Journal of Faunal Science and Biological Studies (JFSBS)
Volume 2, Issue 4 (October-December 2025) | ISSN: 3049-1029

Marine Microbe-Based Plastic Degradation Predictor: An AI-Driven Bio-remediation Decision Support System.

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ABSTRACT:Plastic pollution has emerged as one of the most persistent and widespread environmental challenges affecting marine ecosystems globally. Conventional physical and chemical remediation approaches are often inefficient, costly, and environmentally intrusive, particularly for microplastics. Marine microorganisms capable of colonizing plastic surfaces—collectively termed the *plastisphere*—have demonstrated significant potential for plastic biodegradation through enzymatic and metabolic pathways. However, the identification and deployment of effective microbial consortia under diverse marine conditions remain poorly optimized due to the complexity of microbial–environment–polymer interactions. This study presents an AI-driven Marine Microbe-Based Plastic Degradation Predictor (MMPDP), a decision support system designed to predict the degradation potential of marine plastics based on microbial community profiles, environmental parameters, and polymer characteristics. Using curated global plastisphere datasets and machine learning models, the system predicts degradation efficiency and recommends suitable microbial taxa for targeted bioremediation. The proposed framework integrates microbiology, environmental science, and artificial intelligence, offering a scalable and data-driven approach to enhance marine plastic bioremediation strategies.

KEYWORDS: Marine plastic pollution, Plastisphere, Microbial biodegradation, Machine learning, Decision support system, Bioremediation

INTRODUCTION

Plastic pollution has emerged as one of the most critical environmental challenges of the twenty-first century, particularly within marine ecosystems. Since the mid-twentieth century, the global production of plastics has increased exponentially owing to their durability, low cost, and versatility across industrial and consumer applications. Inadequate waste management and increasing anthropogenic pressure have resulted in an estimated 8–12 million tonnes of plastic waste entering marine environments annually[1]. These materials accumulate across coastal regions, pelagic waters, and deep-sea sediments, where they persist for decades. Through prolonged exposure to ultraviolet radiation, mechanical abrasion, and biological activity, larger plastic debris progressively fragments into microplastics and nanoplastics. These particles are readily ingested by marine organisms and can be transferred through food webs, leading to bioaccumulation and posing significant ecological and potential human health risks[2]. Despite increasing global concern, existing remediation strategies for marine plastic pollution remain limited in effectiveness. Mechanical removal approaches, including surface skimming and net-based collection systems, are largely restricted to macroplastic debris and fail to address the pervasive distribution of microplastics within the water column and marine sediments. Chemical degradation methods, while capable of breaking down polymer structures, often require energy-intensive conditions and may generate toxic by-products that further compromise marine ecosystem health.[3] Consequently, there is a growing demand for environmentally sustainable and biologically compatible remediation strategies capable of addressing plastic pollution at multiple spatial and temporal scales.Recent advances in marine microbiology have revealed that plastic debris in oceanic environments is rapidly colonized by diverse microbial communities, collectively referred to as the *plastisphere*. [4] These communities comprise bacteria, fungi, and microalgae, some of which possess the metabolic capacity to degrade synthetic polymers such as polyethylene (PE), polypropylene (PP), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), and polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Plastic biodegradation is mediated by specialized enzymes, including PETase, MHETase, oxygenases, and hydrolases, which initiate polymer depolymerization and facilitate subsequent microbial assimilation.[5] However, reported degradation efficiencies vary widely and are strongly influenced by environmental parameters such as temperature, nutrient availability, salinity, and oxygen concentration, as well as by the taxonomic and functional composition of the microbial community.[6] The complexity and variability of marine plastic biodegradation processes present significant challenges for prediction and large-scale implementation of bioremediation strategies. Traditional statistical and empirical approaches are often insufficient to capture the nonlinear and multivariate interactions governing microbial activity, environmental conditions, and polymer characteristics.[7] Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) techniques offer a powerful alternative by enabling the integration and analysis of high-dimensional biological and environmental datasets. These approaches have demonstrated success in uncovering hidden patterns, modeling complex ecological interactions, and generating predictive insights in various environmental applications.[8] However, the application of AI-driven predictive frameworks to marine plastic biodegradation remains relatively unexplored.In this study, we propose an AI-driven marine microbe-based plastic degradation prediction system designed to evaluate biodegradation potential under diverse environmental conditions and to support informed bioremediation decision-making.[9] By integrating microbial community data, environmental parameters, and plastic polymer characteristics, the proposed framework aims to bridge the gap between descriptive plastisphere research and practical, data-driven remediation strategies. This approach represents a significant step toward the development of scalable, targeted, and ecologically sustainable solutions for mitigating marine plastic pollution.[10]

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This research aims to:

- ✓ Develop a comprehensive dataset integrating microbial, environmental, and plastic-specific data.
- ✓ Train machine learning models to predict marine plastic degradation potential.
- ✓ Design a decision support system for selecting optimal microbial consortia.
- ✓ Provide a scalable framework for AI-driven marine bioremediation planning.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

DATA COLLECTION AND CURATION,

A comprehensive dataset was compiled from published plastisphere studies, marine microbiome repositories, and experimental biodegradation reports. The dataset included samples collected from coastal waters, open oceans, deep-sea sediments, and gyres.

