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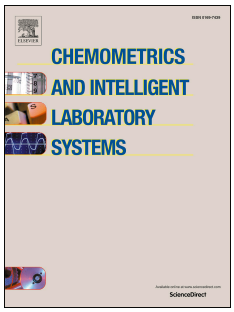

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PII: S0169-7439(19)30083-8

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chemolab.2019.103811

Article Number: 103811

Reference: CHEMOM 103811

To appear in: *Chemometrics and Intelligent Laboratory Systems*

Received Date: 7 February 2019

Revised Date: 2 May 2019

Accepted Date: 23 July 2019

Please cite this article as: I. Nazari, M. Tahir, H. Tayara, K.T. Chong, iN6-Methyl (5-step): Identifying RNA N6-methyladenosine sites using deep learning mode via Chou's 5-step rules and Chou's general PseKNC, *Chemometrics and Intelligent Laboratory Systems* (2019), doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chemolab.2019.103811.

iN6-Methyl (5-step): Identifying RNA N6-methyladenosine sites using deep learning mode via Chou's 5-step rules and Chou's general PseKNC

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Abstract

N6-methyladenosine (m^6A) is an RNA methylation modification and it is involved in various biological progresses such as translation, alternative splicing, degradation, stability, etc. Therefore, it is highly recommended to develop computational models for detecting N6-methyldenosine sites in RNA as experimental technologies, such as m^6A-seq and MeRIP-Seq, are both expensive and time consuming. Previous works start with features design step, which requires domain knowledge, followed by a classifier or cascade of classifiers for m^6A sites identification. In this paper, on the other hand, we utilize an automatic feature learning approach based on the widely used natural language technique "word2vec". The learnt features are extracted automatically from the human genome without any explicit definition. Then, these learnt features are fed to a simple convolution neural network model for classification. The proposed model is denoted as "iN6-Methyl (5-step)". It has been evaluated on three publicly available benchmark datasets and outperformed the current state-of-the-art methods. It is anticipated that the proposed model could be helpful for both academia and drug discovery. Finally, a user-friendly web-server has been established and made freely available at: https://home.jbnu.ac.kr/NSCL/iN6-

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Methyl.htm

Keywords: N6-methyladenosine site, deep learning, convolution neural network, RNA methylation, word2vec.

1. Introduction

N6-methyladenosine (m^6A) is the most frequent RNA modification that exists in various species [1, 2]. It plays important roles in various biological processes such as alternative splicing [3], regulation of circadian clock [4], cell differentiation and reprogramming [5], primary microRNA processing [6], and RNA structural dynamics [7]. The m^6A is found at mRNA [8], tRNA, rRNA, small nuclear RNA, and long non-coding RNA [9, 2, 10]. It also exists in archaea, viruses, bacteria, and most eukaryotes such as yeast, plants, and mammals [11, 12, 13, 14, 15] Therefore, identifying m^6A is important to understand their functional mechanisms. Recently, high-throughput experiments such as m^6A-seq [16] and MeRIP-Seq [17] provided a genome-wide m^6A profiles for various species such as Homo sapiens , Mus musculus [18], and Saccharomyces cerevisiae [19]. Based on these experimental findings, it was revealed that m^6A sites are more likely to occur within long internal exons, in 3' UTR, and near the stop codon, [18, 17]. In addition, the nonrandom existence of m^6A sites across the genome is conserved from yeast to human. Therefore, it is an essential and important for species [18, 19]. On the other hand m^6A-seq and MeRIP-Seq experiments are expensive and not accurate enough. Therefore, it is important to develop reliable computational tools for identifying m^6A sites. In recent years, several types of post transcription modification (PTM) have been studied such as ([20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46]).

Recently, machine learning based approaches have been used for developing computational tools for m^6A site identification. "iRNA-Methyl" was developed by [47] for m^6A site identification. In this method, sequence-order information using PseDNC (pseudo dinucleotide composition) [48] and physicochemical

