Prioritizing biological pathways by recognizing context in time-series gene expression data

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From The 27th International Conference on Genome Informatics
Shanghai, China. 3-5 October 2016

Abstract

Background: The primary goal of pathway analysis using transcriptome data is to find significantly perturbed pathways. However, pathway analysis is not always successful in identifying pathways that are truly relevant to the context under study. A major reason for this difficulty is that a single gene is involved in multiple pathways. In the KEGG pathway database, there are 146 genes, each of which is involved in more than 20 pathways. Thus activation of even a single gene will result in activation of many pathways. This complex relationship often makes the pathway analysis very difficult. While we need much more powerful pathway analysis methods, a readily available alternative way is to incorporate the literature information.

Results: In this study, we propose a novel approach for prioritizing pathways by combining results from both pathway analysis tools and literature information. The basic idea is as follows. Whenever there are enough articles that provide evidence on which pathways are relevant to the context, we can be assured that the pathways are indeed related to the context, which is termed as relevance in this paper. However, if there are few or no articles reported, then we should rely on the results from the pathway analysis tools, which is termed as significance in this paper. We realized this concept as an algorithm by introducing Context Score and Impact Score and then combining the two into a single score. Our method ranked truly relevant pathways significantly higher than existing pathway analysis tools in experiments with two data sets.

Conclusions: Our novel framework was implemented as ContextTRAP by utilizing two existing tools, TRAP and BEST. ContextTRAP will be a useful tool for the pathway based analysis of gene expression data since the user can specify the context of the biological experiment in a set of keywords. The web version of ContextTRAP is available at http://biohealth.snu.ac.kr/software/contextTRAP.

Keywords: Literature information, Pathway, Pathway analysis, Pathway prioritization, Time series

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Background

The advancement of gene profiling techniques has expanded the genomics research from a single gene analysis to the analysis of genome-wide gene expression data [1, 2]. The result from genome-wide gene expression data analysis is typically further processed for pathway analysis to investigate the association between a set of genes or proteins and phenotypes such as metabolism [3], gene regulation [4] or signal transduction [5]. Pathway analysis produces the global landscape of cellular processes, which cannot be derived from a list of differentially expressed genes (DEGs). Especially, understanding the dynamics of pathways helps identify biological processes expressed genes (DEGs). Especially, understanding the dynamics of pathways helps identify biological processes.

A lot of efforts have been made to define sets of genes that perform key roles for common mechanisms. As a result, a number of databases have been developed to curate sets of genes as pathways [11]. KEGG is the most widely used pathway database and it also provides graphical representations for molecular interactions in pathway [12]. REACTOME [13] and NCI-PID [14] are also well curated pathway databases used for many research projects. Pathway databases facilitate gene set analysis and help researchers to understand biological process.

With gene expression profiling techniques and well curated pathway databases, gene expression data is now routinely analyzed in terms of biological pathways. Over the years, a number of tools for pathway analysis have been developed and they can be categorized as i) over-representation analysis (ORA), ii) functional class scoring (FCS), and iii) pathway topology (PT) based approach [15]. ORA methods select a gene set (e.g. DEGs) from expression data and statistically evaluate the proportion of the gene set in terms of biological pathways. Fisher’s exact test or Chi-square are widely used to perform the ORA based analysis tasks [16]. FCS methods assign gene-level statistics to each gene, and aggregate them into the pathway-level statistics. Gene set enrichment analysis (GSEA) is a representative FCS method that determines whether a set of genes that are predicted to share a common biological function are randomly distributed or over-represented either at the top or bottom of the ranked list [17]. PT-based methods use the topology of a pathway where genes are nodes and their interactions are edges. For instance, CliPPER selects significant pathways based on the network represented as the mean and covariance matrix and determines fraction of signaling paths that are correlated with phenotypes [18].

Recently, time-series data has been considered as important key resources to understand the dynamics of biological mechanism over time and the number of datasets or research projects producing time-series gene expression data has increased dramatically [19]. Thus, several pathway analysis methods for time-series gene expression data have also been developed recently. For example, Time-series RNA-seq Analysis Package (TRAP) analyzes time-series gene expression data and identifies significant pathways with regard to the propagation difference of gene expression between different conditions [20].