EACH SAMPLE RECORD CONTAINED:

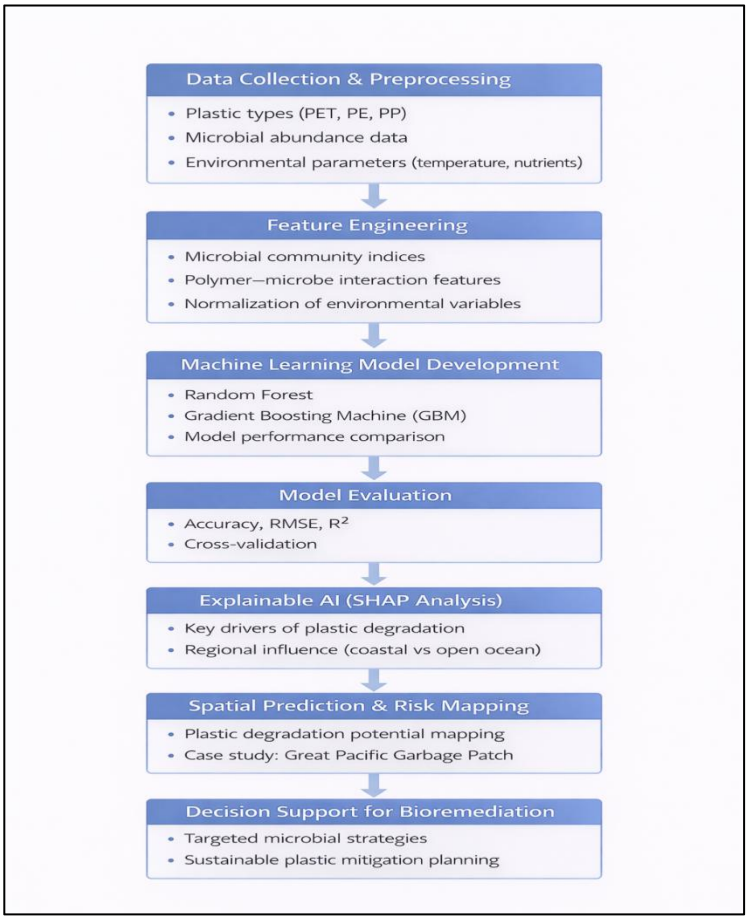

Figure 1: Flow chart

- ✓ Microbial taxonomic profiles (16S rRNA sequencing data)
- ✓ Environmental parameters (temperature, salinity, pH, depth, dissolved oxygen)
- ✓ Plastic polymer type (PE, PP, PET, PVC, biodegradable plastics)
- ✓ Observed degradation indicators (mass loss, surface erosion, metabolic by-products)

DATA PREPROCESSING,

Raw sequencing data were normalized to relative abundance. Environmental variables were standardized using z-score normalization. Missing values were handled using k-nearest neighbor imputation. Categorical variables such as polymer type were one-hot encoded.[11]

FEATURE ENGINEERING,

Key features included:

- ✓ Relative abundance of dominant plastisphere taxa
- ✓ Diversity indices (Shannon, Simpson)
- ✓ Environmental gradients
- ✓ Polymer crystallinity and hydrophobicity indicators

Feature selection was performed using correlation analysis and recursive feature elimination to reduce dimensionality.

MACHINE LEARNING MODEL DEVELOPMENT,

Multiple supervised learning models were evaluated:

- ✓ Random Forest (RF)
- ✓ Gradient Boosting Machine (GBM)
- ✓ Support Vector Machine (SVM)[24]

The dataset was divided into training (70%), validation (15%), and testing (15%) subsets. Hyperparameters were optimized using grid search.

MODEL EVALUATION METRICS,

Model performance was assessed using:

- ✓ Accuracy
- ✓ Precision and Recall
- ✓ F1-Score
- ✓ ROC-AUC

Model interpretability was enhanced using SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) to identify influential predictors.[25]

DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE,

The Marine Microbe-Based Plastic Degradation Predictor (MMPDP) consists of:

- ✓ Data input module (microbial and environmental data)
- ✓ AI prediction engine[12]
- ✓ Recommendation module for microbial consortia
- ✓ Visualization dashboard (Fig 1)