properties are used for feature extraction then followed by support vector machine [49, 50]. More physicochemical properties have been added with a scalable transformation algorithm for a better feature extraction by [51]. It was suggested by [52] and [53] that using different types of feature descriptors could improve the performance of m^6A site identification models. Jia et al. [52] improved the performance by incorporating three types of feature descriptors such as dinucleotide composition, bi-profile Bayes, and KNN scores. On the other hand, Xiang et al. [53] merged k-mer frequency and binary encoding scheme to improve the performance. Recently, a powerful tool, "SRAMP", was proposed by [54]. In this work various feature extraction techniques have been utilized such as k-nearest neighbor encoding, secondary structure pattern, positional binary encoding of nucleotide sequence, and binary representation of nucleotide sequence. Then random forest model was trained based on the extracted features and the performance outperformed the other methods. Xiang et al. [53] proposed "RNAMethyPre" predictor that was based on position-specific and compositional information for m^6A sites on both mouse and human. Most of the previously mentioned predictors are species-specific. However, Qiang et al. [55] proposed a multiple species predictor for m^6A sites. They used Local position-specific dinucleotide frequency and dinucleotide binary encoding as features extraction and enhanced them using sequential forward search and F-score algorithm. Then, XGBoost algorithm was used to construct the predictive model. Generally, several m^6A predictors have been proposed such as m6Apred M6APred-EL [56], RFAthM6A [57], iRNA(m6A)-PseDNC [58], iRNA-PseColl [37],iRNA-3typeA [59], DeepM6ASeq [60], SRAMP [54], RNAMethPre [53], and BERMP[61].

In general, all of the proposed predictors require domain knowledge to manually design the features. These features should be designed in a way that the sequence-pattern information is preserved. For instance, pseudo amino acid composition [62] or PseAAC [63] is a good example for feature extraction technique. The popularity of this concept has led to developing open source softwares such as 'PseAAC-Builder' [64], 'propy' [65], and 'PseAAC-General' [66].

Later, PseAAC was extended to PseKNC (Pseudo K-tuple Nucleotide Composition) [67] to obtain numerical features from DNA/RNA sequences [68, 69]. The PseKNC has been constructed in web-servers such as Pse-in-One [70] and 'Pse-in-One2.0' [71].

On the other hand, deep learning based predictors enable designing powerful tools from raw RNA/DNA sequences without handcrafting the features such as DeepCpG [72], iDeepS [73], branch point selection [74], alternative splicing sites prediction [75], 2'-Omethylation sites prediction [76], and other biological processes [77, 78, 79, 80]. Deep learning based predictors for m^6A such as DeepM6ASeq [60] and BERMP [61] have extracted the features from the raw m6A sites using CNN and RNN. However, we learn the new representation for the m6A sites using word2vec algorithm and then utilize the new representation for m6A identification. The learnt features from word2vec are more comprehensive as they are based on the whole mRNA rather than small set of RNA/DNA samples. In this paper, we propose a novel multiple-species sequence-based predictor, namely "iN6-Methyl (5-step)", for identifying m^6A sites in RNA sequences. It consists of two steps. The first step is the feature representation stage in which each sequence is divided into words (3-mer) then a natural language processing models called word2vec is applied in order to map each word to its corresponding feature representation. The second step is a deep learning computational model that predicts the m^6A sites based on the generated features of the first step word2vec. The achieved results outperform the state-of-the-art methods in all evaluation metrics. In addition, a user-friendly webserver for m^6A prediction is established and made available at: https://home.jbnu.ac.kr/NSCL/iN6-Methyl.htm.

In this work, we follow the Chou's 5-step rules [81] similar to the previous studies [82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98]. The 5-step rules are benchmark dataset construction [92, 83, 82], mathematical formulation of the samples of the dataset, prediction engine design, performing cross-validation tests for evaluating the performance of the predictor engine, and finally, web-server construction.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Benchmark Datasets

In order to predict m^6A sites in multiple species, we use three benchmark datasets for three different species namely Saccharomyces cerevisiae (S51) [47], Homo sapiens (H41) [99], and Mus musculus (M41) [18]. The datasets S51, H41, and M41 contain 2614, 2260, and 1450 samples, respectively, and the length of each sample in S51 dataset is 51nt and it is 41nt for H41 and M41 datasets. Each sample of these datasets is centered on the m^6A site for the positive sequences, whilst the negative sequences prepared by adenines at the center without having biologically m^6A peak. As a quality control, we utilize 10-fold cross-validation in the training process. In this case, we randomly split the dataset into 10 folds. Nine folds are used for training and early stopping and the remaining fold is used for testing.

2.2. Methodology

We present a novel method in order to finding and predicting m^6A sites in different species called iN6-Methyl (5-step) model. Our proposed method consists of two major steps. The first step is the feature representation stage in which each sequence is divided into words (3-mer) then a natural language processing models called word2vec is applied in order to map each word to its corresponding feature representation. The second step is a deep learning computational model that predicts the m^6A sites based on the generated features of the first step. This process is illustrated in Figure 1 and is described in details in the following sections.

