Bayesian Hyperparameter Optimization for PDE-based Rectified Flow

JAY UPADHYAYA, Department of Computer Science, University of Texas at Austin, USA
MOHAMMED HASSAN, Department of Computer Science, University of Texas at Austin, USA

We explore hyperparameter optimization (HPO) for *PDE-based rectified flow*, a generative framework that combines normalizing flows with continuous rectification steps to produce expressive and stable transformations. Focusing on CIFAR-10, we systematically compare Random Search, Grid Search, and Bayesian Optimization against a default Baseline. Our experiments demonstrate that Bayesian Optimization consistently discovers superior hyperparameter configurations with lower variance. To explain these empirical results, we present a rigorous theoretical interpretation showing how the partial factorization and PDE-inspired structure of rectified flow yield a smoother objective landscape well-suited for surrogate modeling approaches. This synergy between PDE-based generative modeling and adaptive HPO offers a powerful avenue for stable, high-fidelity generation in research and real-world AI pipelines.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Hyperparameter Optimization, PDE-based Generative Models, Rectified Flow, Bayesian Optimization, Random Search, Grid Search

ACM Reference Format:
Jay Upadhyaya and Mohammed Hassan. 2024. **Bayesian Hyperparameter Optimization for PDE-based Rectified Flow**. 1, 1 (December 2024), 3 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/nnnnnnn.nnnnnnn

1 Introduction

Generative models continue to shape modern AI applications, enabling tasks like high-fidelity image synthesis, data augmentation, and privacy-preserving analytics. *Rectified flow* [Liu et al. 2022] introduces a PDE-inspired extension to normalizing flows, rectifying points from a noise distribution into the data manifold through a continuous generative trajectory. While this approach boasts improved stability and invertibility, selecting hyperparameters (e.g., flow depth, hidden dimensions, learning rate) remains an intricate challenge.

Hyperparameter optimization (HPO) aims to automate this search, but different strategies can yield drastically varying performance. We systematically compare three HPO methods—**Random Search**, **Grid Search**, and **Bayesian Optimization**—against a Baseline configuration of rectified flow on CIFAR-10. Our experiments reveal Bayesian Optimization's consistent edge in discovering superior configurations with lower validation loss and variance.

Beyond empirical observations, we propose a rigorous theoretical interpretation exploring why PDE-based rectified flow exhibits a tractable, smoother hyperparameter landscape, making Bayesian surrogate modeling particularly effective. We conclude by discussing future directions for PDE-inspired flows and broader multi-objective optimization opportunities.

2 Related Work

Hyperparameter optimization is integral to boosting deep learning performance. **Random Search** [Bergstra and Bengio 2012] often delivers broader coverage than naive grids, while **Grid Search** [Larochelle et al. 2007] systematically enumerates configurations but can be computationally burdensome in high-dimensional spaces. **Bayesian Optimization** [Snoek et al. 2012] leverages surrogate models (Gaussian Processes, Tree-structured Parzen Estimators) to adaptively probe the hyperparameter space.

Meanwhile, normalizing flows [Rezende and Mohamed 2015; Dinh et al. 2017] have catalyzed significant advances in density estimation and generative modeling. **Rectified flow** [Liu et al. 2022] extends these approaches by incorporating PDE-based continuous transformations for improved stability. Despite promising results, the synergy between PDE-based rectification and HPO remains underexplored, motivating our comparative study.

3 Methodology

3.1 Dataset and Preprocessing

Experiments employ CIFAR-10 (60,000 images of 32×32 pixels in 10 classes). We hold out 5,000 training images for validation, normalizing inputs to $[-1, +1]$. This moderate scale enables iterative HPO comparisons without overwhelming computational resources.

3.2 Rectified Flow Architecture and Baseline

Our `RectifiedFlow` model extends the publicly released code in [Liu et al. 2022]. Input images are flattened into 3,072-dimensional vectors, then passed through multiple `RectifiedAffineCoupling` layers, each splitting features into sub-blocks for scale-and-translate transforms. A default **Baseline** config uses:

- Hidden Dim = 128
- Num. Flows = 5
- Batch Size = 128
- Learning Rate = 1×10^{-3}
- Weight Decay = 0
- Epochs = 5

After 5 epochs, Baseline converges to a validation loss of ~ 1450.

3.3 Hyperparameter Optimization Methods

3.3.1 Random Search. We sample from:

- **Learning Rate (lr):** log-uniform in $[10^{-4}, 10^{-2}]$

Authors' Contact Information: Jay Upadhyaya, Department of Computer Science, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, USA; Mohammed Hassan, Department of Computer Science, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, USA.

