases are mostly similar. In general, GIFT can work smoothly without particular requirements on the data IID level.

F. Sensitivity Analysis

In Fig. 8 we further evaluate the impact of GIFT sync-interval divisor, i.e., \( \gamma \) in Alg. 1. We change it—from the default value 2—respectively to 3 and 10, and evaluate the GIFT performance in the 20-node cluster. As shown in Fig. 8, GIFT behavior is generally stable with different \( \gamma \); The synchronization interval \( \tau \) is decreased to 1 at a similar time, and the accuracy performance is also similar. This suggests that our GIFT algorithm is robust to the \( \gamma \) hyper-parameter.

VI. ADDITIONAL RELATED WORK AND DISCUSSION

Recall that in §II-B we have introduced a series of frequency-setup methods for FL; to improve FL accuracy or efficiency, in the literature there have been some other interesting directions not involving frequency-tuning. In this section, we will briefly review those parallel directions and further discuss the privacy-preserving property of GIFT.

Meanwhile, recall that when enabling frequency relaxation (as in §V-D), the default addend \( \delta \) to increase \( \tau \) is set to 5; here we also evaluate its sensitivity with Fig. 9. For each of the experiments in Fig. 7, we change \( \delta \) respectively to 2 and 10 and repeat the same training process. As shown in Fig. 9, a larger \( \delta \) can yield a faster accuracy improvement in the early stage, although that speedup would be caught up by others in the later stage when a smaller \( \tau \) becomes more beneficial. In general, the performance of GIFT is also stable with respect to different \( \delta \) values.
B. Improving Communication Efficiency

end users, not requiring any modifications to the user-specified
those methods by being light-weight and also transparent to
set up. Overall speaking, our GIFT method outperforms
GAN (Generative Adversarial Network) models [32]. Yet these
a few common samples to each client [4], or by augmenting
implement means to reduce data non-IID level by copying
\[ \delta \]

Fig. 9. GIFT Performance with different \( \delta \) values (\( \delta \) is used to increase \( \tau \) when relaxing synchronization frequency).

A. Improving FL Accuracy

To mitigate accuracy loss due to non-IID data in FL, two typical methodologies other than frequency tuning are
data complementing and optimization rectifying. Data complementing means to reduce data non-IID level by copying
a few common samples to each client [4], or by augmenting
clients’ local datasets with auxiliary samples generated from
GAN (Generative Adversarial Network) models [32]. Yet these
methods may incur large computation and communication overheads. Optimization rectifying means to add an extra
regularizing term to the loss function [32], [33], or to add a
specific momentum to the optimizer [34]. These methods are not transparent to models and require expert knowledge
to set up. Overall speaking, our GIFT method outperforms
those methods by being light-weight and also transparent to
end users, not requiring any modifications to the user-specified
loss function or optimizers.

B. Improving Communication Efficiency

To reduce communication cost of distributed training, quantization and sparsification are two well-known methodologies
in addition to frequency tuning. Quantization reduces bandwidth consumption by transmitting low-precision updates,
balancing the trade-off between accuracy and gradient compressing level [1], [35], [36]. Sparsification aims to synchronizing
only the important gradients under a given criterion like normalized magnitude [37], [38], [39], [40]. These methods have
proven effective in reducing the communication amount, yet they ignored the non-IID problem in FL, and may thus
suffer accuracy loss when applied in realistic FL scenarios.

C. Privacy-Preserving Characteristics of GIFT

Privacy is not an absolutely-defined conception. By privacy-preserving, in this work we mean that GIFT does not compromise
the accuracy level of vanilla FL, better than existing practices based on loss values. Nonetheless, it has been shown that
certain user information can still be recovered from
\[ \text{gradients} \] [41]. To solve this problem, differential privacy (DP) [42], [43] is often adopted in FL to protect raw gradients
by injecting Gaussian noises to them. We note that applying DP does not compromise the effectiveness of GIFT, because
the noises added by DP exhibit a similar impact with that of
mini-batch sample randomness, which is already solved with
the smoothing and pooling techniques (§IV).