Motivation

Pathway analysis from gene expression data using these tools identifies which biological pathways are important to understand the context of data or research being investigated (e.g. phenotype). However, there is no guarantee that all pathways selected by pathway analysis are relevant to the context [21]. One of the major reasons for this inconsistency is existence of overlapped genes among multiple pathways [22, 23]. Table 1 shows how many genes belong to multiple pathways in KEGG pathway database. Among 6,972 genes participating in 295 homo sapiens pathways of KEGG, more than half of the genes belong to more than two pathways. As an example, a single gene, MAPK1, is involved in 85 pathways. These overlapped genes among multiple pathways make some pathways significant regardless of the relation with the context, concurrently. Thus, the result of pathway analysis can produce pathways that are not related to the context being investigated.

One effective way to verify whether a significant pathway is actually related to the context or not is to search the literature information. If some literatures support specific relationship between the pathway and the context of data, we can be more confident to choose the pathway as one significantly expressed and truly related to the context. Thus, our goal in this study is to come up with a computational framework to combine pathway analysis of gene expression data and the literature information to

| The number of involved pathways | The number of genes |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1                              | 3157                |
| 2 ~ 10                          | 3405                |
| 11 ~ 20                         | 264                 |
| 21 ~ 30                         | 70                  |
| 31+                             | 76                  |
| 295                             | 6972                |

It shows how many genes belong to multiple pathways of homo sapiens in KEGG database. Among 6,972 genes that consist of 295 pathways, more than half of the genes belong to two or more pathways.
select pathways relevant to the the context of the experimental condition, typically control vs. treated. To describe our research clearly throughout the paper, we introduce two concepts as below.

- **Significance**: It is to measure the correlation between a pathway and the context from gene expression data \[24\]. Currently existing pathway analysis tools evaluate which pathways are significant in characterizing phenotype, using it in terms of scores like p-values. In this paper, this concept is defined as *significance* and it will be used throughout the manuscript.

- **Relevance**: It means how a pathway is truly associated to the context \[25\] and one practical method to measure it is to exploit literature information reporting the observations or evidences of association between the pathway and the context. It is stronger than *significance* since *significance* is simply to measure how much correlation exists between the pathway and the context through expression values, while *relevance* requires direct observations or evidences that the pathway is actually related to the context. In this paper, this concept is defined as *relevance* and it will be used throughout the manuscript.

The goal of this study is to come up with a computational method to combine both *significance* and *relevance*. In particular, the integration of these two concepts is to combine analysis of gene expression data (*significance*) and the literature information based on the contextual information provided by the user (*relevance*). Figure 1 shows the overview of the proposed method. The *significance* of pathways is calculated using existing pathway-based gene expression data analysis tools. The *relevance* of pathways is obtained from the literature search upon keywords that are provided by the user to specify the context of the experiment. Scores for *significance* and *relevance* are combined into a single score by summing up the two scores as a weighted sum.

### Methods

For the implementation of the proposed concept, we used an existing pathway analysis method and a literature search tool. TRAP \[20\] is selected for pathway analysis. TRAP uses method that combines the ORA and PT-based approaches to find significant pathways from KEGG pathway database and it is also designed for time-series gene expression data. For the literature search, Biomedical Entity Search Tool (BEST) \[26\] is used. BEST uses the concept of Maximal Coherent Semantic Unit for indexing keywords to associate the keyword and literatures efficiently. Using BEST, users can specify the contextual information by specifying a set of keywords for the biological experiments that generated data for analysis. BEST returns biological entities with entity scores as a result of literature search. The entity score is computed by considering various factors such as the publication date, the number of citations and impact factors of journals.

The integration of *significance* and *relevance* can be easily done with these two tools. Integrating TRAP and BEST, we implemented ContextTRAP as in Fig. 2. Time-series gene expression data and keywords representing a context of data are given as inputs. TRAP analyzes time-series gene expression data to obtain the *significance* of pathways. Using keywords, BEST is used to obtain the *relevance* between a pathway and the context as an entity score.

To quantify and integrate *significance* and *relevance*, we introduce two score terms. Using the concept of posterior probability, *Context Score* (CS) measures the *relevance* of pathway from the entity score of BEST. Meanwhile, *Impact Score* (IS) measures the *significance* of pathway from p-value result of TRAP analysis for time-series gene expression data. Then, CS and IS are integrated via an automatically assigned weight called *Discovery rate*.

In this section, we introduce how to transform the result of BEST to CS, how to transform the result of TRAP to IS, and how to calculate Discovery rate that will be used as weight to integrate of CS and IS. In addition, we introduce the method of Pathway Set Enrichment Analysis (PSEA) to evaluate the result of ContextTRAP in Section “Accuracy of discovery rate estimation”.