ACM XXXX-XXXX/2024/12-ART
https://doi.org/10.1145/nnnnnnn.nnnnnnn

- **Number of Flows (num_flows):** integer in $[5, 20]$
- **Hidden Dimension (hidden_dim):** integer in $[128, 512]$
- **Batch Size (batch_size):** {64,128,256}

Each random configuration trains for 5–10 epochs, final validation loss is recorded, repeated for 10 trials.

3.3.2 Grid Search. We define a moderate grid:

- **lr** $\in \{10^{-4}, 5\times10^{-4}, 10^{-3}, 5\times10^{-3}\}$
- **hidden_dim** $\in \{128, 256\}$
- **num_flows** $\in \{5, 10\}$

Total of 16 configurations, each trained 5 epochs at `batch_size=128`. We log final validation losses.

3.3.3 Bayesian Optimization. Via Optuna [Snoek et al. 2012], we adaptively sample the same hyperparameters as Random Search. The surrogate model updates after each trial, focusing future proposals on promising regions. Trials auto-prune if validation loss plateaus. We conduct up to 10 trials (5–10 epochs each).

4 Results

4.1 Baseline Performance

The Baseline achieves ~ 1450 in validation loss. This serves as a reference for measuring improvement from HPO methods.

4.2 Hyperparameter Optimization Outcomes

Random Search. Random draws often beat Baseline, reaching ~ 1350 loss on average, though variance remains high. A few suboptimal samples lag behind Baseline.

Grid Search. Final losses range from 1300 to > 1600. While some grid points outperform Baseline, many converge poorly, underscoring Grid Search's inefficiency in PDE-based rectified flow.

Bayesian Optimization. Repeatedly converges near 1330–1350 validation losses with narrower variance. Adaptive sampling prunes unproductive configurations, capitalizing on the PDE-based flow's structured partial factorization.

Table 1. Comparative Validation Loss Across Methods (5–10 Epochs, Multiple Trials)

Method	**Mean Val. Loss**	**Variance**
Baseline	1450	–
Random Search	1390 ± 30	High
Grid Search	1420 ± 50	Moderate
Bayesian Optimization	1340 ± 15	Low

Table 1 summarizes final validation losses. Bayesian Optimization exhibits both the lowest mean loss and the smallest variance.

5 Theoretical Interpretation of PDE-based Rectified Flow

A key contribution of this paper is the **theoretical interpretation** elucidating *why* Bayesian Optimization excels in tuning PDE-based rectified flow. Let $x \in \mathbb{R}^d$ represent flattened input data, and consider a continuous trajectory $x(t)$ driven by a PDE-based update rule:

$$\frac{\partial x(t)}{\partial t} = F\big(x(t), \theta\big), \quad t \in [0, 1],$$

where θ encapsulates hyperparameters shaping the rectification field $F(\cdot, \theta)$. Rectified flow discretizes $x(t)$ into N steps of invertible coupling transforms:

$$x_{k+1} = x_k + g(x_k; \theta_k), \quad k = 0, \dots, N-1,$$

where $g(\cdot; \theta_k)$ is a learned scale-and-translate function. The log-likelihood objective for generative modeling is:

$$\mathcal{L}(\theta) = -\mathbb{E}_{x\sim\mathcal{D}}\left[\log p_\theta(x)\right].$$

Each coupling layer factorizes the Jacobian determinant, e.g.,

$$\log\left|\frac{\partial x_{k+1}}{\partial x_k}\right| = \sum_{i=1}^{m} \phi_i(x_{k,\text{split}}; \theta_k),$$

rendering the global log-likelihood smoother compared to typical high-dimensional transformations. This partial factorization arises naturally from PDE-inspired rectification, which imposes constraints on how data is warped at each discrete step.

5.1 Surrogate Modeling Under Partial Factorization

Bayesian Optimization employs a surrogate $q(\mathcal{L}|\theta)$, iteratively refined by observations $\{\theta^{(j)}, \mathcal{L}^{(j)}\}_{j=1}^{t}$. Because the PDE-based rectified flow imposes additional structure (i.e., each coupling layer manipulates disjoint feature subsets), the global parameter space is less entangled. This reduced entanglement tends to produce a relatively smooth $\mathcal{L}(\theta)$ manifold, yielding more accurate posterior estimates for $q(\mathcal{L}|\theta)$.

$$\theta^* = \arg\min_\theta \mathcal{L}(\theta), \quad q_{t+1}(\theta) \propto q_t(\theta)\exp\big(-\alpha(\mathcal{L}(\theta) - \min_j \mathcal{L}(\theta^{(j)}))\big).$$

Surrogate updates converge faster when $\mathcal{L}(\theta)$ is smooth and partially factorized, letting Bayesian Optimization focus search on the most promising hyperparameter subspaces. In contrast, naive Grid/Random methods fail to systematically exploit these PDE constraints, resulting in higher variance and occasionally worse performance.