VII. CONCLUSION

In this work, to attain better model accuracy and resource efficiency in FL, we have proposed GIFT, a privacy-preserving,
system-practical and model-generic scheme to adaptively tune
the synchronization frequency and to mitigate accuracy loss due to non-IID data in FL, while preserving
in this work we mean that GIFT does not compromise
accuracy loss when applied in realistic FL scenarios.

APPENDIX

Lemma 2: Let \( \omega^k_i \) be the local parameter on client-\( i \) (\( i = 1, 2, \ldots , N \)) after refined for \( k \) iterations from \( \omega_0 \), and \( \omega^*_k \) be the ideal parameter when refined with IID dataset also for \( k \) iterations from \( \omega_0 \). Under the Assumptions 1 and 2, let \( \omega^*_k = \omega^k_i - \omega_0 \) be the accumulated gradients on client-\( i \) after \( \tau \) iterations, then \( \omega^*_k = \omega^*_k + \varepsilon^*_k \), where \( \omega^*_k \) is the ideal gradient
with IID data and \( \varepsilon^*_k \) is the local error component:

\[ e^i_k = -\eta_0 \left[ \nabla L^i(\omega^*_k) - \nabla L^*(\omega^*_k) + \langle \nabla^2 L^i(\omega^*_k), \omega^*_k - \omega^*_k \rangle \right] \]

Proof: Since \( \omega^*_k \) is the ideal gradient with IID data, i.e.,
\[ \omega^*_k = -\eta_0 \sum_{i=0}^{\tau-1} \nabla L^*(\omega^*_k) \], and let \( \Delta^*_k = \nabla L^i(\omega^*_k) - \nabla L^*(\omega^*_k) \)
be the gradient error in the \( k \)th iteration, we have

\[ e^i_k = \omega^*_k - \omega^*_k = -\eta_0 \sum_{k=0}^{\tau-1} [\nabla L^i(\omega^*_k) - \nabla L^*(\omega^*_k)] \]

\[ = -\eta_0 \sum_{k=0}^{\tau-1} \Delta^*_k. \] \[ (2) \]

Let \( v^i(\omega) = \nabla L^i(\omega) - \nabla L^*(\omega) \), we have:

\[ \Delta^*_k = v^i(\omega^*_k) + [\nabla L^*(\omega^*_k) - \nabla L^*(\omega^*_k)] \]. \[ (3) \]

Regarding the first term \( v^i(\omega^*_k) \), because Assumption 2 indicates that \( L^*(\omega) \) is upper-bounded by a quadratic function,
and \( \omega^*_k - \omega^*_k \) scaled by \( \eta_0 \) can be arbitrarily small, we can skip
higher-order items and get:

\[ v^i(\omega^*_k) = v^i(\omega^*_k) + [\nabla v^i(\omega^*_k), \omega^*_k - \omega^*_k]. \] \[ (4) \]

Similarly, regarding the second term in Eq. (3) we can get

\[ \nabla L^*(\omega^*_k) - \nabla L^*(\omega^*_k) = \nabla L^*(\omega^*_k + \omega^*_k - \omega^*_k) - \nabla L^*(\omega^*_k) \]

\[ = \langle \nabla^2 L^*(\omega^*_k), \omega^*_k - \omega^*_k \rangle. \] \[ (5) \]
With Eq. (4) and Eq. (5), we can transfer Eq. (3) to
\[
\Delta_k^i = v^i(\omega_k^i) + (\nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega_k^i), \omega_k^i - \bar{\omega}_k^i).
\]

Therefore, we can get
\[
e^i_k = -\eta \sum_{k=0}^{\tau-1} \Delta_k^i = -\eta \sum_{k=0}^{\tau-1} [v^i(\omega_k^i) + (\nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega_k^i), \omega_k^i - \bar{\omega}_k^i)]
= -\eta \sum_{k=0}^{\tau-1} [\nabla L^i(\omega_k^i) - \nabla L^i(\bar{\omega}_k^i)] + (\nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega_k^i), \omega_k^i - \bar{\omega}_k^i).
\]

This completes our proof.

