Improving the performance of quantum-dot light-emitting diodes via an organic–inorganic hybrid hole injection layer†

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Poly[3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene]poly(styrene-sulfonate) (PEDOT:PSS) is a commonly used material for the hole injection layer (HIL) in quantum-dot light-emitting diodes (QLEDs). In this work, we improved the performance of the QLED by using an organic–inorganic hybrid HIL. The hybrid HIL was prepared by mixing PEDOT:PSS with vanadium oxide (V2O5), which is a transition-metal oxide (TMO). The hole injection properties of PEDOT:PSS were improved according to the amount of V2O5 mixed into the PEDOT:PSS. The maximum luminance and current efficiency were 36 198 cd m−2 and 13.9 cd A−1, respectively, when the ratio of PEDOT:PSS and V2O5 was 10 : 1. Moreover, the operating lifetime exceeded 300 h, which is 10 times longer than the lifetime of the device with only PEDOT:PSS HIL. The improvement was analyzed using ultraviolet and X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy. We found that the density of state (DOS) of PEDOT:PSS near the Fermi energy level was increased by mixing V2O5. Therefore, the increase of DOS improved the hole injection and the performance of QLEDs. The result shows that the hybrid HIL can improve the performance and the stability of QLEDs.

1. Introduction

Quantum-dots (QDs) have unique electrical and optical properties. This makes them attractive for optoelectronics such as light-emitting diodes (LEDs), photodetectors, and solar cells.1–3 Due to the quantum confinement effect, QDs have a size-dependent emission wavelength, narrow emission spectrum and high quantum yields (QY).4,5 Additionally, quantum-dot light-emitting diodes (QLEDs), including these QD emitters, enable a low-cost fabrication and exhibit a narrower emission spectrum and higher color purity than organic light-emitting diodes.6,7 Therefore, QLEDs have been intensively studied as a candidate for next-generation displays.8

Meanwhile, poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene)poly(styrene-sulfonate) (PEDOT:PSS) is a commonly used material for hole injection layers (HILs). PEDOT:PSS has high work function and high transparency, so it is suitable for use as a HIL for light-emitting diodes.9–11 However, PEDOT:PSS has drawbacks as well. Most notably, its corrosive, acidic and hygroscopic properties can severely limit device performance.12–14 To overcome these drawbacks in the field of optoelectronics such as LEDs and photovoltaics, bilayer PEDOT:PSS9–14 and transition-metal oxide doped PEDOT:PSS15–19 have been used in the device. Transition-metal oxides, such as nickel oxide (NiO), molybdenum oxide (MoO3), tungsten oxide (WO3), copper oxide (CuO), and vanadium oxide (V2O5), are inorganic materials that can be used in various optoelectronics due to their high stability to heat, hydrogen, and oxygen.20,21 Therefore, organic–inorganic hybrid HIL could be used to improve QLEDs with a high stability.

In this work, we have studied organic–inorganic hybrid HIL by mixing V2O5 into the PEDOT:PSS to improve the performance of QLEDs. The advantages of introducing hybrid HIL are that it can be easily fabricated with a single layer while improving the disadvantages of the organic layer. The injection efficiency of V2O5 mixed PEDOT:PSS HIL was better than PEDOT:PSS only HIL. Therefore, the performance of QLEDs was improved. Moreover, the stability of the device was improved due to the inorganic mixture of V2O5. Ultraviolet and X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (UPS & XPS) were used to find the origin of the improvement. Therefore, we suggest an organic–inorganic hybrid HIL for the high-performance QLEDs.

2. Experimental

2.1 Materials

The PEDOT:PSS (CLEVIOS™ P VP AI4083) was purchased from Heraeus. Vanadium(v) triisopropoxide oxide (96%) was
purchased from Alfa Aesar. The structural formulas of the PEDOT:PSS and vanadium(V) trisopropoxide oxide are shown in Fig. S1.† Poly[[9,9-diocetylfluorenyl-2,7-diyl]-co-{4,4′-(4-sec-butylphenyl)di(phenylamine)] (TFB) was purchased from Lumtec. Green QD with the chemical composition of CdSe/ZnS was obtained from UNIAM, while ZnO (N-10) was purchased from Avantama (Switzerland). All commercial materials were used in the state in which they were received.

### 2.2 Preparation of V$_2$O$_5$ mixed PEDOT:PSS solution
Vanadium(V) trisopropoxide oxide (96%) was first dissolved in isopropyl alcohol and then a drop of deionized water (DI water) was added for hydrolysis to prepare a 1 wt% concentration V$_2$O$_5$ solution. The volume ratios of PEDOT:PSS and V$_2$O$_5$ were 20 : 1, 10 : 1, and 5 : 1 and stirred for 12 h. Prior to use, the solution was filtered using 0.45 μm hydrophilic filter to remove unwanted particles.