2.2.1. Distributed Feature Representation

The existing approaches for m^6A sites identification require domain-knowledge to hand-craft the input features of the classification models. In this work, we aim to build a computational model that can learn features representation automatically based on the genomic data. This technique helps in obtaining more

optimal features by reducing the noise in the data and, consequently, improving the performance of the final computational model.

Genetic data is considered as a language, that is represented in DNA and RNA sequences, by which the information passes within and between the cells [100, 101, 102]. It is based on a continues chain of nucleotides (A, C, G, and T). In addition, NLP techniques have been used successfully in various biological problems such as alternative splicing site prediction [75].

Thus, we utilize NLP model "word2vec" to get interpretable representations for m^6A sites Figure 1(a). The first step in word2vec is corpus construction. In this step we split the continuous genomic sequences into words represented by overlapped k-mer to break its continuity. In our model we empirically set $k = 3$. This selection performs better than using other values of k such as 4-mer,5-mer, 6-mer, etc. This selection confirms the previous findings of [103, 75] in which setting $k = 3$ was the best choice. In addition, 3-mer has been widely used in DNA/RNA sequence formulation [104, 105]. Thus, The constructed corpus has four different nucleotides (A, C, G, and T) and consequently forms 64 unique words ($4^3 = 64$). For instance, the biological sequence {ACAGAATG} results in the following words {ACA, CAG, AGA, GAA, AAT, and ATG}. The generated corpus for each sequence is used for training the word2vec model.

Generally, we use human mRNA from GenBank which is available at: http://hgdownload.soe.ucsc.edu. The genome assembly is divided into 21 chromosomes (Chr1, Chr2, ..., X, and Y) and each chromosome is then divided into sentences with length of 100nt. Finally, each sentence is cut into overlapping 3-mer to create the words. Continuous bag-of-words (CBOW) method is used for training word2vec model. CBOW method predicts the current word w(t) based on the surrounding context words in a predefined window. The detailed parameters that are used for training word2vec model are given in Table 1. These parameters are widely used in genomic data [103]. As a result of using word2vec, each word (3-mer) is represented by a 100-dimensional vector and each sequence with length L is represented by an array of shape $(L - 2) \times 100$. Dominissini et al. [18] showed that mammalian m^6A have a DRACH consensus motif (D = U, G

or A; R = G or A; H = U, C or A) which can denoted in an overlap 3-mer as {AAA, AGA, GGA, UGA,UAA, AAC, GAC, ACA, ACC, ACU, GAA}. These 3-mers are shown in the 2d-space in Figure2 from the learnt representation using word2vec. Figure2 is obtained by using t-distributed stochastic neighbor embedding (t-SNE) [106].

2.2.2. Deep learning model

The extracted feature representation for each sequence from the first step is used for training the proposed deep learning model which is a a simple and efficient convolution neural network as shown in Figure 1(b). The grid search algorithm is utilized for searching the best hyper-parameters. The input shape of the proposed model is $(L-2) \times 100$ where L is the length of the input sequence. It consists of two dilated convolution layers [107] where the number of the filters is 32 and the size of the filter is 5 for both of them. The dilation rate is set to $d = 1$ and $d = 2$ for the first and the second convolution layers, respectively. Dilated convolution produces exponentially larger receptive field with less number of layers with comparison to conventional convolution layers. Each layer is followed by rectified linear unit (ReLU) activation function [108] where $ReLU(x) = max(x, 0)$. Alpha dropout is used in order to retain the variance and the mean of the inputs to their original values after applying dropout [109]. The dropout probability is set to 0.2. The generated features of the dilated convolution layers are averaged using average pooling operator with window size equals to 4 and then passed to two fully connected layers. The first layer has 128 nodes and followed by ReLU activation function and alpha dropout with probabilty of 0.2. On the other hand, the second fully connected layer has only one node with sigmoid activation function for prediction.

3. Results and discussion

In this section we introduce evaluation metrics, the obtained results, and the comparison with the state-of-the-art methods.