**Theorem 3:** Under the Assumptions 1 and 2, let \( \bar{u}_\tau = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} u_i^* \) and let \( d(\tau) = \bar{u}_\tau - u_i^* \) be aggregated gradient error after each client locally refines the parameter for \( \tau \) iterations from \( \omega_0 \), then
\[
d(\tau) \geq (\tau - 1) \frac{\eta^2}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} (\nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega_0^i), \nabla L_i(\omega_0^i) - \nabla L^i(\omega_0^i)).
\]

**Proof:** Since \( \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \nabla L_i^*(\omega_k^i) = \nabla L^*(\omega_k^i) \), with Lemma 2 we can get:
\[
d(\tau) = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} e^i_{\tau} = -\eta \sum_{k=0}^{\tau-1} \sum_{i=1}^{N} (\nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega_k^i), \omega_k^i - \omega_k^i). \]

Let \( \Delta_k \) be the aggregated error in \( k \)th \( (k = 0, \ldots, \tau - 1) \) iteration:
\[
\Delta_k = -\eta \sum_{i=1}^{N} (\nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega_k^i), \omega_k^i - \omega_k^i)
\]

Next, we seek to prove \( \Delta_{k+1} \geq \Delta_k \) with mathematical induction.

When \( k = 0 \), since \( \omega_0^* = \omega_0 = \omega_0 \), we have \( \Delta_0 = 0 \).

When \( k = 1 \), since \( \omega_1^* = \omega_1 - \eta \nabla L^1(\omega_0) \) and \( \omega_1^* = \omega_1 - \eta \nabla L^1(\omega_0) \), and also let \( v^i(\omega) = \nabla L^i(\omega) - \nabla L^i(\omega) \), we have
\[
\Delta_1 = -\eta \sum_{i=1}^{N} (\nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega_1^i), \omega_1^i - \omega_1^i)
= -\eta \sum_{i=1}^{N} (\nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega_1^i), v^i(\omega_0)). \]

Since \( \sum_i v^i(\omega_0) = 0 \), \( \Delta_1 \) can be viewed as the summation of conflicting values \( \{v^i(\omega_0)\} \) assigned with respective weights \( \{\nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega_1^i)\} \). If with IID data such that \( \forall i, \nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega) \equiv \nabla^2 L^*(\omega) \), we then have \( \Delta_1 = 0 \); otherwise, if for non-IID data that usually yields heterogeneous \( \{\nabla^2 L_i^*(\omega)\} \), we have \( \Delta_1 \neq 0 \), i.e., \( \Delta_1 > 0 \).

For clarity we focus on the case where there is only one dimension in \( \omega \). Given that \( \{L_i(\omega)\} \) are convex and smooth (the global optimum is optimal in each dimension), the conclusion of single-dimension case can be extended to multi-dimensional cases.

Given that \( \Delta_1 > 0 \), without loss of generality we can assume that \( \Delta_1 > 0 \). With Eq. (8) the set of \( \{i\} \) can be divided into two groups: \( \{i^+\} - \text{those such that } \omega_i^+ > \omega_i^* \); and \( \{i^-\} - \text{those such that } \omega_i^- < \omega_i^* \). For simplicity, we assume there are only two clients: \( i^+ \) and \( i^- \). Given \( \Delta_1 > 0 \), under Eq. (9) and with convexity we have:
\[
\nabla^2 L_i^-(\omega_i^-) > \nabla^2 L_i^+(\omega_i^+) > 0.
\]

