

Structure and electronic properties of Alq3 derivatives with electron acceptor/donor groups at the C4 positions of the quinolate ligands: a theoretical study

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Abstract The molecular structures of the ground (S_0) and first singlet excited (S_1) states of Alq3 derivatives in which pyrazolyl and 3-methylpyrazolyl groups are substituted at the C4 positions of the 8-hydroxyquinolate ligands as electron acceptors, and piperidinyl and *N*-methylpiperazinyl groups are substituted at the same positions as electron donors, have been optimized using the B3LYP/6-31G* and CIS/6-31G* methods, respectively. In order to analyze the electronic transitions in these derivatives, the frontier molecular orbital characteristics were analyzed systematically, and it was found that the highest occupied molecular orbital is localized on the A ligand while the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital is localized on the B ligand in their ground states, similar to what is seen for *mer*-Alq3. The absorption and emission spectra were evaluated at the TD-PBE0/6-31G* level, and it was observed that electron acceptor substitution causes a red-shift in the emission spectra, which is also seen experimentally. The reorganization energies were calculated at the B3LYP/6-31G* level and the results show that acceptor/donor substitution has a significant effect on the intrinsic charge mobilities of these derivatives as compared to *mer*-Alq3.

Keywords OLED · Gap energy · Optical properties · Reorganization energy

Introduction

Organic light-emitting diodes (OLED) are currently under intense investigation due to their application in full-color flat display panels [1–4]. OLEDs are heterojunction devices in which the layers of the organic transport materials are incorporated into devices as amorphous thin films [5]. Following an initial report of the utilization of *mer*-Alq3 [6, 7] as an electron-transport material and emitting layer in OLED, derivatives of metal quinolates have become the focus of new electroluminescent material research [8–10]. Although research into the development of OLEDs in the past decade has grown rapidly, theoretical studies of the fundamental molecular properties of metaloquinolates have only been reported in the literature in recent years [11–24]. The electronic structural properties of *mer*-Alq3 can be modified by adding electron acceptor/donor groups to the peripheral ligands. In general, attaching electron donor groups to a pyridine ring causes a blue-shift in the emission, while introducing them onto phenoxide ring causes a red-shift [25–27]. Electron acceptor groups such as chloro [28] and cyano [29] show almost negligible emission shifts, while strong electron acceptors such as sulfonamide show blue-shifted emission [30]. The substitution of fluorine at different positions in the *mer*-Alq3 ligand leads to changes in emission wavelengths [31]. Recently, Hormi et al. [32] synthesized *mer*-Alq3 derivatives with electron acceptor/donor groups at the C4 positions of the 8-hydroxyquinolate ligands, and showed that emission spectra can be efficiently tuned by substitution. The present study provides a detailed theoretical study of the ground (S_0) and the first singlet excited (S_1) state

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geometries of these derivatives using density functional theory (DFT) and ab initio configuration interaction with single excitation (CIS) methods, respectively. The time-dependent DFT (TDDFT) method was used to calculate the absorption and emission spectra of these derivatives, and the results are compared with the available experimental data [32]. The reorganization energies for all of the derivatives were calculated at the B3LYP/6-31G* level.

Computational details

The S_0 geometries of Alq3 derivatives (1–4) in which pyrazolyl and 3-methylpyrazolyl groups are substituted at the C4 positions of the 8-hydroxyquinolate ligands as acceptors, and piperidinyl and *N*-methylpiperazinyl groups are substituted at the same positions as donors (Fig. 1), were optimized using the DFT/B3LYP/6-31G* method in the G03 package [33]. This method has been shown to be a reliable approach for *mer*-Alq3 and its derivatives [34–40]. The S_1 geometries were optimized using the ab initio CIS approach [41], and this approach has previously been applied to *mer*-Alq3 and its derivatives [34–36, 40] and other OLED materials [42–47], yielding reliable results. The absorption and emission spectra of these derivatives were evaluated by the PBE0/6-31G* method [48] using the B3LYP/6-31G* and CIS/6-31G* optimized geometries, respectively. The reorganization energy, which is one of the most important

parameters for determining the charge mobility, was calculated at the B3LYP/6-31G* level for each derivative.