### Context score

The set of pathways to be analyzed is denoted as \( \pi = \{\pi_1, \ldots, \pi_n\} \). \( \pi \) has \( n \) pathways and \( i \)-th pathway is denoted as \( \pi_i \). A keyword is needed to be specified as an input for BEST which is the contextual information
related to the context like the experimental condition or the phenotype which the research wants to investigate (e.g., disease, symptom, or gene). This keyword is denoted as \( k \).

The Context Score \( CS(\pi_i, k) \) measures how many research or articles reported some association of the pathway \( \pi_i \) and the keyword \( k \). \( CS(\pi_i, k) \) can be computed as a form of posterior probability like Eq. (1). By entering \( k \) into BEST as a search word, a list of entities related to \( k \) is retrieved with an entity score of each entity. Then, \( CS(\pi_i, k) \) is calculated easily from the entity score of \( \pi_i \), by finding \( \pi_i \) from the retrieved list of entities.

\[
CS(\pi_i, k) = P(\pi_i | k)
\]  

However, some pathways are not included as entities in BEST, probably because the current literatures, though increasing rapidly, are yet to be complete enough to cover all biological pathways. Thus, it is difficult to get the entity score for whole pathways by Eq. (1). To handle this problem, we converted \( P(\pi_i | k) \) to Eq. (2) using the Bayes’ rule. Then, we compute likelihood \( P(k | \pi_i) \) instead of \( P(\pi_i | k) \), meaning that retrieves the entity score of \( k \) entering \( \pi_i \) as a search word into BEST. Considering this concept, if user select \( k \) from the entity list of BEST in advance, \( CS(\pi_i, k) \) of any pathway can be obtained from the entity score of \( \pi_i \).

\[
P(\pi_i | k) = \frac{P(\pi_i) P(k | \pi_i)}{P(k)} = \frac{\sum_j^\infty P(\pi_j) P(k | \pi_j)}{P(k)}
\]  

Given a pathway \( \pi_i \) that is used as a search word for BEST, the entity score of \( k \) is transformed to \( P(k | \pi_i) \) as Eq. (3). It is a logarithm of \( (s_j+1) \) to base \( b \). \( s_i \) is the entity score of \( k \) derived from using \( \pi_i \) as search word and \( b \) is \( s_{\max} + 2 \), where \( s_{\max} \) is the maximum of all \( s_j \). Logarithm is a monotonically increasing function, so a higher entity score is mapped to a higher probability. Because the base of logarithm is \( s_{\max} + 2 \), the highest entity score is mapped to a probability approximated to 1. Thus, Eq. (3) converts entity scores of \( k \) for each of pathways ranged to \( [0, s_{\max}] \) to a probability with a range \( [0, 1) \). In addition, this function is concave down, which means the rate of increase is larger for smaller entity scores but it decreases and converges gradually. Thus, use of the logarithm function effectively makes densely distributed
small entity scores widely scattered while big entity scores
remain distinguishable from the small entity scores.

\[ P(k|\pi_i) = \log_b (s_i + 1) \]  \hspace{1cm} (3)

\[ P(\pi_i) = \log_b (t_i + 1) \]  \hspace{1cm} (4)

Prior probability \( P(\pi_i) \) is calculated using Eq. (4),
which is similar to Eq. (3). \( P(\pi_i) \) represents the
prevalence of \( \pi_i \) in all possible keywords, and this
prevalence can be acquired by \( t_i \) derived from
summing up all scores of entities related to \( \pi_i \) in
BEST. Because obtaining scores of all possible
entities is a time-consuming work and scores of
low-ranked entities have very small values, \( t_i \)
is approximated by entering \( \pi_i \) into BEST
and adding top ten entity scores in three categories (gene,
disease, and pathway), respectively. Then, \( b \) is calculated
as \( t_{\text{max}} + 2 \) to make \( P(\pi_i) \) range from 0 to 1,
where \( t_{\text{max}} \) is the maximum of all \( t_i \).

In some cases, multiple keywords are needed to cover
the context of data. Then, final \( \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) \) of multiple
keywords is obtained by calculating the average of \( \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) \)
derived by each keyword.