Under mathematical induction, we assume that \( \forall k \in \{0, 1, 2, \ldots, K - 1\} \), \( \Delta_{k+1} > \Delta_k \geq 0 \), and seek to prove \( \Delta_{K+1} > \Delta_K \). Based on the assumptions, we first have
\[
\nabla L_{k+1} - \nabla L_{k+1} = \sum_{k=0}^{K} \Delta_k > \sum_{k=0}^{K-1} \Delta_k = \nabla L_{K} - \nabla L_{K} > 0.
\]

Given that \( \bar{w}_K = \frac{i^+ + i^-}{2} \), Eq. (11) translates to
\[
\nabla L_{K+1} - \nabla L_{K+1} > (\omega_i^+ - \omega_i^-) > 0.
\]

We next seek to prove \( \Delta_{K+1} > \Delta_K \). Comparing \( \Delta_{K+1} \) and \( \Delta_K \), we have
\[
\Delta_{K+1} - \Delta_K = \sum_{k=0}^{K} \Delta_k - \sum_{k=0}^{K-1} \Delta_k = \Delta_K - \Delta_{K+1} = \nabla L_{K} - \nabla L_{K} > 0.
\]

Under Assumption 2 (i.e., \( \nabla^2 L_i^{(\omega_{K+1})} \) is bounded by a constant) and with a small step size, we approximately have \( \nabla^2 L_i^{(\omega_{K+1})} = \nabla^2 L_i^{(\omega_{K})} = \nabla^2 L_i^{(\omega_{K})} \) (in fact \( \nabla^2 L_i^{(\omega)} \) is a constant if \( L_i(\omega) \) are quadratic functions). We further have
\[
\Delta_{K+1} - \Delta_K = \nabla L_{K} - \nabla L_{K} > 0.
\]

Combining Eq. (10), Eq. (12) with Eq. (14), we can obtain \( \Delta_{K+1} - \Delta_K \geq 0 \), i.e., \( \Delta_{K+1} > \Delta_K \).

Therefore for general case with \( \tau > 1 \) we have,
\[
d(\tau) = \sum_{k=0}^{\tau-1} \Delta_k = (\tau - 1) \Delta_1 - \sum_{k=0}^{\tau-1} \Delta_k > (\tau - 1) \Delta_1
\]

Integrating the case of \( \tau = 1 \) we complete the proof.

**Theorem 4 (Suboptimal Convergence):** Suppose FL process converges at a point \( \bar{w}^* \), and \( \omega^* \) is the ideal parameter under IID dataset. Then
\[
\bar{w}^* - \omega^* \geq \frac{(\tau - 1)\eta}{\beta N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} (\nabla^2 L_i^{(\bar{w}^*)}, \nabla^2 L_i^{(\omega^*)} - \nabla^2 L_i^{(\omega^*)}).
\]

**Proof:** Under Theorem 3, we treat \( \bar{u}_\tau, u_i^* \) and \( d \) as a function of \( \omega_0 \), then we have \( d(\omega) = \bar{u}_\tau(\omega) - u_i^* \).
When FL process stagnates at $\hat{w}^*$, i.e., $u_i^*(\hat{w}^*) = 0$, we have
\[
u^*_i(\hat{w}^*) = \frac{(n - 1)n^2}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \left[ \nabla L_i(\hat{w}^*) - \nabla L_i^*(\hat{w}^*) \right].
\]
(15)

Meanwhile, since $u^*_i(\omega^*) = 0$, with Assumption 2 we have:
\[
u^*_i(\omega^*) = u^*_i(\omega^* + \bar{\omega}^* - \omega^*)
= u^*_i(\omega^*) + \langle \nabla u^*_i(\omega^*), \bar{\omega}^* - \omega^* \rangle
= \langle \nabla u^*_i(\omega^*), \bar{\omega}^* - \omega^* \rangle \leq \eta/\beta\bar{\omega}^* - \omega^*.
\]
(16)

Combining Eq. (15) and Eq. (16) our proof completes. □

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