Results and discussion

Ground state geometries

The ground state geometries of (1–4) are depicted in Fig. 1 [32]. The ligands in these derivatives were labeled A, B and C. The central Al atom is surrounded by the three ligands with the A- and C-pyridinate nitrogens and the B- and C-pyridinate oxygens *trans* to each other. The derivatives 1 and 2 are obtained by substituting the acceptors (namely pyrazolyl and 3-methylpyrazolyl groups) at the C4 positions of the 8-hydroxyquinolate ligands, while 3 and 4 are obtained by substituting the donors (piperidinyl and *N*-methylpiperazinyl groups, respectively) at the same position on the ligands, as shown in Fig. 1b. Selected optimized geometrical parameters of (1–4) and *mer*-Alq3 are shown in Table 1, along with the available experimental values of *mer*-Alq3 [49]. In all of the Alq3 derivatives (1–4), the Al–N bond lengths are predicted to be 0.005–0.020 Å (depending on the substitution) shorter than they are for the optimized *mer*-Alq3 (Table 1). The Al–O bond lengths are predicted to be 0.003–0.006 Å (i.e., negligibly) longer in 3 and 4, while they are similar in 1 and 2 to the lengths seen in the optimized *mer*-Alq3

Fig. 1 a The geometry of *mer*-Alq3 with three quinolate ligands (A–C); b the ligand labeling for the Alq3 derivatives (1–4) considered for this study

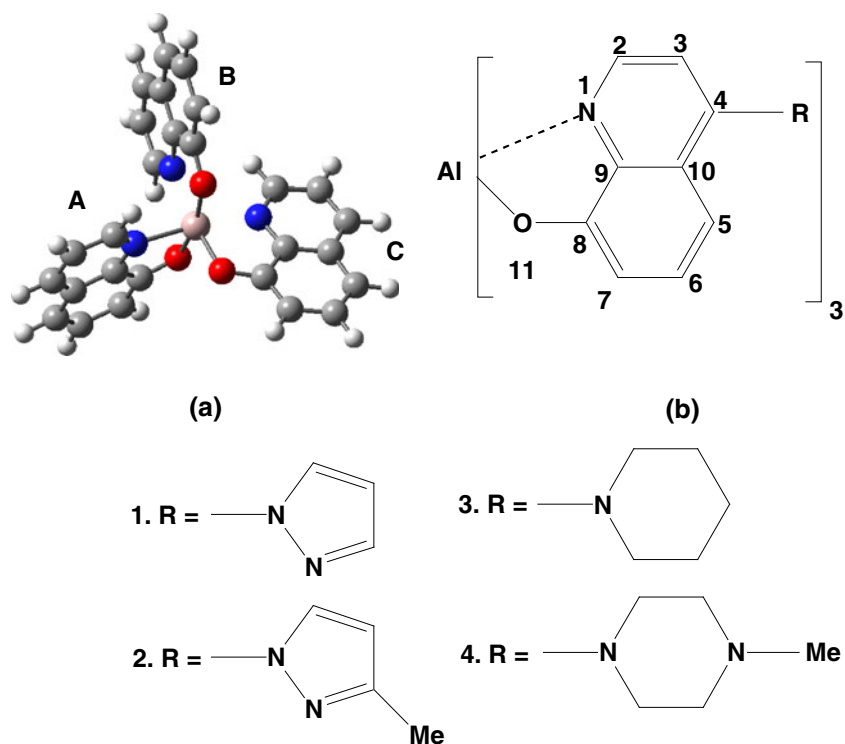


Table 1 Selected optimized bond lengths (in Å°), and bond angles (in degrees) of **1–4** computed at the B3LYP/6-31G* level