6 Discussion

Our theoretical analysis (Section 5) reveals that PDE-driven partial factorization underlies much of the rectified flow's stability and smoothness in hyperparameter space. By splitting the feature dimension into disjoint sub-blocks for learned scale-and-translate transforms, the likelihood gradients and Jacobian terms become significantly less entangled. This modularity lowers the effective dimensionality of optimization and mitigates erratic gradient behaviors often encountered in other high-dimensional flows.

Link to Bayesian Surrogate Modeling. The synergy with Bayesian Optimization emerges because the surrogate model thrives in smoother, more factorized objective landscapes. As the PDE-based structure imposes regularity, the Bayesian surrogate (Gaussian Processes, TPE, etc.) can more rapidly refine its posterior estimate of validation loss, converging on minima with fewer trials. In contrast, Grid and

Random Search lack the adaptive refinement to fully exploit this factorized geometry, leading to higher variance.

Implications for Scalability. A notable insight from our results is that partial factorization not only benefits performance but also fosters scalability. For more complex generative tasks—e.g., higher-resolution images or multi-channel data—this design principle suggests that PDE-based rectified flows might remain tractable under expansions in feature dimensionality. Bayesian HPO can then systematically prune unproductive hyperparameter subspaces more efficiently than naive sweeps.

Cross-Architecture Considerations. Although our study centers on the rectified flow architecture, the concept of factorization can extend to other flow-based or PDE-inspired models. Flows employing complementary coupling layers or multi-scale structures may similarly profit from Bayesian Optimization. If the parameter transformations maintain invertibility with factorized Jacobians, the synergy highlighted here is likely to generalize.

Comparison to Traditional Normalizing Flows. Traditional normalizing flows like Real NVP [Dinh et al. 2017] or Glow often require careful hyperparameter tuning to avoid training instabilities. Rectified flow's PDE approach further reduces these instabilities. The success of Bayesian HPO reported in Table 1 underscores how rectified flow's design choices yield a friendlier search space. Thus, PDE-based rectification appears especially well-suited for advanced HPO frameworks that rely on smoothness and partial independence assumptions.

Practical Deployment. In practical terms, the smoother objective translates to fewer experimental runs wasted on drastically suboptimal hyperparameters. Practitioners deploying large-scale generative tasks (e.g., synthetic data generation, domain adaptation) can likely cut down on both compute time and tuning overhead by pairing PDE-inspired flows with Bayesian HPO. This synergy aligns well with modern ML pipelines that demand both high fidelity and efficiency.

7 Future Work and Implications

7.1 Extended Training Schedules and Multi-Objective Goals

Longer training (50–100 epochs) may highlight second-order stability benefits of PDE rectification and reveal new Pareto-optimal hyperparameters. Exploring multi-objective goals (e.g., FID score, inference latency) would yield broader adoption in resource-constrained or domain-specific settings.

7.2 Generalization to Higher-Resolution Domains

Future directions include applying PDE-based rectified flow on higher-resolution image tasks or specialized domains such as medical imaging or physics-based simulations. The partial factorization property might scale favorably, making Bayesian Optimization an even more powerful tool.

8 Conclusion

We presented a rigorous study of hyperparameter optimization for PDE-based rectified flow, comparing Random Search, Grid Search, and Bayesian Optimization on CIFAR-10. Empirically, Bayesian Optimization consistently achieves lower validation loss and variance, while our theoretical analysis explains this performance through PDE-inspired factorization that yields smoother objective gradients.

By leveraging rectified flow's structural constraints, adaptive surrogate-based methods can more precisely identify effective hyperparameter settings. These findings chart a path toward scalable, reliable PDE-inspired generative models across image, text, and scientific applications. Future work extending to multi-objective contexts and larger architectures promises to further refine the synergy between PDE-based flows and advanced HPO strategies.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge Dr. Qiang Liu and Baiyu Su for valuable insights supporting this research.

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