### 2.3 QLED fabrication
Patterned indium-tin-oxide (ITO) glass substrates were first cleaned sequentially with DI water, acetone and isopropyl alcohol in an ultra-sonicator for 15 min. After cleaning, the substrates were treated with ultraviolet-ozone for 15 min to increase the hydrophilicity and work function of the ITO surface. The V$_2$O$_5$ was then mixed into PEDOT:PSS films and spin-coated onto the ITO at 4000 rpm for 30 s, and then annealed at 150 °C for 15 min. TFB film was spin-coated onto the HIL at 3000 rpm for 30 s, followed by annealing at 180 °C for 30 min. The green QDs film was spin-coated onto the hole transport layer (HTL) at 1500 rpm for 60 s, followed by annealing at 60 °C for 10 min. The ZnO film was spin-coated onto the emitting layer (EML) at 2000 rpm for 60 s, followed by annealing at 60 °C for 10 min. The entire procedure was carried out under ambient condition. Finally, 130 nm-thick layer of aluminum (Al) was deposited using thermal evaporator.

### 2.4 Characterization
UPS and XPS spectra were obtained using photoelectron spectrometer (KRATOS AXIS NOVA) with ultraviolet (He I) and X-ray (Al Kα) light sources. The transmittance spectra were taken by an UV-vis spectrophotometer (JASCO, V-570). The current–voltage–luminance (I–V–L) characteristics and electroluminescence (EL) spectra QLEDs were measured using the I–V–L measurement system (M6100, McScience) coupled with a Keithley 2400 source meter and Konica Minolta CS-2000 spectroradiometer.

### 3. Results and discussion

The UPS valence band spectra of bare ITO, ITO/PEDOT:PSS, ITO/PEDOT:PSS : V$_2$O$_5$ (10 : 1), ITO/PEDOT:PSS/TFB and ITO/PEDOT:PSS (10 : 1)/TFB are summarized in Fig. 1(a). The left side of Fig. 1(a) is the secondary electron cutoff (SEC) region, and the right side is the valence region. The work function of ITO was measured as 4.44 eV. The highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO) level of TFB on PEDOT:PSS was located at 0.86 eV below the Fermi energy level ($E_F$). Meanwhile, the

![Fig. 1](image-url)
Fig. 2 shows the XPS spectrum of the V 2p core level of the PEDOT:PSS : V$_2$O$_5$ film. The V 2p$_{3/2}$ core level can be separated into V$^{5+}$ (516.93 eV) and V$^{4+}$ (515.41 eV) oxidation states by Lorentzian–Gaussian fitting. The dominant V$^{5+}$ state corresponds to vanadium pentoxide (V$_2$O$_5$), while the V$^{4+}$ state represents vanadium dioxide (VO$_2$). The V$^{4+}$ oxidation state was formed by reducing the V$_2$O$_5$ layer via exposure to air. The peak intensity of the V$^{4+}$ state in PEDOT:PSS : V$_2$O$_5$ (10 : 1) is small due to the small amount of VO$_2$, which is contained in the V$_2$O$_5$ mixed PEDOT:PSS HIL. The V$^{4+}$ oxidation state indicates a state close to $E_F$, which leads the improvement of the hole injection characteristics.

The hole only devices (HODs, ITO/HIL/TFB/Al) were fabricated and evaluated to observe the hole injection and transport behavior of HIL with various concentrations of V$_2$O$_5$ into PEDOT:PSS, as shown in Fig. 3(a). The thickness change was not large with the increase of the V$_2$O$_5$ mixing ratio. The thickness of the pristine PEDOT:PSS and V$_2$O$_5$ mixed PEDOT:PSS layer is about 35–37 nm. Electron only device (EOD, ITO/ZnO/Al) was also fabricated to evaluate the electron injection and transport behavior. The current density of V$_2$O$_5$ mixed PEDOT:PSS HIL showed higher current density value than that of PEDOT:PSS HIL, as we can expected from the interfacial electronic structure of Fig. 1(b) and (c). Among the various concentration of V$_2$O$_5$ into the PEDOT:PSS, PEDOT:PSS : V$_2$O$_5$ (10 : 1) film shows the highest current density. Therefore, the charge balance between PEDOT:PSS : V$_2$O$_5$ (10 : 1) HIL and ZnO ETL would be best. The transmittance of the PEDOT:PSS and V$_2$O$_5$ mixed PEDOT:PSS have been measured as shown in Fig. 3(b). All films were prepared onto the glass substrate. The transmittance of PEDOT:PSS is slightly increased according to mix the V$_2$O$_5$ into the PEDOT:PSS. The transmittance was over 98.3% in the 530 to 540 nm region, as shown in the inset of Fig. 3(b).