Parameters	Alq3	1	2	3	4	Alq3 ^a
Bond lengths						
Al–N _a	2.084	2.079	2.078	2.073	2.074	2.050
Al–N _b	2.126	2.116	2.113	2.108	2.106	2.087
Al–N _c	2.064	2.059	2.058	2.053	2.054	2.017
Al–O _a	1.855	1.855	1.856	1.860	1.860	1.850
Al–O _b	1.881	1.881	1.882	1.886	1.887	1.860
Al–O _c	1.884	1.882	1.883	1.888	1.887	1.857
Bond angles						
N _a –Al–N _c	171.50	171.16	171.06	171.00	171.29	173.82
N _b –Al–O _a	172.75	172.21	172.45	172.06	171.75	171.46
O _c –Al–O _b	166.57	166.50	166.59	166.54	166.91	168.22

^a Experimental data for Alq3 from [49]

(Table 1). The calculated bond lengths are slightly longer than the experimental values, which could be due to solid-state effects [50]. In the substituted ligand, the dihedral angle between the hydroxyquinolate and the acceptor is found to be $\sim 32^\circ$, whereas it is $\sim 19^\circ$ between the hydroxyquinolate and the donor.

Frontier molecular orbitals for S_0 geometries

It is useful to examine the frontier molecular orbitals (i.e., HOMO and LUMOs) of **1–4** because the relative order of these orbitals provides a reasonable qualitative indication of the excitation properties and the hole/electron transport