**Impact score**

**Impact Score** (\( IS(\pi_i) \)) measures how significant
pathway \( \pi_i \) is as a result of gene expression data analysis.
To handle time-series data, ContextTRAP uses TRAP for
analyzing gene expression data. Before deriving \( IS(\pi_i) \),
we define \( IS^*(\pi_i) \) like Eq. (5), using the \( p \)-value of each
pathway from the result of TRAP. Because the \( p \)-values of
significant pathways are very small near to zero, distribution
of \( p \)-values has to be scattered and expanded. Thus, a
negative logarithm to base 10 is applied for negating the
density of \( p \)-values.

\[ IS^*(\pi_i) = -\log_{10} p\text{value}_i \]  \hspace{1cm} (5)

After applying the logarithm-based transformation,
a min-max normalization adjusts the maximum (or minimum)
of \( IS^*(\pi_i) \) to the maximum (or minimum) of
\( \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) \) like Eq. (6). Then, \( IS(\pi_i) \) can have an equal
influence as \( \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) \) when integrated into a single combined score.

\[ IS(\pi_i) = (IS^*(\pi_i) - \min IS^*) \frac{\max CS - \min CS}{\max IS^* - \min IS^*} + \min CS \]  \hspace{1cm} (6)

**Discovery rate**

\( IS(\pi_i) \) and \( \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) \) are normalized in the same scale so
that the integration of the two scores can be easily done.
Two scores are integrated by a weighted sum as in Eq. (8),
so it is important to select a proper weight for integration
reflecting the importance of \( IS(\pi_i) \) and \( \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) \). **Discovery rate** (\( w_0 \))
is a dynamically assigned weight as in Eq. (7) to
reflect the importance of the **significance** and the
**relevance**. It is the proportion of pathways whose \( p \)-value
is bigger than a specific threshold \( \theta \) and \( \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) \) is
bigger than zero. It represents the ratio of pathways that are not
selected as significant by TRAP but discovered as meaningful
in BEST. In other words, **Discovery rate** shows how
many pathways are missed by the gene expression analysis
but have been investigated and reported in the literature
v.s. all the pathways. \( n \) is the total number of pathways
and \( \theta \) means a threshold of \( p \)-value for selecting insignificant
pathways from TRAP and 0.05 is used in this paper,
since \( p \)-value of 0.05 is a widely used cutoff value for
indicating statistical significance. **Discovery rate** reflects
some characteristics about data. 1) If the user-defined context
is well supported by the literature and BEST can cover many
pathways related to the context, **Discovery rate** will be
greater to increase the effect of \( \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) \) and vice versa. 2) Although
BEST finds many pathways with the context, if TRAP
covers most of the pathways detected by BEST, the
importance of \( \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) \) decreases.

\[ w_0 = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} I(p\text{value}_i > \theta \text{ and } \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) > 0)}{n} \]  \hspace{1cm} (7)

The final score of \( \pi_i \) is derived by combining \( \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) \)
and \( IS(\pi_i) \) with **Discovery rate** as in Eq. (8). Using this
score, significance of pathway is re-estimated.

\[ \text{Score}(\pi_i, k) = w_0 \text{CS}(\pi_i, k) + (1 - w_0) IS(\pi_i) \]  \hspace{1cm} (8)

**Pathway set enrichment analysis**

To evaluate the pathway list determined by ContextTRAP
in Section “Accuracy of discovery rate estimation”,
we propose **Pathway Set Enrichment Analysis** (PSEA), a
modified version of Gene Set Enrichment Analysis (GSEA)[17]
at the pathway level. GSEA is a method to determine
whether a set of genes is significant or not, while PSEA
measures whether a ranked list of pathways is significant
or not. From a pathway list ranked by Eq. (8), PSEA
calculates Rank Score (\( RS(i) \)) at rank \( i \) like Eq. (9). In the
ranked list, \( RS(i) \) is increased or decreased from \( RS(i-1) \),
depending on whether \( \pi(i) \) is relevant pathway or not,
where \( \pi(i) \) is \( i \)-th pathway in the ranked list. In this paper,
relevant pathways are defined as \( \pi^+ \) by DAVID [27, 28]
analysis using a specific gene set that was validated or
reported to be related to the context in original paper,
while the rest of the pathways are defined as \( \pi^- \). Firstly,
\( RS(0) \) is initialized to 0. Then, if \( \pi(i) \) is involved in \( \pi^+ \),
\( RS(i) \) is increased by a proportion of \( r_i \) which means the
impact of rank \( i \), where \( r_i = n - i + 1 \). On the other hand,
if \( \pi(i) \) is member of \( \pi^- \), \( RS(i) \) is decreased by a reciprocal
of the number of \( \pi^- \). **Enrichment Score** (\( ES \)) is the maximum
of \( RS \), which measures how significant the pathway
list is. The higher the ranks of overall \( \pi^+ \), the higher the \( ES \)
score is.
\[ RS(i) = \begin{cases} 
0, & i = 0 \\
RS(i - 1) + \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{L} \pi(i) \in \pi^*}{|\pi^-|}, & \pi(i) \in \pi^- 
\end{cases} \] (9)

\[ ES = \max_i RS(i) \] (10)