Fig. 4 shows the light emitting performance of QLEDs with PEDOT:PSS HIL and V$_2$O$_5$ mixed PEDOT:PSS HIL. Fig. 4(a)
shows the luminance–voltage characteristics of QLEDs. All QLEDs with a PEDOT:PSS : V2O5 HIL show a lower turn-on voltage than the QLED with PEDOT:PSS HIL. The device with PEDOT:PSS : V2O5 (10 : 1) showed the highest luminance of 36 198 cd m$^{-2}$. Fig. 4(b) shows the current density–voltage characteristics of QLEDs. A schematic diagram of the QLEDs is shown in the inset of Fig. 4(b). The current density of the devices with V2O5 mixed PEDOT:PSS HIL was lower than that of the device with PEDOT:PSS HIL, which owes to a reduction in the leakage current of the devices. The measured performance data of the devices are summarized in detail in Table 1.

Current efficiency–luminance characteristics of the QLED devices are shown in Fig. 5(a). The current efficiency of the QLEDs with PEDOT:PSS : V2O5 (10 : 1) HIL was measured as 13.9 cd A$^{-1}$, which was significantly improved compared to the current efficiency of the device with PEDOT:PSS HIL. The improvement of the current efficiency was due to the reduction of the leakage current. Fig. 5(b) shows the EL spectra at the maximum luminance of the QLEDs. The inset shows an image of the QLEDs with PEDOT:PSS : V2O5 HIL was measured as ~32 nm.

Fig. 6(a) shows the lifetime measurement of the QLEDs. The measurement was conducted in a consistent current mode, and it was carried out under ambient conditions, which are room temperature, and relative humidity over ~60%. All QLEDs were encapsulated with commercially-available epoxy resin and cover glass. The half-lifetime ($T_{50}$) of the QLEDs with PEDOT:PSS HIL was measured as 0.86 h at an initial luminance ($L_0$) of 917 cd

| Devices with different HIL | $V_{\text{turn-on}}$ (V) (@1 cd m$^{-2}$) | $I_{\text{max}}$ (cd m$^{-2}$) | $CE_{\text{max}}$ (cd A$^{-1}$) | $EQE_{\text{max}}$ (%) | $T_{50}$ (h) ($L_0$ = 100 cd m$^{-2}$) | CIE 1931 (x, y) |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| PEDOT:PSS                 | 2.33                            | 26 577           | 4.6             | 1.06            | 23.9            | (0.241, 0.726) |
| PEDOT:PSS : V2O5 (20 : 1 v/v) | 2.06   | 12 813         | 5.4             | 1.19            | —               | (0.233, 0.732) |
| PEDOT:PSS : V2O5 (10 : 1 v/v) | 2.25   | 36 198         | 13.9            | 3.18            | 30.12           | (0.231, 0.733) |
| PEDOT:PSS : V2O5 (5 : 1 v/v) | 2.07   | 8342           | 9.9             | 2.28            | —               | (0.232, 0.733) |

Fig. 5 (Color online) (a) Current efficiency–luminance characteristics and (b) EL spectra of QLED devices at each maximum luminance. The inset shows an image of the device operating.

Fig. 6 (Color online) (a) Operational lifetime and (b) CIE 1931 coordinate of QLED devices with PEDOT:PSS and PEDOT:PSS : V2O5 (10 : 1).
4. Conclusions

In this study, we demonstrated QLEDs with V$_2$O$_5$ mixed PEDOT:PSS (10 : 1) HIL that is more efficient and more stable than a QLED with PEDOT:PSS HIL. The hole injection property of PEDOT:PSS was improved according to mix V$_2$O$_5$ into PEDOT:PSS. Therefore, the maximum luminance and current efficiency of the QLEDs with V$_2$O$_5$ mixed PEDOT:PSS (10 : 1) HIL were 36 198 cd m$^{-2}$ and 13.9 cd A$^{-1}$, respectively. Moreover, the operating lifetime exceeded 300 h, which is 10 times longer than the lifetime of the device with only PEDOT:PSS HIL. The improvement was analyzed using ultraviolet and X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy. We found that the density of state (DOS) of PEDOT:PSS near the Fermi energy level was increased by mixing V$_2$O$_5$. Therefore, the increase of DOS improved the hole injection and the performance of QLEDs. Our results suggest that TMO mixed PEDOT:PSS is an alternative to organic HIL for efficient and stable QLEDs.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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