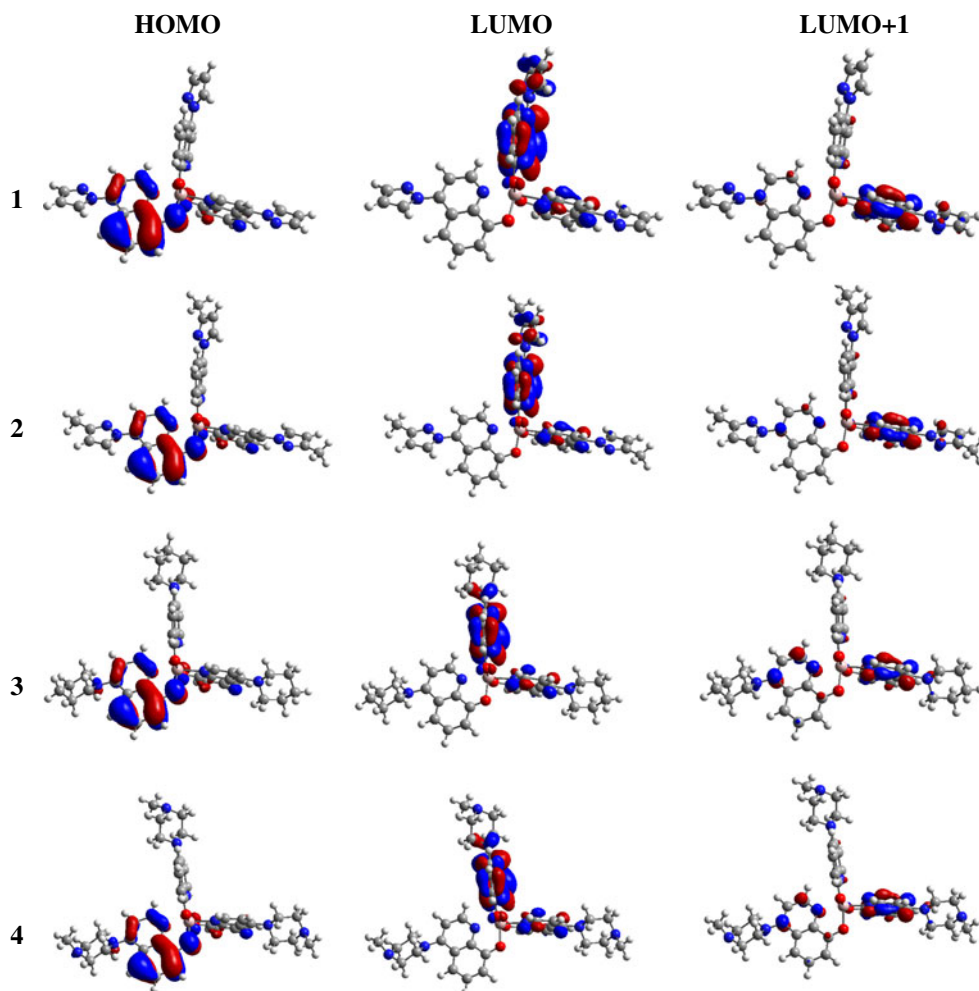
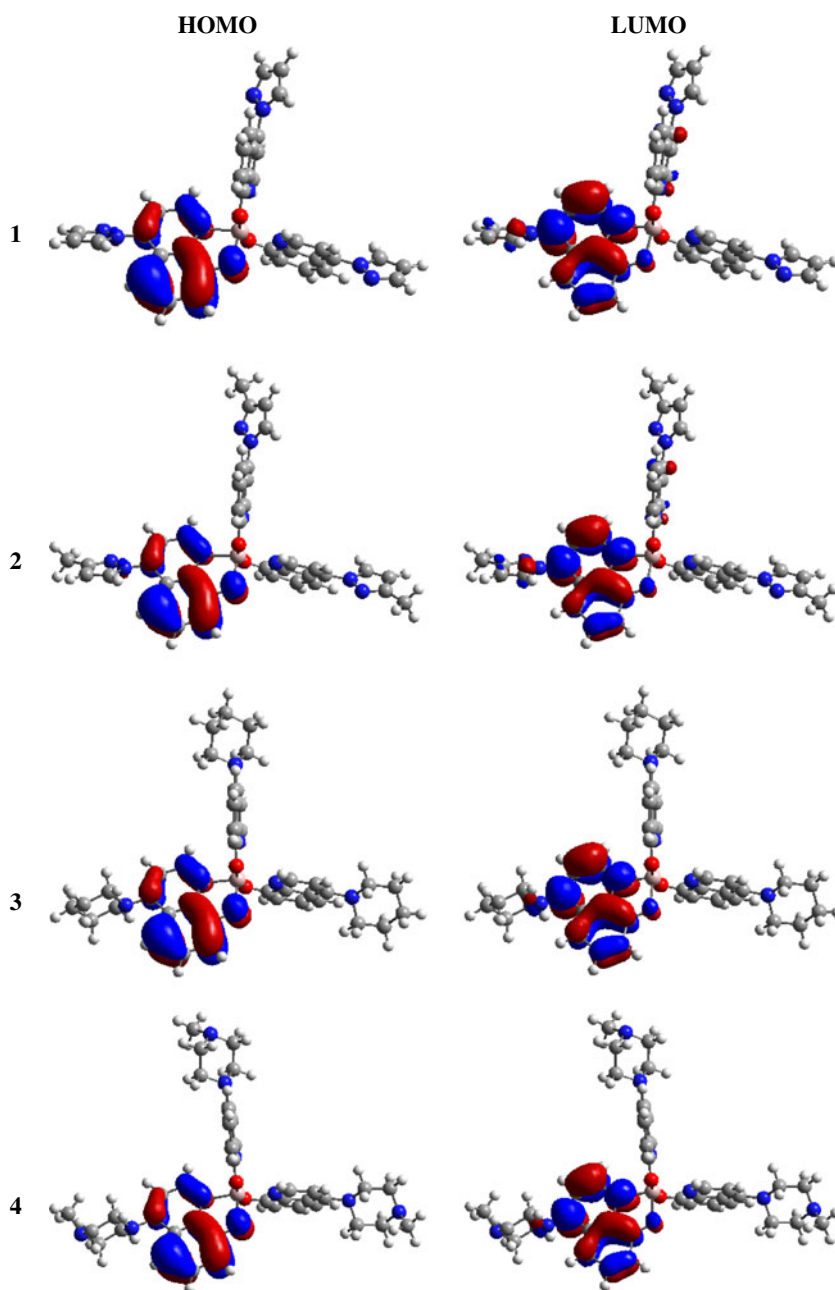
Fig. 2 Frontier molecular orbitals (FMOs) (0.05 e au^{-3}) for the ground states (S_0) of **1–4**