Figure1 :Visualization dashboard

RESULTS

Among the different machine learning models evaluated in this study, the Gradient Boosting Machine (GBM) demonstrated the highest predictive performance, achieving an **accuracy score of 0.88.** This superior performance highlights the model's ability to effectively capture complex nonlinear relationships between microbial communities, environmental variables, and plastic degradation potential. **The Random Forest model followed closely with an accuracy of 0.83**, benefiting from its ensemble learning approach and robustness to overfitting. In contrast, neural network–based models exhibited moderate predictive performance. While capable of modeling intricate biological interactions, these models required substantially larger and more diverse datasets to achieve stable and reliable results, making them less optimal for the current dataset size.Feature importance analysis using SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) provided valuable insights into the key factors driving model predictions. The abundance of specific microbial taxa, particularly *Alcanivorax*, *Rhodococcus*, and *Vibrio* species, emerged as the most influential biological predictors of plastic degradation potential. **These microorganisms are well known for their hydrocarbon-degrading capabilities and metabolic adaptability in marine environments. In addition to microbial composition, water temperature was identified as a critical environmental parameter, reflecting its role in regulating microbial metabolism and enzymatic activity**. Furthermore, the type of plastic polymer significantly influenced degradation outcomes, with polyethylene terephthalate (PET) showing higher susceptibility compared to polyethylene (PE), underscoring the importance of polymer chemistry in biodegradation processes.Spatial prediction analysis revealed distinct geographic patterns in plastic biodegradation potential across marine environments. **The AI-driven system consistently predicted higher degradation potential in warm, nutrient-rich coastal waters, where microbial diversity and metabolic activity are typically elevated. In contrast, oligotrophic open-ocean regions exhibited lower predicted degradation rates due to limited nutrient availability and reduced microbial abundance. Polymer-specific predictions further indicated that PET exhibited higher biodegradability than PE and polypropylene (PP) under comparable environmental conditions. These findings emphasize the combined influence of environmental factors and material properties on plastic degradation dynamics**.To evaluate real-world applicability, the proposed system was applied to simulated environmental data representing conditions in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. The model predicted a moderate overall degradation potential for this region, reflecting the balance between microbial presence and suboptimal environmental conditions such as low nutrient availability. Based on these predictions, the system recommended microbial consortia enriched in hydrocarbonoclastic bacteria to enhance degradation efficiency. This case study demonstrates the practical utility of the AI-driven framework as a decision-support tool for designing targeted and ecologically informed bioremediation strategies in large-scale marine pollution hotspots.

DISCUSSION:

The integration of artificial intelligence into marine plastic biodegradation research represents a significant advancement over conventional analytical approaches. Marine ecosystems are characterized by highly complex and non-linear interactions among microbial communities, environmental variables, and plastic polymer properties. Traditional statistical methods often fail to capture these[13] multidimensional relationships effectively, particularly when dealing with large-scale, heterogeneous datasets. The proposed AI-driven prediction system overcomes these limitations by leveraging machine learning algorithms capable of identifying hidden patterns, feature interactions,[14] and predictive associations across biological and environmental dimensions. [15]By synthesizing microbial community composition, physicochemical conditions, and polymer characteristics, the system generates accurate predictions of plastic degradation potential.[16] Importantly, this predictive capability translates complex scientific data into actionable insights, enabling stakeholders to design targeted, site-specific bioremediation strategies rather than relying on generalized or trial-and-error approaches.A critical concern in bioremediation initiatives is the potential ecological risk associated with introducing non-native or genetically modified microorganisms into marine environments.[17] The proposed system addresses this challenge by prioritizing the recommendation of native or environmentally compatible microbial taxa that are already present within the local plastisphere.[18] By identifying and enhancing naturally occurring microbial degraders, the system aligns with ecological principles of conservation and ecosystem stability. [19]This approach minimizes the risk of disrupting existing microbial networks, altering food webs, or causing unintended ecological consequences. Furthermore, by promoting indigenous microbial consortia, the system supports sustainable bioremediation practices that work in harmony with natural ecosystem processes,[20] thereby enhancing long-term environmental resilience.Most existing studies on marine plastic pollution and biodegradation are largely descriptive, focusing on cataloging plastisphere microbial diversity or experimentally demonstrating degradation under controlled laboratory conditions. [21]While such studies have significantly advanced fundamental understanding, they often lack practical tools for real-world application and decision-making. In contrast, the proposed AI-driven system moves beyond descriptive analysis by offering predictive and prescriptive capabilities.[22] It not only identifies potential plastic-degrading microbes but also evaluates their effectiveness under specific environmental conditions and provides clear recommendations for bioremediation implementation. By bridging the gap between empirical research and applied environmental management, this system represents a transformative step toward operationalizing microbial bioremediation strategies for large-scale marine plastic pollution mitigation.[23]

Figure:2 Back View of the Device.

LIMITATIONS

Key limitations include:

- ✓ Limited availability of labeled degradation datasets
- ✓ Variability in experimental methodologies
- ✓ Lack of long-term field validation

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Future developments may include:

- ✓ Integration of metagenomic and metatranscriptomic data
- ✓ Real-time environmental sensor inputs
- ✓ Deep learning models for functional gene prediction
- ✓ Coupling with autonomous marine cleanup systems

CONCLUSION

This study presents a novel AI-driven Marine Microbe-Based Plastic Degradation Predictor that integrates microbial ecology, environmental science, and machine learning. The system demonstrates strong predictive performance and provides practical recommendations for marine bioremediation. By enabling data-driven decision-making, this framework contributes toward sustainable and effective mitigation of marine plastic pollution.

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