3.1. Evaluation metrics

In this wrok, we use accuracy (ACC), sensitivity (Sn), specificity (Sp), and Matthew correlation coefficient (MCC) based on Chou's symbols that were introduced in [62, 110] and derived in [48, 111]. These metrics were widely used in the recent publications [24, 28, 37, 112, 82, 90, 91, 92, 69, 48, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119].

$$Sn = 1 - \frac{P_-^+}{P^+} \tag{1}$$

$$Sp = 1 - \frac{P_+^-}{P^-} \tag{2}$$

$$ACC = 1 - \frac{P_-^+ + P_+^-}{P^+ + P^-} \tag{3}$$

$$MCC = \frac{1 - \frac{P_-^+ + P_+^-}{P^+ + P^-}}{\sqrt{(1 + \frac{P_+^- - P_-^+}{P^+})(1 + \frac{P_-^+ - P_+^-}{P^-})}} \tag{4}$$

Where P^+ is the total portion of m^6A investigated while P_-^+ is the portion of m^6A incorrectly predicted as non m^6 sequences. P^- is the total portion of non m^6A investigated while P_+^- is the portion of non m^6A sequences incorrectly predicted as m^6 ones.

In addition, The area under receiver operating characteristic (ROC-AUC) curves, a graphical form for visualizing the performance of the proposed models, is used. The larger the AUC the better model's performance.

3.2. Results and comparison

As described in Section 2.1, the proposed model is evaluated on three datasets S51, H41, and M41. In order to study the effect of using different values of k-mer we test 3-mer, 4-mer, 5-mer, and 6-mer as shown in Table 2. The results show that using 3-mer produces the best performance on the three datasets compared with the other values of k-mer. These results confirm the finding of the previous studies in which 3-mer was the best performing selection [103, 75].

Figure 3 shows the confusion matrix results of S51, H41, and M41. It can be seen that iN6-Methyl (5-step) model performs better in the case of H41 and M41 datasets than S51 dataset. Figure 4 shows the acheived AUC for S51, H41, and M41. It can be observed that H41 and M41 have AUC of 90.30% and 91.33%, receptively. while the AUC of S51 is 80.31%.

In addition we compare the results of the proposed model with the state-of-the-art-models pRNAm-PC [51] and M6AMRFS [55] using the same 10-fold cross-validation tests. Figure 5 show the performance of the proposed model with comparison with other classifiers in terms of ACC, SP, SN, and MCC. It can be seen that iN6-Methyl (5-step) outperforms the other methods as shown in Figure 5 and Table 3.

More specifically, the accuracy of iN6-Methyl (5-step) is improved by 1.13%, 0.09%, and 1.12% for S51, H41, and M41 datasets, respectively. The sensitivity is improved by 0.94% and 0.10% for S51 and H41 datasets, respectively. The specificity is improved by 1.32% for S51. MCC is also improved by 2.26%, 0.15%,and 21.99% for S51, H41, and M41 datasets, respectively. Thus, we achieve a big improvement in the case of M41 dataset.

These results indicate that using word2vec to extract the feature from raw genomic sequences enhances the performance of m^6A prediction model. The learnt features using word2vec are extracted from the whole mRNA which are more comprehensive compared with the hand-crafted features used by the previous state-of-the-art models such as pRNAm-PC [51] and M6AMRFS [55].

3.3. Web server

It is highly recommended to construct a web-server that makes the developed tool accessible by the research community [120, 37, 41, 42, 121, 82, 122, 48, 113, 116, 117, 118, 123, 124, 122, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129]. Therefore, we have developed a user-friendly and easy-to-use web-server and made it available at https://home.jbnu.ac.kr/NSCL/iN6-Methyl.htm. The web-server has been built by Python and Flask library.

4. Conclusion

In this study, we have proposed a novel deep learning based model, called iN6-Methyl (5-step), for the identification of m^6A sites in multiple species. It consists of two steps namely features extraction and classification. We have adopted wrod2vec in order to automatically extract the features form raw genmoics sequences then a simple and efficient deep learning model based on dilated convolution neural network has been used for classifying the m^6A sites. The obtained results outperformed the state-of-the-art models in all evaluation metrics i.e. accuracy, sensitivity, specificity, and Matthew correlation coefficient. Finally, a user friendly webservr is made available for m^6A sites identification in multiple species at https://home.jbnu.ac.kr/NSCL/iN6-Methyl.htm.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research was supported by the Brain Research Program of the National Research Foundation (NRF) funded by the Korean government (MSIT) (No. NRF-2017M3C7A1044815)

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated for this study is freely available at:
https://home.jbnu.ac.kr/NSCL/iN6-Methyl.htm.