Table 2 HOMO, LUMO, and gap energies (E_g , in eV) of **1–4** in their ground states (S_0) computed at the PBE0//B3LYP/6-31G* level

Derivatives	HOMO	LUMO	LUMO +1	E_g	Exp ^a
Alq3	-5.261	-1.647	-1.405	3.85	3.19
1	-5.398	-1.930	-1.710	3.69	3.05
2	-5.301	-1.817	-1.596	3.71	3.06
3	-4.853	-1.108	-0.887	3.97	3.32
4	-4.914	-1.186	-0.964	3.95	3.29

^a Experimental gap energies for Alq3 and **1–4**, from [32]

properties of **1–4**. It is seen in the literature that the HOMO and LUMO are mainly localized on the A ligand and B ligand, respectively, in the ground states of *mer*-Alq3 [34] and its derivatives [37, 40]. The HOMO, LUMO and LUMO+1 distribution patterns of **1–4** in their ground states, as obtained using the B3LYP/6-31G* method, are shown in Fig. 2. As noted in earlier reports [34, 37, 40], the HOMO and LUMOs in **3** and **4** are localized mainly localized on the A ligand and B ligand, respectively, whereas in **1** and **2** the HOMOs are localized on the A ligand and the LUMOs are localized on the B ligand and to some extent on the acceptor group (which could be due to the π -conjugation

Fig. 3 Frontier molecular orbitals (FMOs) (0.05 e au^{-3}) for the excited states (S_1) of **1–4**

associated with the acceptor group) (Fig. 2). The HOMO, LUMO and LUMO+1 energies of **1–4** computed using TD-PBE0/6-31G**/B3LYP/6-31G* are shown in Table 2. The gap energies (E_g) were calculated as the difference between E_{HOMO} and $E_{\text{LUMO}+1}$, because in all of these complexes the major transitions for the absorptions are from HOMO to LUMO+1 (Table 2). It was found that the calculated E_g values for **1** (3.69 eV) and **2** (3.71 eV) are lower than the parent *mer*-Alq3 (i.e., ca. 3.85 eV), while they are higher for **3** (3.97 eV) and **4** (3.95 eV). The calculated trend in E_g values compares well with that seen experimentally [32], as reflected by their absorption spectra (Tables 2 and 4).

Frontier molecular orbitals of the first excited state (S_1) geometries

At present, the standard procedure adopted to calculate the properties of S_1 is the CIS method [41], and this has been successfully applied to *mer*-Alq3 and its derivatives [34–36, 40] and other OLED materials [42–47]. Hence, S_1 geometry optimizations for **1–4** were carried out by the CIS/6-31G* method using the corresponding HF/6-31G* optimized ground-state geometries. The HOMO and LUMO distribution patterns of **1–4** in their excited states are shown in Fig. 3. It is apparent that, for all these derivatives, the HOMO is localized on the phenoxide ring of the A ligand, while the LUMO is localized on the pyridyl ring of the A ligand (Fig. 3). The HOMO and LUMO energies of **1–4**, computed using the TD-PBE0/6-31G**/CIS/6-31G* method, are shown in Table 3. The calculated E_g values of **1** (3.13 eV) and **2** (3.15 eV) are lower than that of the parent Alq3 (3.22 eV), while those for **3** (3.22 eV) and **4** (3.21 eV) are comparable with that of the parent Alq3 (Table 3).

Properties of the absorption and emission spectra

Several studies have shown that TDDFT is a good predictive tool for absorption spectra; hence, TDDFT calculations were carried out for **1–4**. As done in previous reports [38–40, 45], various functionals (namely SVWN, BLYP, B3LYP, B3PW91, PBE0, BHandH and BHandH-