**Results and discussion**

In this section, we evaluated the performance of ContextTRAP by analyzing two public datasets. Two datasets have time-series gene expression data measured in control vs. treatment experiments. Using these datasets, we evaluated the performance of ContextTRAP in various ways. Firstly, we tested whether the literature information truly supports the *relevance*, using various keywords, each of which has different strength of representing the context of data. Secondly, Pathway Set Enrichment Analysis (PSEA) introduced in Section “Pathway set enrichment analysis” was used to verify whether *Discovery rate* estimates a proper weight or not for integration. Next, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test was used to compare the performances of ContextTRAP and the original TRAP in terms of prioritization. Finally, we compared ContextTRAP with original TRAP and also with three existing pathway analysis methods, one from each of major pathway analysis categories of ORA, FCS and PT-based methods, in terms of F1 score. Additionally, we investigated the biological importance of the prioritized pathways in ContextTRAP.

**Data processing**

To evaluate the performance of ContextTRAP, two public datasets are selected. i) H5N1 identified signaling networks affected by highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 infection [29]. ii) Th17 identified regulatory networks controlling the Th17 cell differentiation triggered by TGF-β1 and IL-6 [30]. Raw data of two datasets have been deposited in the Gene Expression Omnibus (GEO) database under access links http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE28166 for H5N1 and http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE43955 for Th17.

Firstly, keywords representing the context of data are necessary to obtain CS. It should be one of the entities of BEST, thus we selected the simplest and the most relevant keywords from the entity list in BEST. In Table 2, keywords used for each dataset are shown. *Influenzas* is used as a keyword for H5N1, while TGFβ1 and IL6 are used as keywords for Th17. In the web version of ContextTRAP, user can search and select keywords from the entities of BEST to specify the experimental condition of the input dataset.

To define the pathways which are relevant to the context of each dataset, DAVID [27, 28] analysis was performed using gene sets validated and reported in experiments that generated each dataset. The gene sets and the selection criteria of the gene sets are provided in additional file [see Additional file 1]. With these gene sets, 15 pathways from H5N1 and 29 pathways from Th17 are selected as relevant pathways of each dataset. In this paper, these relevant pathways are represented as \( \pi^* \) and the rests are represented as \( \pi^- \). Then, the purpose of our research is prioritizing \( \pi^* \) from pathway analysis result. The list of \( \pi^* \) for each dataset is provided in additional file [see Additional file 2].

For running TRAP algorithm, we selected time-lag factor, parameter to adjust the ratio of influence from the previous time point, as 1. Also, cutoff value, threshold to find DEGs by fold-change as logarithm, was selected as 1, according to the default values.

Using the result of BEST and TRAP, *Discovery rate* was calculated automatically: 0.30 for H5N1 and 0.21 for Th17. The result of data processing is shown in Table 2. H5N1 is time-series gene expression data of *Homo sapiens* and has 295 KEGG pathways in total referred as \( \pi^* \). Th17 is for *Mus musculus* and has 291 KEGG pathways. The \( |\pi^*| \) means the number of \( \pi^* \) which are context-relevant pathways retrieved from DAVID.

**Table 2** Datasets used to evaluate contextTRAP

| Dataset | Species     | Keywords   | Discovery rate | \(|\pi^*|\) | \(|\pi^-|\) |
|---------|-------------|------------|----------------|---------|---------|
| H5N1    | Homo sapiens| Influenzas | 0.30           | 295     | 15      |
| Th17    | Mus musculus| TGFβ1 and IL6 | 0.21         | 291     | 29      |

H5N1 is a time-series gene expression data of homo sapiens and about highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 infection. Influenzas was used as keyword and *Discovery rate* was calculated as 0.30. Th17 is a time-series gene expression data of mus musculus and about Th17 cell differentiation. TGFβ1 and IL6 were used as keywords and *Discovery rate* was calculated as 0.21. \(|\pi^*|\) represents the number of total pathways, and \(|\pi^-|\) is the number of the relevant pathways retrieved from DAVID with validated genes.