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Tables

Table 1: Word2vec training parameters

Parameters	Word2vec model
Training Method	CBOW
Vector Size	100
Corpus	Human Genome
Context Words	3-mers
Window Size	5
Minimum Count	5
Negative sampling	5
Epochs	20

Table 2: The performance of the proposed model using different values of Kmer

Dataset	**K-mers**	**ACC**	**Sn**	**Sp**	**MCC**
S51		75.38%	76.15%	74.62%	0.5078
M41	3-mers	89.51%	78.87%	100.0%	0.8079
H41		91.11%	82.14%	100.0%	0.8354
S51		70.0%	70.77%	69.23%	0.40
M41	4-mers	88.81%	79.17%	98.59%	0.7918
H41		90.62%	82.14%	99.11%	0.8244
S51		66.92%	69.23%	64.62%	0.3388
M41	5-mers	88.19%	79.17%	97.22%	0.7767
H41		90.18%	82.14%	98.21%	0.8142
S51		68.73%	72.09%	65.38%	0.3756
M41	6-mers	88.28%	79.10%	97.15%	0.7720
H41		89.33%	81.42%	97.32%	0.7971

Table 3: Performances of iN6-Methyl (5-step) and other algorithms.

Dataset	Model	ACC	SN	SP	MCC
S51	pRNAm-PC	69.74%	69.72%	69.75%	0.40
	M6AMRFS	74.25%	75.21%	73.30%	0.4852
	iN6-Methyl (5-step)	**75.38**%	**76.15**%	**74.62**%	**0.5078**
H41	MethyRNA	90.38%	81.68%	99.11%	N.A%
	M6AMRFS	91.02%	82.04%	100.0%	0.8339
	iN6-Methyl (5-step)	**91.11**%	**82.14**%	**100.0**%	**0.8354**
M41	MethyRNA	88.39%	77.79%	100.0%	N.A%
	M6AMRFS	79.33%	82.81%	75.84%	0.5880
	iN6-Methyl (5-step)	**89.51**%	**78.87**%	**100.0**%	**0.8079**

675 **Figure**

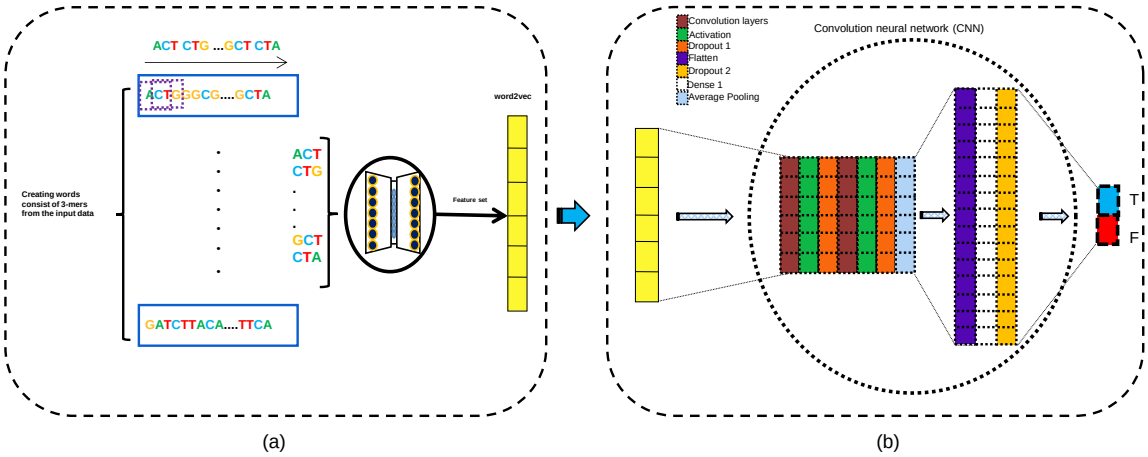
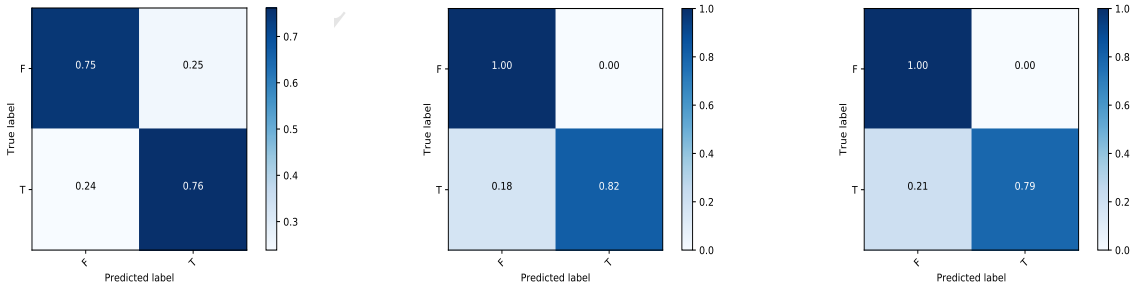


Figure 1: Illustration of iN6-Methyl (5-step) model. (a) Feature representation by Word2vec model (b) Convolution neural network for classification task.