LYP) were used to determine the functional that gave the best performance in predicting the maximum absorption (λ_{max}) of **1** and **3** using the B3LYP/6-31G* optimized geometry, and the results are tabulated in Table 4. The λ_{max} values vary significantly depending on the functionals employed (Table 4). The performance of the local density approximation (SVWN) and pure gradient-corrected functionals (BLYP) was found to be poor when compared to the hybrid functionals (B3LYP, B3PW91, PBE0, BHandH, and BHandHLYP). Among all of the functionals, the PBE0 method was found to be the most reliable for predicting the λ_{max} values of **1** and **3** (Table 4). To investigate the effect of extending the basis sets on the absorption of **1** and **3**, calculations were carried out using the PBE0 method and different basis sets, namely 6-31+G*, 6-31G and 3-21+G**, and the results indicate that the basis set has a negligible effect on the absorption (Table 4). Among all of the functionals used to calculate the absorption spectra, the TD-PBE0/6-31G* results for **1** (434 nm) and **3** (397 nm) give the closest agreement with experimentally obtained spectra (Table 4). Hence, the PBE0 functional was chosen to calculate the absorption and emission spectra of **1–4** using the B3LYP/6-31G* and CIS/6-31G* optimized geometries, respectively, and the results are summarized in Table 5 along with experimental absorption and emission data [32]. In all of these complexes, the major

Table 4 Absorption wavelengths (λ_{max} , in nm) computed at various levels of DFT theory using the B3LYP/6-31G* optimized geometry for **1** and **3**. The effect of the basis set is also shown using TD-PBE0

Method	6-31G*	6-31G	6-31+G*	3-21G*
Al derivative 1				
SVWN	676			
BLYP	669			
B3LYP	465			
B3PW91	466			
PBE1PBE	434	442	439	437
BHandH	364			
BHandHLYP	364			
Exp ^a	407			
Al derivative 3				
SVWN	676			
BLYP	669			
B3LYP	465			
B3PW91	466			
PBE1PBE	397	405	404	400
BHandH	341			
BHandHLYP	340			
Exp ^a	374			

^a Experimental λ_{abs} for **1** and **3**, from [32]

Table 3 HOMO, LUMO, and gap energies (E_g) (in eVs) of **1–4** in their first excited states (S_1), computed at the PBE0//CIS/6-31G* level

Derivatives	HOMO	LUMO	E_g
Alq3	-4.873	-1.649	3.22
1	-5.047	-1.915	3.13
2	-4.959	-1.807	3.15
3	-4.577	-1.358	3.22
4	-4.636	-1.426	3.21

Table 5 Calculated absorption (λ_{abs}) and emission (λ_{emi}) wavelengths (in nm) of **1–4** at the TD-PBE0/6-31G* level

Derivatives	Absorption			Emission				
	Major transitions ^a	λ_{abs}	f^b	λ_{abs}^c	Major transitions	λ_{emi}	f^b	λ_{emi}^c
Alq3 ^c				389				512
1	H→L+1	426	0.1551	407	H→L	536	0.0776	535
2	H→L+1	423	0.1753	406	H→L	531	0.0872	534
3	H→L+1	391	0.1686	374	H→L	523	0.0678	477
4	H→L+1	393	0.1755	377	H→L	525	0.0676	485

^a *H* and *L* are HOMO and LUMO, respectively

^b *f* is the oscillator strength

^c Experimental λ_{abs} and λ_{emi} for *mer*-Alq3 and **1–4** from [32]

transitions for absorption were from HOMO to LUMO+1, while for emission they were from HOMO to LUMO (Table 5). In the case of absorption spectra, the calculated absorption values are in good agreement with the experimental ones [32], with deviations of ~16–19 nm depending on the substitution at the C4 position of 8-hydroxyquinolate ligand (Table 5). Substituting an acceptor at the C4 position of the quinolate ligand (i.e., in **1** and **2**) leads to a red shift of ~16–21 nm in the emission spectrum compared to the parent *mer*-Alq3, which is similar to that seen experimentally [32].

