Article type: Editorial

Home Page URL: https://www.alliedacademies.org/journal-bacteriology-infectious-diseases/

Bacterial taxono-genomics and comparative genomics: A new era in microbial classification.

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Received: *03-May-2025, Manuscript No. AABID-25-171171;* ***Editor assigned:*** *05-May-2025, Pre QC No. AABID-25-171171 (PQ);* ***Reviewed:*** *11-May-2025, QC No. AABID-25-171171;* ***Revised:*** *25-May-2025, Manuscript No. AABID-25-171171 (R);* ***Published:*** *28-May - 2025, DOI: 10.35841/ aabid-9.2.192*

Introduction

The field of bacterial taxonomy has undergone a revolutionary transformation with the advent of genomics. Traditional classification methods based on morphology, physiology, and biochemical traits have proven insufficient to capture the vast diversity and evolutionary complexity of bacteria. Enter taxono-genomics—a hybrid discipline that integrates genomic data with classical taxonomy—and comparative genomics, which enables the systematic comparison of entire genomes across species. Together, these approaches are reshaping our understanding of microbial diversity, evolution, and function. Historically, bacterial taxonomy relied on phenotypic characteristics and 16S rRNA gene sequencing. While useful, these methods often failed to distinguish closely related species or detect cryptic diversity. Taxono-genomics addresses these limitations by incorporating whole-genome sequencing (WGS), average nucleotide identity (ANI), digital DNA-DNA hybridization (dDDH), and phylogenomic analyses to refine species boundaries and evolutionary relationships [1].

For example, ANI values above 95–96% typically indicate that two strains belong to the same species, offering a more precise metric than traditional DNA-DNA hybridization. This genomic resolution has led to the reclassification of numerous bacterial taxa and the discovery of novel species, especially from environmental and clinical samples. Comparative genomics involves the analysis of multiple genomes to identify conserved and variable regions, gene gain and loss events, and evolutionary trajectories. It provides insights into species adaptation, pathogenicity, metabolic capabilities, and resistance mechanisms [2].

Tools like zDB and PPanGolin facilitate comparative analysis by automating ortholog detection, phylogenetic inference, and pangenome construction. These platforms allow researchers to visualize genome-wide similarities and differences, track horizontal gene transfer, and explore functional annotations across hundreds of genomes. One of the key concepts in comparative genomics is the pangenome, which comprises: Genes shared by all strains of a species [3].

Pangenomic analysis reveals how bacterial populations adapt to diverse environments. For instance, pathogenic strains may acquire virulence factors through mobile genetic elements, while environmental strains evolve metabolic pathways for niche-specific survival. Phylogenomics combines phylogenetic analysis with genomic data to reconstruct evolutionary relationships. Unlike single-gene trees, whole-genome phylogenies offer higher resolution and robustness. Core genome trees and presence-absence pangenome trees provide complementary views of bacterial evolution [4].

This approach has clarified the taxonomy of complex genera like *Streptomyces*, *Bacillus*, and *Pseudomonas*, where traditional methods struggled to resolve species boundaries. Taxono-genomics and comparative genomics have profound implications for clinical microbiology. Accurate species identification is critical for diagnosing infections, tracking outbreaks, and guiding treatment. Genomic tools can detect antimicrobial resistance genes, virulence factors, and mobile

Citation: Gan J. H. Bacterial taxono-genomics and comparative genomics: A new era in microbial classification. J Bacteriol Infec Dis. 2025; 9(2):192

elements, enabling real-time surveillance and precision medicine. For example, comparative genomics of *Escherichia coli* strains has identified distinct pathogenic lineages and resistance profiles, informing public health interventions. In environmental microbiology, taxono-genomics helps catalog microbial diversity in soil, water, and extreme habitats. Comparative genomics reveals how microbes contribute to biogeochemical cycles, pollutant degradation, and symbiotic relationships. Industrially, genome mining of actinobacteria and other producers has led to the discovery of novel enzymes, antibiotics, and bioactive compounds. Genomic insights guide strain improvement for bioproduction and bioremediation [5].

Conclusion

Bacterial taxono-genomics and comparative genomics represent a paradigm shift in microbial classification and understanding. The exponential growth of genome sequences demands scalable computational tools. Uniform criteria for species delineation and annotation are needed. Combining genomic, phenotypic, and ecological data remains complex. By leveraging genomic data, these approaches offer unprecedented resolution, accuracy, and functional insight. As sequencing becomes faster and cheaper, and computational tools more sophisticated, the microbial world will continue to unfold in remarkable detail—transforming medicine, ecology, and biotechnology.

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