The effect of relevance between keyword and the context of data

To show whether the literature information can represent the *relevance*, we tested whether the distribution of \( \pi^* \) in pathway list returned from BEST is different in accordance with the degree of association between keyword and context of data. Figure 3 shows pathway list sorted by the result returned from BEST with various keywords for each dataset.

Figure 3(a) is the result of H5N1 using *Alcohol dependence*, *Infectious diseases* and *Influenzas* as keywords. *Influenzas* is the best keyword well representing the context of H5N1 and *Infectious diseases* that is more comprehensive term than *Influenzas* was selected as secondly relevant keyword. *Alcohol dependence* was selected to show the result of keyword having little relevance with the context. In the bottom of the figure, each color marker...
shows the position of $\pi^*$ in 295 pathways ordered by BEST score derived from each keyword. Boxplot above shows the distribution of rank of $\pi^*$ in pathway list. In Influenzas which is most relevant to H5N1, $\pi^*$ are mainly positioned at the front of pathway list. It means Influenzas well represents the context of H5N1. As a secondly relevant keyword, Infectious diseases shows similar result with Influenzas, but $\pi^*$ are mainly positioned at lower rank than Influenzas. In Alcohol dependence, most $\pi^*$ are distributed in backward of pathway list. It suggests that the result of literature search with a keyword that well reflects the context of data makes reasonable pathway scores representing the relevance between pathway and the context.

Figure 3b shows the result of Th17 using Alcohol dependence, TGFBI, IL6 and combination of TGFBI and IL6 as keywords. Like Fig. 3a, 291 pathways ordered by the result of BEST with various keywords are represented in x-axis and $\pi^*$ are marked in color. The result of Alcohol dependence which is a irrelevant keyword shows that $\pi^*$ are uniformly distributed on the pathway list without any tendency. Two mainly relevant keywords, TGFBI and IL6, show good performance where $\pi^*$ are focused on top of list. When two relevant keywords are used together like a combination of IL6 and TGFBI, however, the result is improved than the result of single keyword. It seems that combined keywords mutually supplement search results and make synergy from each keyword.

Accuracy of discovery rate estimation
To show how well Discovery rate, the weight in Eq. (8), is set automatically, we used Pathway Set Enrichment Analysis (PSEA) introduced in Section “Pathway set enrichment analysis". The weights increased by 0.2 from 0.0 to 1.0 were compared with Discovery rate of each dataset. A weight of 0.0 indicates that the TRAP analysis result is solely used and a weight of 1.0 indicates that the BEST analysis result is solely used. Figure 4 shows the results of PSEA for (a) H5N1 and (b) Th17. In Fig. 4a–b, the positions of $\pi^*$ in the sorted pathway list determined by ContextTRAP are indicated in x-axis at 7 different weights, $\pi^-$ in gray and $\pi^*$ as bars in color other than gray. The line graph shows a change of RS($i$) through x-axis from the first rank to the last rank.

With the weight of 0.0 in Fig. 4a–b, which shows the result of the original TRAP, the $\pi^*$ generally tend to be focused on the front of pathway list, which indicates that TRAP performed well. However, considering the literature information, ContextTRAP prioritized $\pi^*$ more from the result of TRAP. Figure 4c–d shows ES which is the maximum RS at weights of 0.0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0 and also Discovery rate. With Discovery rate, ContextTRAP improved ES compared to original TRAP, from 0.761 to 0.787 for H5N1, and from 0.726 to 0.763 for Th17. It is the highest of the results from each weight. This experiment shows that our strategy of combining relevance and significance of pathways is quite good without requiring the user to set the weight value. Note that our system determines Discovery rate automatically and it reduces the bias which can be caused by a fixed weight.

How much improvement is achieved in detecting relevant pathways in comparison with the original version of TRAP
We measured how much improvement was achieved by comparing performance of ContextTRAP that incorporated BEST and the original version of TRAP that does not utilize literature information. Using Kolmogorov Smirnov (KS) test, we can compare two distributions effectively. KS test measures the $D$ statistic that represents the maximum distance between two empirical distribution functions of two samples. Applying the KS test, we compared distributions of $\pi^+$ and $\pi^-$ in sorted pathway list returned from ContextTRAP and original TRAP. If $\pi^+$ are positioned at the head of list and $\pi^-$ are positioned at the tail of list, $D$ between them becomes higher. If $\pi^+$ and $\pi^-$ are mixed in list, on the other hand, $D$ will be a lower value.