Reorganization energies

The charge transfer rate can be defined using Marcus theory [51]:

$$K_{\text{et}} = (4\pi^2/h)H_{\text{da}}^2(4\pi\lambda kT)^{-1/2} \exp(-\lambda/4kT) \quad (1)$$

Here, H_{da} is the charge transfer integral/coupling matrix element between neighboring molecules, λ is the reorganization energy, k is the Boltzmann constant and T is the temperature. The two major parameters that determine transfer rates and ultimately the charge mobility are H_{da} and λ , which should be maximized and minimized, respectively, to achieve significant charge transport. Evaluating H_{da} would require the relative positions of the molecules in the solid state, as it is related to the splitting of the energies of the frontier orbitals of the interacting molecules. On the other hand, electron or hole transport is predicted from the electron (λ_{ele}) or hole (λ_{hole}) reorganization energy, and the values for these parameters generally show good agreement with experimental observations [51–60]. Crystal data are required in order to calculate the charge transfer integrals, and these data are not available, so we calculated only the reorganization energy (the other important mobility parameter), for all of these derivatives. The hole and electron reorganization energies are calculated via the following equations:

$$\text{For hole transport: } \lambda_{\text{hole}} = \lambda_1 + \lambda_2 \quad (2)$$

$$\text{For electron transport: } \lambda_{\text{ele}} = \lambda_3 + \lambda_4 \quad (3)$$

where $\lambda_1(\lambda_3)$ is the energy required to reorganize the neutral geometry into that of the cation(anion) upon the removal(addition) of an electron along the cation(anion)-state potential energy surface, and $\lambda_2(\lambda_4)$ is the energy required to reorganize the obtained cation(anion) geometry back into the neutral geometry upon the addition(removal) of an electron along the ground-state potential energy surface.

The hole/electron reorganization energies for *mer*-Alq3 [47] and its derivatives [38, 39, 61–63] were previously calculated at the B3LYP/6-31G* level. Hence, reorganization energy calculations were carried out for **1–4** using the same methodology, and the results were compared with *mer*-Alq3 (Table 6). In general, acceptor substitution favors n-channel materials, while donor substitution favors p-channel materials [64]. From Table 6, it is clear that the λ_{hole} values of all of the derivatives are higher than that of the parent *mer*-Alq3 (ca. 0.242 eV [47]). The introduction of a donor group onto the ligand increases the λ_{ele} values of **3** (0.371 eV) and **4** (0.380 eV), while the introduction of an acceptor group onto the ligand lowers the λ_{ele} values of **1** (0.237 eV) and **2** (0.247 eV) when compared with the λ_{ele} values (0.276 eV [47]) of *mer*-Alq3. From these results, it is clear that donor/acceptor substitution has a significant effect on the intrinsic charge mobility when compared to that of *mer*-Alq3.

Conclusions

The S_0 of Alq3 derivatives in which electron acceptor/donor groups are substituted at the C4 positions of the 8-hydroxyquinolate ligands have been optimized using the DFT/B3LYP/6-31G* method. From frontier molecular

Table 6 Calculated hole (λ_{hole}) and electron (λ_{ele}) reorganization energies (in eV) of **1–4** calculated at the B3LYP/6-31G* level

Derivatives	λ_{hole}	λ_{ele}
Alq3 ^a	0.242	0.276
1	0.264	0.237
2	0.262	0.247
3	0.327	0.371
4	0.336	0.380

^a Alq3 data from [47]

orbital analysis, it is apparent that the HOMOs and LUMOs are localized mainly on the A ligand and B ligand, respectively, in these derivatives—similar to the parent *mer*-Alq3 and its derivatives. The calculated trend in the gap energies is in good agreement with that observed experimentally. The CIS/6-31G* method was used to obtain the S_1 states. The calculations of absorption and emission spectra were carried out using the TD-PBE0/6-31G* method, and the results were found to be comparable with those found experimentally. Acceptor substitution causes a similar red-shift in the calculated emission spectra to that seen experimentally. The reorganization energies were calculated at the B3LYP/6-31G* level, and the results show that donor/acceptor substitution has a significant effect on the intrinsic charge mobility as compared to *mer*-Alq3. Thus, theoretical studies of the structural, electronic and charge-transport properties of such complexes may be useful when designing efficient emitters for use in OLEDs.

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