Figure 2: Visualization of word2vec features using tSNE. The highlighted words show the important 3-mer in m^6A sites prediction.



(a) (b) (c)

Figure 3: Confusion matrix of the proposed model iN6-Methyl (5-step) on three benchmarks (a) S51, (b) H41, and (c) M41.

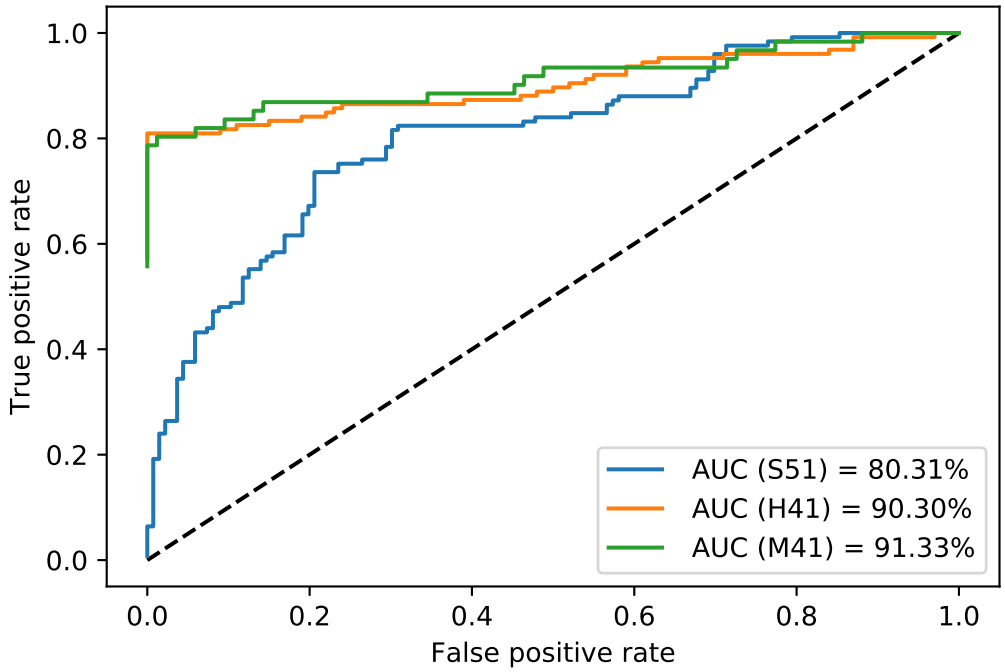


Figure 4: The AUC curves the proposed model iN6-Methyl (5-step) on three benchmarks S51, H41, and M41.

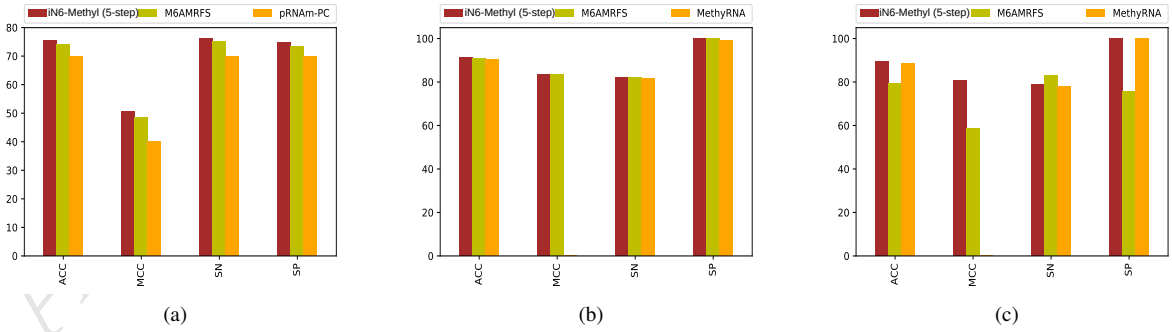


Figure 5: Performance of iN6-Methyl (5-step) model and other classifiers on three benchmarks (a) S51, (b) H41, and (c) M41.

Highlights

- Computational predictor is developed for prediction of RNA N6-Methyladenosine Sites.
- Features are learnt using natural language processing techniques.
- Achieved promising outcomes than existing methods.