Figure 5 shows the results of KS test of ContextTRAP and the original TRAP for each dataset. Figure 5a is the result of H5N1 and Fig. 5b represents the result of Th17.
The pathway list is sorted by score of each analysis and is present in x-axis of each plot. Red markers indicate the position of $\pi^*$ in the pathway list. In each plot, points in red color represent the empirical distribution function of $\pi^*$ and blue points indicate that of $\pi^-$ in the pathway list returned from pathway analysis.

For two datasets, plots show that $\pi^*$ are distributed at the head of pathway list and empirical distribution function of $\pi^*$ increases more rapidly in ContextTRAP compared with original TRAP. In addition, $D$ is higher in ContextTRAP than original TRAP. It means $\pi^*$ are prioritized well in ContextTRAP by using literature information.

**Comparison with other pathway analysis methods**

We compared the performances of ContextTRAP with three other pathway analysis methods included in the graphite web server [31], also with the original TRAP. Graphite web is a web tool for pathway analysis using gene expression data, providing various analysis methods. For the comparison, three pathway analysis methods were selected, one for each of three categories of pathway analysis tools—Fisher’s exact test, GSEA [17] and CliPPER [18] represent ORA methods, FCS methods and PT-based methods, respectively. For a quantitative comparison, we calculated $F_1$ score of a pathway list determined by each of the pathway analysis tools. $F_1$ score is a harmonic mean of precision and recall and it is widely used to evaluate the performance of binary classification tests. In this analysis, we consider $\pi^*$ as a positive condition set and $\pi^-$ as a negative condition set in terms of true condition set. Then, pathways are predicted as positive or negative, depending on whether a pathway is classified as significant or insignificant by each of pathway analysis tools. Using the result of predicted condition set and the pre-defined true condition set, $F_1$ score is calculated.

To split the pathway list of ContextTRAP into significant and insignificant, p-value of each pathway is calculated by permutation. P-value is derived from a distribution of permuted scores by generating all possible combinations of $CS$ and $IS$ of all pathways. Then, pathways having p-value under 0.05 are selected as significant for ContextTRAP. For other pathway analysis tools, we selected pathways having p-value below 0.05 as significant.

Figure 6 shows $F_1$ scores for five methods—ContextTRAP, original TRAP, Fisher’s exact test, GSEA and CliPPER. Figure 6a represents the result of $H5N1$ and Fig. 6b represents the result of $Th17$. For two datasets, original TRAP shows higher $F_1$ score than other three methods—Fisher’s test, GSEA and CliPPER. It is probably because...
other methods except TRAP do not consider the effect of time factor in a proper manner, handling the time-series samples as multiple replicates. However, ContextTRAP shows the highest F1 score, even higher than the score of original TRAP. It indicates that literature search realizes the prioritization of context-relevant pathways and improves the quality of significant pathway set from original TRAP.

**Biological perspective**

Table 3 shows part of pathways whose ranks went up as a result of incorporating the contextual information, compared to the original version of TRAP. An additional file shows the whole list of pathway rankings [see Additional file 3].

In H5N1, the rank of the pathways that are related to the immune system and affected by infection of H5N1 influenza moved up significantly. Invading to host, H5N1 viruses activate PI3K-Akt signaling pathway to increase their replication efficiency [32]. The NS1 protein of H5N1 virus binds to p85β, a regulatory subunit consisting in PI3K, and induces activation of Akt [33]. It leads to promoting cell growth, cell cycle or other cellular processes that support replication of H5N1 [34]. In addition, nucleoprotein in H5N1 induces apoptosis in host cells for their efficiency of replication, by interacting with clusterin, antiapoptotic protein of host [35]. The hemagglutinin of H5N1 activates JAK-STAT signaling pathway associated with transcriptional activation of chemokines/cytokines genes and incurs a destructive innate immune response [36].

In Th17, pathways related to cytokines that induce differentiation of TH17 cell moved upwards. Differentiation of TH17 cell is induced by IL-6 and TGF-β1 together [37]. In addition, IL-23, IL-1β and IL-21 play a role in amplifying the differentiation IL-6 and TGF-β1 [38]. Mitogen-activated protein kinases (MAPK) including ERK, JNK and p38 are related to mediation of the intracellular responses to TGF-β [39, 40]. Toll-like receptor (TLR) is also involved in differentiation of TH17 cell [41]. TLR2 has been implicated in promoting TH17 cell differentiation and proliferation [42].
Conclusions

Many gene expression analysis methods are available for identifying significant pathways from transcriptome data. However, these methods are often misled by many genes that are involved in a number of pathways. To address the challenge, we developed a new computational framework to combine analysis of gene expression data and the literature information based on the contextual information provided by the user as keyword. We defined two scores, Impact Score and Context Score, to measure significance from the result of pathway analysis and to specify relevance from the result of literature search, respectively.

Our novel framework was implemented as ContextTRAP by utilizing two existing tools, TRAP and BEST. We evaluated the performance of ContextTRAP with two data sets, H5N1 and Th17, in comparison with the state of the art pathway analysis tools in each of the three categories of pathway analysis tools: Fisher’s exact test representing ORA methods, GSEA [17] representing FCS methods, and CliPPER [18] representing PT-based methods. In terms of F1 scores, ContextTRAP achieved better performances than existing methods and than the original TRAP. One notable feature is that ContextTRAP automatically combines Impact Score and Context Score into a single score.

Table 3 The list of pathways that rank higher in ContextTRAP than in TRAP

| Dataset | Pathway name                                      | Rank   | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Ref |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| H5N1    | JAK-STAT signaling pathway                      | 3 → 2  | The challenging respiratory epithelial cells with hemagglutinin of H5N1 exploit the JAK2/3/STAT1 and result in a large release of cytokines, initiating a destructive innate immune response.                             | [36]|
|         | P38-Akt signaling pathway                        | 6 → 5  | P38-Akt signaling, which can be activated by the NS1 protein of H5N1, is crucial for viral replication.                                                                                                      | [43]|
|         | Apoptosis                                        | 139 → 31 | Apoptosis plays a major role in the pathogenesis of H5N1 virus in humans by destroying alveolar epithelial cells.                                                                                           | [44]|
| Th17    | Cytokine-cytokine receptor interaction           | 33 → 10 | The differentiation of T_{h}17 cells from naive CD4+ T cells is regulated by multiple cytokines.                                                                                                          | [38]|
|         | MAPK signaling pathway                           | 47 → 40 | MAPKs play a supplemental role in mediating the intracellular responses to TGF-β required for differentiation of T_{h}17.                                                                              | [39]|
|         | Toll-like receptor signaling pathway             | 46 → 41 | Differentiation of T_{h}17 cell is induced by proinflammatory cytokines generated by ligation of a subset of toll-like receptors.                                                                   | [41]|

It represents part of the pathways from H5N1 and Th17 that rank higher in ContextTRAP than in original TRAP. Rank column shows how the rank of the pathway in original TRAP is changed in ContextTRAP. Relation between those pathways and the context of the dataset is described with reference.
by setting Discovery rate dynamically. In extensive experiments with various weights, Discovery rate showed the maximum performance, which demonstrates the ability of ContextTRAP to combine analysis of transcriptome data and the literature information dynamically, depending on the level of literature knowledge related to the experiment.

We believe that ContextTRAP will be a very useful resource for the pathway based analysis of gene expression data for the time-series, since the user can specify the context of the biological experiment in a set of keywords.

Acknowledgements
Not applicable.

Declarations
This article has been published as part of BMC Bioinformatics Volume 17 Supplement 17, 2016: Proceedings of the 27th International Conference on Genome Informatics: bioinformatics. The full contents of the supplement are available online at http://biomc.bioinformatics.biomedcentral.com/articles/supplements/volume-17-supplement-17.

Funding
Publication charges for this research were funded by the BK21 Plus for Pioneers in Innovative Computing (Dept. of Computer Science and Engineering, SNU) funded by National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) (21A20151113088). Also, this research was supported by Next-Generation Information Computing Development Program through the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) funded by the Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning (NRF-2012M3CA9A7033341), and Collaborative Genome Information Computing Development Program through the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) funded by the Ministry of Science ICT and Future Planning (NRF-2014M3CA9A3063541).

Availability of data and materials
The H5N1 gene expression datasets analyzed during the current study are available in GEO under the accession number GSE28166, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE28166. The Th17 gene expression datasets analyzed during the current study are available in GEO under the accession number GSE43955, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE43955. The web version of ContextTRAP is available at http://biohealth.snu.ac.kr/software/contextTRAP.

Authors’ contributions
SK conceived the experiment, JL conducted the experiment, JL and SK drafted the manuscript, JL and KJ processed data and analyzed results, SL and JK constructed BEST api. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Consent for publication
Not applicable.

Ethics approval and consent to participate
All data analyzed in this study is in the public domain and have been analyzed in previous studies.

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Published: 23 December 2016

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